

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S  
“VOICE, CHOICE, AND ACTION  
FRAMEWORK”

# Community-Based Management of Freshwater Resources

Conserving the biodiversity of the world’s freshwater systems is critically important for people and communities worldwide. Yet the very nature of freshwater resources (FWR) poses unique challenges to their sustainable management, especially under conditions of stress. The sheer scale, variability, and unpredictability of the resources and those interacting with them is daunting. Adding to this fundamental complexity are such factors as competing resource claims, over-allocation of available resources, political and power dynamics, social and cultural disparities, and economic constraints.

Communities have enduring economic, social, cultural, and religious ties to the natural environment that creates strong grassroots incentives for sustainably stewarding FWR. In this context, The Nature Conservancy’s “Voice, Choice, and Action framework” provides a strategic approach to community-based conservation of FWR that leverages existing goals, values, and incentives; facilitates the development of the necessary community capacity; promotes equitable, participatory processes; and creates synergies among economic, cultural, equity, and conservation objectives.



## The “Voice, Choice, and Action” Framework



Secure Rights  
to Territories  
and Resources



Strong Community  
Leadership  
and Capacity



Effective Multistakeholder  
Platforms for  
Decision-making



Environmentally Sustainable  
Economic Development  
Opportunities



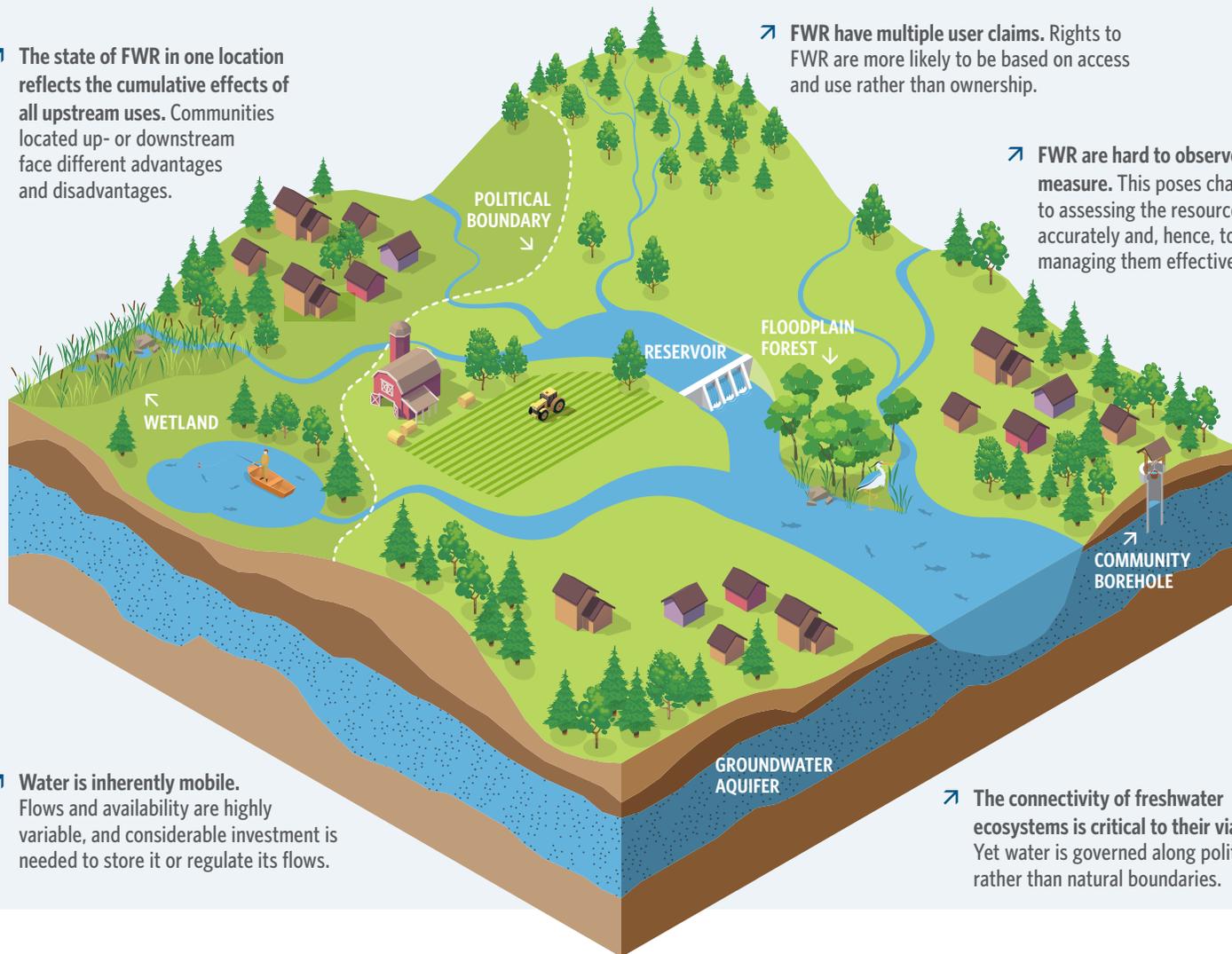
Cross-Cutting Considerations  
Connection to Place  
Equity

# The Unique Characteristics of Freshwater Resources

➤ The state of FWR in one location reflects the cumulative effects of all upstream uses. Communities located up- or downstream face different advantages and disadvantages.

➤ FWR have multiple user claims. Rights to FWR are more likely to be based on access and use rather than ownership.

➤ FWR are hard to observe and measure. This poses challenges to assessing the resources accurately and, hence, to managing them effectively.



➤ Water is inherently mobile. Flows and availability are highly variable, and considerable investment is needed to store it or regulate its flows.

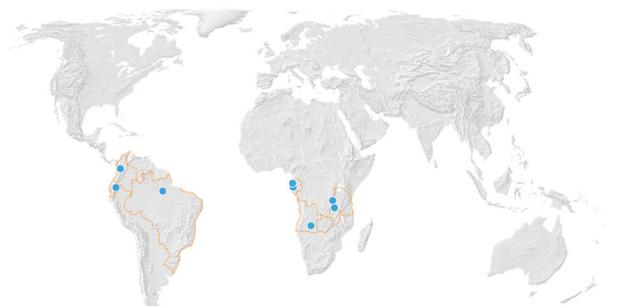
➤ The connectivity of freshwater ecosystems is critical to their viability. Yet water is governed along political rather than natural boundaries.

## Empowering communities with shared goals, values, and needs can generate win-win outcomes for people and nature

Community-based programs grounded in the VCA framework that incorporate the unique features of FWR are poised for success because:

- Many local and indigenous communities maintain cultural norms of cooperation and reciprocity that foster water sharing.
- With strong multistakeholder platforms and leadership, communities can work together to ensure their voices are heard in how FWR are managed.
- Conservation initiatives can generate sustainable livelihood and development opportunities for local communities by enhancing access to sustainable FWR and capitalizing on communities own incentives.
- Strong collective governance by local communities is essential to sustainably govern shared FWR.

The Nature Conservancy is currently working in five unique countries to empower communities to manage their FWR.



Cartography - Chris Bruce, Stan Kang | Data sources - TNC, Natural Earth

**The Nature Conservancy**   
Protecting nature, Preserving life.

For more information, see [Community-Based Management of Freshwater Resources: A Practitioners' Guide to Applying TNC's Voice, Choice, and Action](#).