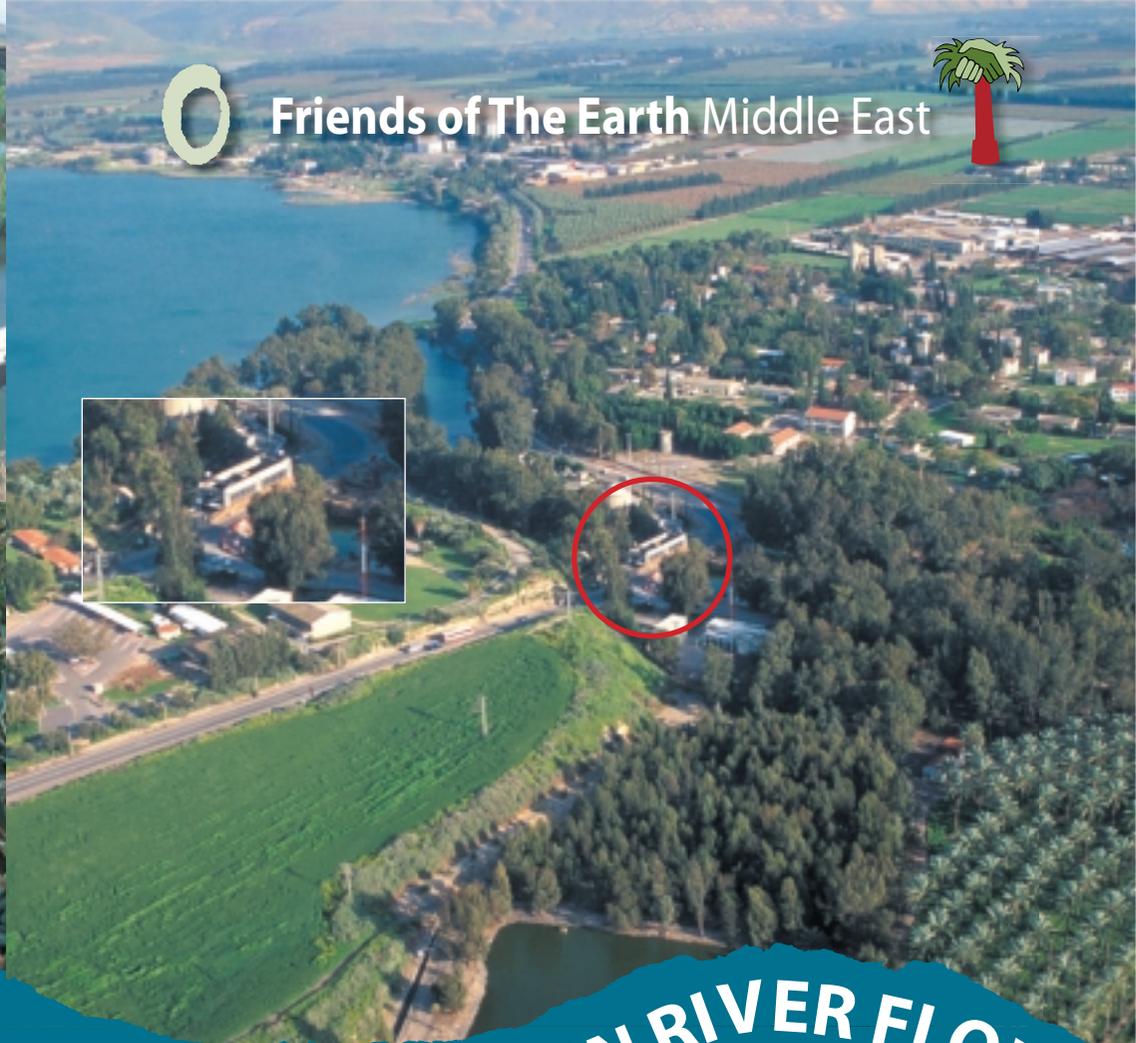


The Lower Jordan River and its Tributaries



Friends of The Earth Middle East



LET THE JORDAN RIVER FLOW

Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME), is a unique organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists. Our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region. FoEME has offices in Amman, Bethlehem, and Tel-Aviv. FoEME is a member of Friends of the Earth International, the largest grassroots environmental organization in the world.

