



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

Preserving wetlands for sustained good water quality

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Efforts should be stepped up to protect the country's wetlands as the increasing threat of their destruction could mean a negative impact and change to life as we know it.

This emerged during the World Wetland Day Celebration, which was held in the South African National Biodiversity Institute recently, under the theme **“Wetlands for disaster risk reduction”**.

Most people regard wetlands as filthy little ponds with nothing but mosquitos. The celebration of the World Wetland Day becomes critical to highlight the importance of wetlands and the threatened status of wetlands in South Africa and globally.

South Africa is struggling with the impacts of mining, industrial development, and large-scale commercial agriculture and forestry that is destroying our wetlands. Already, the country has lost an estimated 50% of its wetlands to mining, agriculture and industrial development, urbanization and pollution.

The WWD celebration was organized as a joint venture between the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), South African National Biodiversity (SANBI), City of Tshwane and the Water Research Commission (WRC) to create and raise public awareness on the value of wetlands and its vital link to human well-being.

Addressing the delegates, DWS' Special Scientist, Mr Roets Wietsche, says wetlands play a crucial role in our lives and in the country's economy. He maintains that if wetlands are not protected and conserved we will suffer the consequences of having no guarantee for sustained water of good quality.

“A catchment without wetlands will act like a house roof that has flowing water only when it rains”, said Wietsche.

During his presentation, communities and industries were called to refrain from treating wetlands as waste-lands and learn to appreciate their importance in the environment, in the hydrological cycle and in the maintenance of sustained water quantity and quality.

“Wetlands maintain good quantity and quality water which we are all dependent on for survival. They (wetlands) also serve as our own natural defence against the expected effects of climate change and for disaster risk aversion”, added Wietsche.



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He further argued that one of the fundamental services that wetlands as ecological infrastructure provide is flood reduction.

“Wetland by virtue of what they are, the morphology, the presence of vegetation and their location in the landscape slow water down, stores large quantities of water (-like sponge) slowly released after the flood recedes”, he concluded.

As part of World Wetlands Day celebrations, the WRC shared various resources on wetlands in the form of training workshops. Delegates were trained in the use of the WRC guide developed for wetland plant identification at the Colbyn Valley Nature Reserve.

Lucky Makgarengi