



INTERNET ARTICLE

Do we know the value of wetlands?

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Wetlands are the link between land and water, and are some of the most productive ecosystems in the world.

A wetland is a place where the land is covered by water, either salt, fresh or somewhere in between. Depending on the type of wetland, it may be filled mostly with trees, grasses, shrubs or moss.

The destruction of wetlands is a concern to South Africa because they are some of the most productive habitats on the planet. They often support high concentrations of animals such as mammals, birds, fish and invertebrates and serve as nurseries for many of these species.

Wetlands also support the cultivation of rice, a necessary ingredient in the staple diet of half the world's population. Wetlands provide a range of ecosystem services that benefit humanity, including water filtration, storm protection, flood control and recreation. Without wetlands, floods are more devastating to nearby communities, animals are displaced or die, and food supplies are disrupted, along with livelihoods.

Governments and other organisations have pursued efforts to conserve and protect wetlands. More than a billion people make a living from wetlands across the world. Wetlands provide livelihoods, from fishing and eco-tourism, to farming and drinking water for communities.

Wetlands are the world's water filters. They trap pollutants such as phosphorus and heavy metals in their soils, transform dissolved nitrogen into nitrogen gas, and break down suspended solids to neutralise harmful bacteria.

It is speculated that half of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900, despite their value to the human population. In some places the pace of wetlands' destruction occurs at incredible speeds. In the Philippines, 80% of coastal wetlands have been degraded, drained or destroyed in the last 30 years. Without wetlands, communities lose many of the vital services that they provide, including water purification, flood control, and food supply.

For this reason, as part of ensuring security of water supply and a cleaner environment, all communities need to protect this valuable resource: our wetlands.