



## INTERNET ARTICLE

### Restoring and protecting wetlands for water security

21 February 2023

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), Mpumalanga Provincial Operations celebrated World Wetlands Day with the City of Mbombela, Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Agency, Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA), Working on Fire, SANBI, Halls Holdings and Emmanuel Church in Mataffin on 16 February 2023.

World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on the 2nd of February. This is an important day in the environmental calendar as it aims to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands for people and the planet. This year, the World Wetlands Day was celebrated under the theme **“It’s time for wetlands restoration”**, which highlights the urgent need to prioritize wetland restoration and calls on an entire generation to take steps to revive and restore degraded wetlands.

The awareness celebration started with a cleaning campaign to clean and restore a wetland that has been turned into a dumping site in Mataffin. The cleaning campaign involved all the stakeholders and community members around the wetland. After the cleaning and restoration of the wetland, the community was engaged in a public education awareness to inform and educate them about the importance of a clean environment and the importance of wetlands. They were educated about the important roles of wetlands and why it is important to restore and protect them.

Mr Phinda Mthimkhulu from DWS Mpumalanga outlined the purpose of the World Wetland Day celebration.

“The purpose is do a cleaning campaign as well as to teach the residents of the importance of wetlands to our water resources and eventually how it impacts on our lives. To teach the community the importance of preserving the wetlands. The benefits of wetlands include increased biodiversity, replenished and filtered water supply, enhanced protection against floods and storms, more local and sustainable livelihoods reducing poverty, increased tourism and higher quality leisure time, increased carbon storage and avoided emissions. Wetlands play a major role in water supply security.”, he said.

Mr Sihle Mthembu from the City of Mbombela engaged the community on wetlands and flood disaster management. He told the audience that destroying wetlands leads to floodings as wetlands holds and reduce the flow speed of water. The loss of wetlands means a loss of

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water storage leading to droughts and the destruction of wetlands leads to the soil getting loose leading to floods.

The highlight of the day was the speech delivered by the learners from John Mdluli Primary School. They outlined the role and value of wetlands and put a strong case why we all have to play an active role in wetlands protection, restoration and preservation. They stated that wetlands have socio-economic benefits as they provide plants used by people to make mats, baskets to get money and also provide food like fish and other vegetations. They further stated that wetlands provide for livestock, provide shelter and a habitat for bird species and amphibians, and prevent soil erosion.

The celebration ended with the planting of trees at the venue and community members were given indigenous trees to plant in their homes.

**Themba Khoza**

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