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## How to save the dying Lake Urmia

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### 1 Introduction

Lake Urmia in the northwestern corner of Iran is one of the largest permanent hypersaline lakes in the world and the largest lake in the Middle East (1,2,3). The lake was declared a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention in 1971 and designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1976 (4,5). The lake itself is home to a

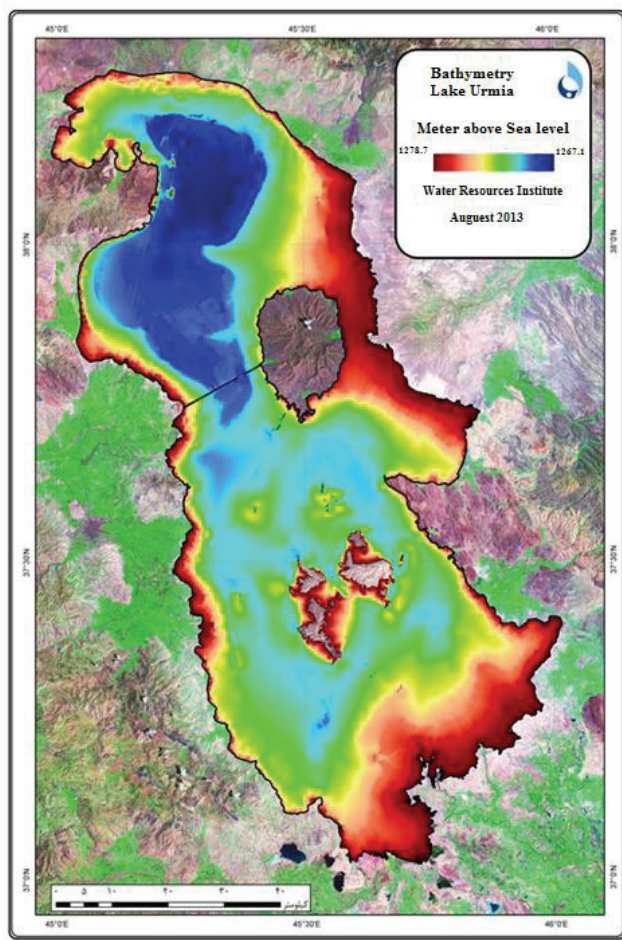


Figure 1 Bathymetry of Lake Urmia showing flat bottom, conversion of the lake to playa

**Table 1 Please replace with your table caption.**

Year	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Dried Area compared to earlier period (Km <sup>2</sup> )
1976	5266	-
1989	5423	-157
1998	5650	-227
2000	4610	+1040
2003	4241	+369
2005	4049	+142
2007	3841	+258
2009	3106	+734
2010	2005	+1102
2013	953	+1051

unique brine shrimp species, *Artemia urmiana*, and along with the surrounding wetlands and upland habitat, it supports many species of reptiles, amphibians and mammals.

The lake's surface area has been estimated to have been as large as 6 100 km<sup>2</sup> but since 1995 it has generally been declining (6) and was estimated from satellite data to be only 953 km<sup>2</sup> in August of 2013 (Landsat data). The decline is generally blamed on a combination of drought, increased water diversion for irrigated agriculture within the lake's watershed and mismanagement (2,6).

### 2 Large Lake or managed impoundments

Probably about 10 billion m<sup>3</sup> of sediments have filled the lake converting it into a flat Playa. The slope from causeway to south has been determined as maximum 20 cm per 10 Km. Therefore the water making entry into the lake spreads over a huge area with minimal depth, prone to immediate evaporation. Reduction of total water production capacity in the basin on one hand and excessive consumption of water on the other, makes it impossible to restore whole lake. Therefore we propose partitioning into well managed impoundments with both ecologic and socio-economic purposes. Based on our plan a total area of 3800 Km<sup>2</sup> could be restored, 100 Km<sup>2</sup> reserved for *Artemia* and birds. Moreover, collection of salts and minerals are proposed from North arm.

**Key words:** Lake Urmia, Climate change, Agriculture,

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Dams, Biodiversity.

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