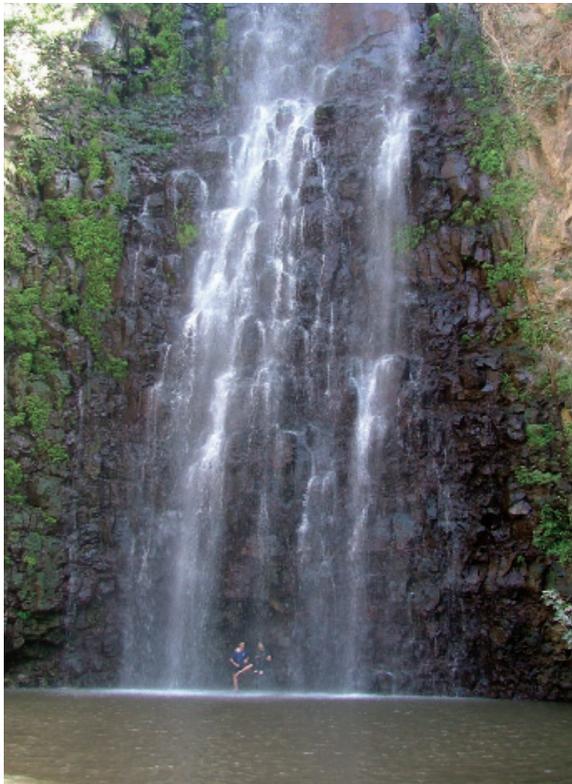


3 Rivers and Streams

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Background

Israel's water economy is currently in the midst of a deep crisis, suffering from a serious deterioration of Israel's natural water sources including: springs, rivers, seasonal pools and wetlands. One of the main factors causing the decline in wetlands is the disappearance of river flow which feed these areas. Most rivers in the north and center of the country used to flow throughout the year, but due to overuse and interference with their sources these rivers only flow after sufficient rainfall. In Israel only 3% of wetlands remain (in terms of area) compared to the start of the 20th Century^[3]. In addition, all Israel's coastal rivers and most of its inland rivers are polluted with industrial waste water causing the disappearance of the species of animals and plants unique to these rivers and wetlands^[4].



Jalburn waterfall | The society for the Protection of nature in Israel.

At this current time Israel is entering a new era in terms of water production, where for the first time large amounts of desalinated water will be used for urban water consumption. By the end of 2013 the amount of desalinated water in use is expected to exceed 600 million m³^[5]. With the end of the urban sector's reliance on natural water resources, coupled with the expanded use of reclaimed water in agriculture, there is a unique opportunity to restore and stabilize groundwater levels and restore Israel's hydrological systems. SPNI published a new report in 2012 that was distributed to decision makers that promoted a new sustainable approach to managing Israel's water resources and mapping out a process that will lead to the rehabilitation of Israel's springs, streams and wetland habitats.

Aims and Objectives

- > To raise awareness of the dire situation in rivers and wetlands among decision makers and the public.
- > To support and encourage processes that lead to the hydrological and ecological restoration of rivers, streams and wetland habitats throughout Israel.
- > To promote an open, transparent and critical public discourse about how natural water systems should be managed.
- > Leading to changes in the way groundwater springs and river beds located on private land are managed.

Key Achievements in 2012

- > Launching of "Longing for the Streams" campaign: This campaign started with the release of a new report "Reviving Streams and Wetlands in Israel – SPNI's Vision and Major Guidelines for Eco-Hydrological Restoration". Our research revealed that 60 out of 90 springs in Israel are in decline and have lost between 30-50% of their discharge over the past 30 years. This decline raises serious questions about Israel's current policy of harnessing water resources – exploiting them up to the verge of causing permanent damage in a game of ecological brinkmanship. The report and its findings were distributed to many forums including: the government, media, academic and professional conferences, public tours and schools to raise awareness of streams' deterioration.

- > Promoting transparency and public control of natural water



resources management: Natural resources are public assets and as such the decisions about how these assets should be managed should be determined in a process that is transparent, impartial and inclusive. The Bain Commission in 2010 reported that “one of the deficiencies that no doubt contributed to the crisis lies in the lack of transparency with regards to the problems confronting the water sector and the failure to involve the public in decision making processes.” SPNI is involved in various processes to increase transparency in the decision making process of natural water resource management. For example, creating proposed amendments to the water law and encouraging the establishment of a public council for water, participating in professional conferences and public events and commenting on the development plans for Israel’s water sector.

- > Encouraging and supporting the hydrological and ecological restoration of streams: SPNI’s water coordinator is an influential member of the team from the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Israel’s Water Authority trying to restore water back to rivers. We also monitor development

plans that may impact the functioning of stream ecosystems.

- > Protecting existing ecosystems: We are currently striving to find the right balance between protecting ecosystems that have adapted to survive in Israel’s deteriorated streams while restoring streams to their natural state so the original ecosystems can reassert themselves.

Continuing Activities for 2013

- > Promoting a long term national program to rehabilitate streams in Israel in conjunction with the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Ministry for Environmental Protection.
- > Participating in the creation of legislation relating to natural water resource management and river basin management, promoting transparency and the public’s rights and abilities to influence water management.
- > Raising public awareness of the current situation in Israel’s rivers through educational activities including: the River Guardian schools program, SPNI’s annual children’s conference, the media, in the Knesset and free public tours.



Banias | Gitit Visebloom