

7-24-2007

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Abstracts of the presentations given on Tuesday, 24 July 2007, in Section 2 of the UCOWR Conference.

Recommended Citation

Eckman, Karlyn, "Assessing Human Vulnerability in Major River Systems - The Human Dimension" (2007). 2007. Paper 59.
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ucowrconfs_2007/59

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Assessing Human Vulnerability in Major River Systems - The Human Dimension

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ABSTRACT

This presentation will summarize ongoing work at the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center (WRC) and the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) to investigate socioeconomic vulnerability to multiple stresses and hazards occurring in the lower Mekong River basin. These changes include floods, drought, contamination, invasive species, industrialization and urbanization, and the construction of massive new dams in the upper Mekong. This joint effort began in 2005 with a major literature review on vulnerability in each lower basin country, as well as a general review of available methods to assess the human dimensions of vulnerability, food insecurity and dependence on aquatic resources. The team is currently reviewing secondary data and designing a research methodology, preparing training curricula in socioeconomic vulnerability assessment (SVA), and training of trainers from the four countries in SVA. The session includes a short Powerpoint presentation about the SVA work to date in the lower Mekong basin, findings of the MRC literature review, and an update on current work on the Mekong SVA. The presenter will make some observations about human vulnerability in both the Mekong and Mississippi, drawing on the recent disasters in each watershed. The remainder of the session will be reserved for an open discussion by the participants on what is currently known about how to assess human vulnerability in major river systems, how this informs planning and decision-making, gaps in the process, and what steps need to be done to improve the process.

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