

Gulf I Conference Report
The State of the Gulf Ecosystem: Future and Threats
March 5-7, 2006, Al-Ain, UAE

His Highness Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Chancellor of the UAE University, opened the three-day conference on Gulf Ecosystem on March 5th, 2006, in Al Ain, UAE.

Background and Objectives

The Gulf conference in Al Ain was among the first international scientific gatherings of environmental expertise devoted to the Gulf ecosystem with participation for every riparian country in the region. The conference focused on the diverse issues and problems confronting the Gulf ecosystem as well as its management. The integrity and health of this riparian ecosystem, both aquatic and terrestrial, has been threatened due to anthropogenic stressors. Marine ecosystem health has been suffering from over-harvesting, habitat destruction, coastal development, oil-gas exploration, production and transportation. Terrestrial ecosystems in the Gulf are also facing challenges such as loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, and sediment/nutrient loss. Thus the objectives of the conference focused on diverse aspects of ecosystem health and management (See “The State of the Gulf Ecosystems: Future and Threats”, Program and Abstracts, 2006).

International program

Leading environmental scientists from 29 countries attended the event. Over 100 papers, comprising of 73 orals and 29 posters, were presented in 16 sessions. Ten invited plenary papers were presented by well known experts. The papers discussed issues in aquatic ecosystem health and management, pollution and other hazards that affect the Gulf ecosystem. The following workshops were also organized on the following topics:

1. Renewable resources management and regional cooperation
2. The possibility of a Gulf Ecosystem Health and Management Agreement (GEHMA) amongst the riparian countries.

The conference also included a few social and recreational events, such as an open air banquet dinner at the top of Jabal Hafeet; and a boat cruise dinner on the Dubai Creek for an evening of fun, delicious cuisine and entertainment.

Conference Recommendations

- Areas of concern needing attention included:
 - Necessity of environmental education and training to implement ecosystem management strategies;
 - Promotion environmental awareness programs directed at students, researchers, and general public, including training activities;
 - Establishment of a regional committee for an integrated network of marine protected areas;

- Execution of a transboundary diagnostic analysis of the marine environment of the ROPME Sea Area;
 - Emerging technology for responding to oil spills; importance of bioremediation;
 - Research on sediment contaminants and remediation;
 - Impact of exotic species;
 - Promotion of ecotourism.
- The establishment of an AEHMS - Middle Eastern Chapter was unanimously recommended by the workshop participants. The AEHMS headquarters in Canada will follow up on the recommendation to organize the chapter. The AEHMS will facilitate the convening of “The State of the Gulf” conference regularly every two years and the Gulf II conference is being planned for 2008 (participants from Kuwait, Bahrain and Iran had offered to host the event). Other proposed activities for the riparian countries include conducting regional seminars, training workshops and courses on the ecosystem health approach, integrated management and public awareness, and the solicitation of new AEHMS members from the Gulf community.
 - UNESCO Doha office is planning to prepare an inventory of research projects for the Gulf region.

Publication Plans

It was strongly recommended to devote a special issue of *Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management* to the Gulf conference. This is the official journal of the Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management Society and is jointly published with the well known publisher Taylor and Francis, Philadelphia, PA USA. The publication of the special issue is being sponsored and funded by the UNESCO Doha office. It includes selected peer reviewed papers originating from the Gulf I conference.

Organizers:

- The Biology Department, College of Science and the Research Affairs of the UAE University (UAE)
- Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management Society (Canada)

Mentors:

Dr. Maitha Salem Al Shamsi, Assistant Provost for Research, UAEU

Dr. Mohammed Al-Azab, Associate Dean, College of Science, UAEU

Co-chairs, Steering Committee:

- Waleed Hamza, Chairman Biology Department, UAEU
- Mohiuddin Munawar, Research Scientist, Fisheries & Oceans Canada; President and Chief Editor-AEHMS

Co-Chairs, Scientific Committee:

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- Saif Al Ghais, Department of Biology, UAEU

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- MASH UP
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*W. Hamza & M. Munawar
Conference Co-chairs*

A Glimpse of the GULF Conference, Al Ain, UAE

