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WWF calls for international fund to break dam deadlock

GLAND, Switzerland - The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a conservation organization, today called for an international fund to compensate countries that refrain from building dams on rivers important for freshwater bio-diversity. This is one of a series of measures proposed by the organization to break the worldwide deadlock between pro and anti-dam supporters.

In a report "A Place for Dams in the 21st Century?" published today, WWF argues against a single world-wide strategy on dams. The organization says that the World Commission on Dams should initiate

a process to develop different dam strategies, linked to the countries' potential hydropower production, freshwater needs, and the requirements of their eco-systems.

"Some countries in the developed world have already exhausted all opportunities for developing hydropower and many have started to reduce their reliance on dams," said Dr. Claude Martin, Director-General of WWF International.

"Others are actively removing dams and restoring rivers to their natural condition - a move that is welcomed by WWF."

In a limited number of less

developed countries, serious damage is done to the environment by the use of fossil fuel and wood burning to produce energy. Some types of dam might do less damage, as long as they strictly abide by international standards.

However, some sites are so ecologically sensitive that no dam should ever be built there. The World Commission should draw up a list of these "off limit" sites, based on existing scientific data. Poorer countries that agree not to develop their hydroelectric capacity in these zones should receive some form of compensation.

WWF would also like to see the World Commission on Dams initiating an "International River Fund" to support projects to conserve and rehabilitate major river systems of the world. This fund could work to protect the world's last free flowing rivers by helping countries financially and technically to achieve their energy and water requirements while improving the ecosystem.

-WWF press release, March 22, 1999-