

Chapter 5-1

From Lake Biwa to the World

Abstract

Through the experience of managing Lake Biwa, it became clear that cooperation among the stakeholders is indispensable to solve environmental problems. Based on this belief, the lessons learned from Lake Biwa have been shared with the world through international conferences and International Lake Environment Committee Foundation (ILEC).

Keywords: World Lake Conference (WLC), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Lake Environment Committee Foundation (ILEC)

1. Lessons Learned from Lake Biwa

Lake Biwa is an ancient lake blessed with rich biodiversity exemplified by its endemic species, and has played an important role in human activities including fisheries, transport, tourism and Japanese literature since ancient times.

The lake was once in danger, threatened by eutrophication caused by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the 1960's and 1970's, but these challenges were overcome through pioneering efforts made by governmental agencies, scientists, and citizens' groups.

Through the experience of ensuring sustainable development of Lake Biwa, it became clear that environmental problems could not be solved without the expertise of governmental agencies and scientists as well as the active participation of citizens along with environmental conservation movements.

The Shiga Prefecture Basic Environmental Ordinance, a local ordinance enact-

ed in 1996, stipulates that the prefecture is to take necessary measures to facilitate international cooperation to ensure sustainable lake management on the earth.

2. World Lake Conference

In 1984, the Shiga Prefectural Government, in cooperation with various international and domestic organizations, hosted the Shiga Conference '84 on Conservation and Management of World Lake Environments (LECS'84) to tackle the challenges of the world's lake management by facilitating interactions among scientists, government officials and citizens on a global scale.

Since then, the Conference, now officially called the World Lake Conference (WLC), has been held in various parts of the world including USA, Hungary, China, Italy, Argentina, Denmark, Kenya, India and Japan including the 9th WLC hosted by Shiga in 2001.

The Conference is globally recognized



Fig. 5-1-1 LECS'84 (Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture: 1984)



Fig. 5-1-2 WLC13 (Wuhan, Hubei Province, China: 2009)

as a place for multi-sectoral participants to exchange their views and experiences on the sustainable management of lakes and their basins.

3. International Lake Environment Committee Foundation (ILEC)

LECS'84 was a great success, with more than 2,400 participants including Dr. M.K. Tolba, Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who proposed the establishment of an international committee to realize the trans-generational succession of the Conference and to help the world develop a rational management plans for lakes and their catchment basins.

Encouraged by the proposal, the International Lake Environment Committee (ILEC) was established by the Shiga Prefectural Government in 1986, supported by entities such as the Japanese government and UNEP. ILEC, which obtained legal status in 1987 and became the International Lake Environment Committee Foundation, has been promoting rational and sound management of world lakes (natural and anthropogenic) and their catchment areas consistent with sustainable development policies.

The activities of ILEC cover organizational support for the World Lake Conference, global promotion of Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM), training and education, and joint projects with international organizations such as UNEP, World Bank, and the Global Environment Facility.



Fig. 5-1-3 ILEC Office (Kusatsu City, Shiga Prefecture)

ILEC concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNEP in April 2011. The two parties agreed to cooperate on promoting ILBM, paving the way for them to pursue further cooperation regarding lake management.

4. Other International Conferences

Aside from the above-mentioned LECS'84 and WLCs, the prefectural government has participated in other international conferences focused on environmental issues.

For example, the 3rd World Water Forum, one of the largest events in the field of water, was held in 2003 in Kyoto, Shiga, and Osaka located in the Lake Biwa-Yodo River basin. Since then, the prefectural government has participated in the Forum held in Mexico in 2006, Turkey in 2009, and France in 2012.

In addition, the prefectural government participated in UN-led conferences such as Rio+10 in South Africa in 2002 and Rio+20 in Brazil in 2012.

Those international conferences have created valuable opportunities for government officials, experts, and NGO representatives to address global concerns and to discuss possible solutions. By taking part in the conferences, the lessons learned from Lake Biwa have been disseminated and shared with the world.

(International Lake Environment Committee Foundation)



Fig. 5-1-4 Shiga-ILEC joint booth at Japan Pavilion during Rio+20 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: 2012)