



Getting Water from a Well

This well in India draws large crowds every day. In many rural areas, the task of finding water falls to women. They often walk many miles each day to get water for their families.

4.7 Beginning to Think Globally

In this chapter, you read that the Great Lakes are the world's largest freshwater ecosystem. You saw how plants and animals in this ecosystem form a complex food web. You also learned how pollution and the invasion of nonnative species of fish are threatening the health of the Great Lakes. Finally, you found out how people are working to clean up and preserve this large watershed.

Water Is Essential to Life Managing freshwater ecosystems is of major importance around the world. All living things need water. Approximately 70 percent of Earth's surface is covered by water. However, nearly 98 percent of that water is too salty for human use. Of the remaining 2 percent that is fresh water, three fourths is frozen in ice caps, or permanent coverings of ice. That leaves less than 1 percent of Earth's water to meet human needs.

People obtain fresh water from many sources. Some draw water from rivers, lakes, and streams while others depend on wells that tap into underground water supplies. In other places, people collect and store rainwater to meet their needs. And in still other places, people desalinate seawater, or remove the salt from it.

Not all fresh water is safe for human use. Of the world's more than 6 billion people, at least 1 billion lack a steady supply of clean, safe drinking water. Unsafe water creates huge health problems. For instance, every day 4,000 children die from diseases that could have been prevented by having clean water to drink. And every year more than 2.2 million people die from diseases, such as cholera, related to unsafe drinking water.