

# Let us protect and restore our wetlands

WORLD Wetlands Day on February 2 was celebrated under the theme Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future.

The theme underscores the urgency of bold action to protect these natural habitats to ensure that future generations continue to benefit them.

Wetlands continue to be destroyed all over the world and humans are the main culprits. Pollution, unsustainable development and climate change threaten the health and existence of these essential ecosystems. We have turned our wetlands into dumping sites. We are destroying wetlands for human settlements. Wetlands are destroyed for economic benefits such as building shopping malls and for mining activities. It is painful to see what humans are doing to wetlands.

Wetlands have many critical benefits for us. Healthy wetlands are critical for human health and biodiversity.

One of the most critical benefits of wetlands is that they play a major role in water security, which is important for a water-scarce country like South Africa. Wetlands act as reservoirs storing water and releasing it during dry periods. They also act as natural water purifiers and contributing to water quality in the ecosystem.

Wetlands also play a major role in climate change mitigation. They store carbon thereby reducing the negative impact of climate change. Wetlands also help to reduce flooding. Wetlands function as natural sponges that trap and slowly release water. This holding capacity helps prevent floods.

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