

Wetlands for Our Future: Act Now to Prevent, Stop, and Reverse Wetland Loss

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Latest

research shows that 64% of wetlands worldwide have been lost since 1900, and that 76% of populations of freshwater plants and animals have disappeared in the last 40 years alone (according to the WWF's Living Planet report), which is worse than any other ecosystem. To combat the downward global trends in loss and degradation of wetlands, Ramsar works with governments and conservation organisations as well as bringing in private sector and scientific expertise.

"Wetlands for our future" -

this year's theme for World Wetlands Day - seeks to highlight the varieties of ways in which wetlands provide for us all, and the many ways that we can all contribute to their conservation and restoration.

Too few people realize the numerous services and benefits wetlands provide and their importance for humans and the planet. Most importantly, wetlands are the source of our daily water. Additionally wetlands feed humanity.

Rice, grown in wetland paddies, is the staple diet of nearly three billion people. The average human consumes 19 kg of fish each year. And most of the fish sold, breed and raise their young in coastal waters and estuaries. Moreover, 70% of all fresh water extracted globally is used for crop irrigation. Wetlands purify and filter harmful waste from water, helping to absorb harmful fertilizers and pesticides, as well as heavy metals and toxins from industry. As an example, the Nakivubo Swamp in Kampala, Uganda filters sewage and industrial effluents for free; a treatment plant to do the same job would cost \$2 million per year. Wetlands act as nature's shock absorbers. Peatlands and wet grasslands in river basins act as natural sponges, absorbing rainfall, creating wide surface pools that ease any flooding in rivers. The same storage capacity will also safeguard against the impact of drought. Wetlands provide sustainable livelihoods and products: 61.8 million people depend directly on fishing and fisheries for a living. Timber for building, vegetable oil, medicinal plants, animal fodder, and stems and leaves for weaving also comes from our wetlands. And importantly for our future, wetlands help to fight climate change. Peatlands alone store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined, and in the face of rising sea levels, coastal wetlands reduce the impact of hurricanes and tsunamis. They also bind the shoreline and resist erosion.

Speaking from the banks of the Rhône in Geneva, a Ramsar site of international importance, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, Dr. Christopher Briggs, said: "We have a fantastic opportunity with the restoration of wetlands to build a groundswell of opinion and involve thousands of enthusiastic, concerned individuals who want to make a difference. We can achieve great things if we work together. I love to spend time in any wetland and so do millions of others, and we have a duty to keep our rivers, lakes, sandy beaches and blue seas in the state that we want our grandchildren to enjoy."
"Wetlands provide services worth an estimated \$15 trillion worldwide -

including food, water, and climate regulation - demonstrating just how vital they are to humans and the environment alike and highlighting the need to conserve them. At the same time, the economic cost of the destruction of carbon-rich mangroves, which are being cleared 3-5 times faster than terrestrial forests, is at \$42 billion in economic damages annually." said Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UN Environment Programme Executive Director. "The Ramsar Convention has further helped bring a shift in thinking, from the perception that wetlands are unproductive and valueless to an understanding that wetlands supply multiple values to society. There are now 2,186 designated Ramsar sites covering over two million hectares across the globe, but further challenges lie ahead as development continues to encroach on these crucial ecosystems," he added. "World Wetlands Day shines greater light on the challenges still faced by wetlands - which have a key role to play in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda - and the communities who depend on them."

This year, for World Wetlands Day, Ramsar is inviting people to make a pledge for wetlands, committing to making small changes that can help to slow the destruction and reverse the downwards trend. By pledging to take shorter showers, or use reusable shopping bags, for example, everyone can make a difference. Even better, organise a clean-up of a local wetland.

World Wetland Day