The Lower Jordan River Valley is part of the Great Rift Valley linking Africa and the Fertile Crescent. The Lower Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee in the north of the valley, meanders for some 200 km, and enters the Dead Sea, a terminal lake. On both sides of the valley are natural and cultural sites that are valued the world over and justify the valley being described as a cultural landscape of outstanding universal value.

For more information: www.foeme.org



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Wye River
Program





Natural and Cultural Highlights of the Lower Jordan River Valley:

- Lowest river in the world flowing through some of the narrowest areas of the Great Rift Valley to the lowest point on earth – the Dead Sea.
- Important wetland habitat sustaining diverse vegetation and fauna.
- A flyway for over 500 million migratory birds twice each year.
- The pathway of early human migration out of Africa and sites of early human settlement.
- The cultivation of wild wheat, from hunter-gathers to early farmers, and the first urban settlements.
- Old and New Testament and Islamic references associating the river to the prophets Joshua, Moses and Elijah, the baptism of Christ and the companions of the prophet Mohammed. The lush northern area of the river valley is known as the Gate to the Garden of Eden.
- Great Roman cities and mediaeval castles of the Crusader period were built along the valley and momentous battles were fought in the valley floor.

The Jordan River will Cease to Flow:

Though still unique in its natural and cultural wealth the river valley is presently threatened by excessive water diversion, pollution and inappropriate development. Of the 1.3 billion cubic meters of water annually that would naturally flow down the River Jordan to the Dead Sea, more than 90% of this water is presently diverted for other purposes. Sewage and other wastes are now discharged into the river. Residents and tourists have little access to the river, due to military restrictions.

The Peace Treaty signed between Jordan and Israel in 1994 specifically calls on the parties under Environment Annex IV, regarding the Jordan River, to cooperate for the:

- 'Ecological rehabilitation of the Jordan River'
- 'Nature reserves and protected areas'
- 'Tourism and historical heritage'

Though 10 years have passed, the state of the river and its valley has only further deteriorated. With new large dams currently being completed, the Jordan River will cease to flow in early 2006.

The main challenges facing the Lower Jordan River Valley are:

- Excessive water diversion and dam building
- The discharge of untreated sewage into the river without the return of considerable quantities of healthy water to the river.
- The lack of cooperative mechanisms in place promoting sustainable development.

FoEME Recommendations:

Based on UNESCO and other mechanisms of World Heritage, Man and Biosphere, Peace Parks, Ramsar, Intangible Heritage and Cultural Diversity, we recommend that our governments develop a detailed Action Plan for the benefit of the valley. UNESCO potential donor states are asked to adopt this Action Plan and where possible, support its implementation. The Lower Jordan River Valley Action Plan would have the following objectives:

Ecological Rehabilitation

- Launch and implement a programme to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River and its tributaries, including the prohibition of wastewater discharge in the rivers and eradication of other types of pollution.
- Prepare a Protected Areas Master Plan in accordance with one or more of the UNESCO mechanisms mentioned above.
- Link the many declared nature reserves on both sides of the valley creating ecological corridors.

Eco-Tourism

- Prepare heritage routes from where to view the natural beauty and unique culture of the valley, cross-valley hiking paths, bicycle trails and bird watching areas.
- Develop sustainable rural tourism.
- Identify opportunities for the integration of health and spa facilities across the river valley.

Culture

- Prepare a business plan for cross border museums with exhibitions on the water resources, culture, history, habitat and agriculture of the Valley, with educational activities for children and adults.
- Promote cultural events such as festivals and concerts in the old Roman theatres and other sites including Bet She'an, Umm Qais, Jericho, and Pella.
- Restore and promote the archeological, religious and cultural sites that cross the valley.

Sustainable Agriculture

- Prepare and implement a training programme to promote organic, local variety, and sustainable agriculture.
- Prepare a business plan on the theme of a Jordan River Valley organic produce logo and the organization of "organic fairs" in the main cities of the region.
- Provide financial incentives to farmers that maintain and protect cultural landscapes.