



World Wetlands Day  
Monday, 2 February 2015



Wetlands for our Future

## The Value of Wetlands

Wetlands deliver multiple co-benefits of significant social and economic values, and can help address a wide range of needs and objectives. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment gave wetlands a total economic value of US\$15 trillion in 1997. Many of the ecosystem services that benefit people, society and the economy at large are related to water and wetlands through water provision, regulation, purification and groundwater replenishment, and are crucial in addressing objectives of water security and water for food security. Ecosystem services provided by wetlands also play important roles in relation to nutrient cycling, climate mitigation and adaptation, food security, job security and a range of cultural benefits, including knowledge (scientific and traditional), recreation and tourism, and formation of cultural values, including identity and spiritual values.

**The values of benefits provided by wetlands, per unit area, have consistently been shown to be orders of magnitude higher than for other ecosystems.** Importantly, most of this value is derived from their role in regulating water; for example, water-related disaster risk reduction.

**Wetlands provide natural infrastructure that can help meet a range of policy objectives.** Beyond water availability and quality, they are invaluable in supporting climate change mitigation and adaption, disaster risk and impact reduction health as well as livelihoods, local development and poverty eradication.

**Meeting sustainable water management objectives cost effectively.** Wetlands provide natural infrastructure that delivers a wider range of services and benefits than corresponding man-made infrastructure, and at lower cost. They are also an important complement to man-made infrastructure in river basin planning and management efforts. Wetlands can provide protection against coastal and river flooding to (partially) offset the need for man-made infrastructure, while simultaneously providing a multitude of other services, such as tourism and recreation, carbon storage or a range of provisioning services. Nature-based solutions can constitute a lower cost approach than alternative built capital solutions, or offer significant cost savings where an integrated natural and man-made infrastructure approach is adopted.

**Wetlands provide multiple benefits to cities and rural communities.** The aesthetic and recreational amenities of urban wetlands, and their value as wildlife habitat, can be significant. The capacity of a functional urban wetland in flood control can also be very important. In Sri Lanka, for example, flood attenuation and wastewater treatment provided by the 3000 ha Muthurajawela Marsh near Colombo have been valued at over US\$5 million/year and US\$1.6 million/year respectively. This exceeds the value of the wetland for



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agricultural production (around US\$0.3million/ year) more than twentyfold. In rural areas, wetlands provide multiple benefits that are vital to local communities. For example, the water tank system in Kala Oya, Sri Lanka, provides water for domestic use and livestock, fish and wild plants with benefits for the majority of households exceeding those from rice cultivation.

**Wetlands have high nature conservation values.** Wetlands are among the most bio-diverse ecosystem types. They are home to a very diverse range of animal and plant species which live permanently in wetlands or rely on wetlands for at least part of their life cycle. They are particularly important for migratory species, especially migratory waterbirds. Because of the threats to wetlands they support a disproportionate number of high conservation priority species.

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Information sourced from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

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## Important links

- Convention on Biological Diversity: [www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int)
- Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets: [www.cbd.int/sp](http://www.cbd.int/sp)
- CBD Programme of Work on Inland Waters Biodiversity: [www.cbd.int/waters](http://www.cbd.int/waters)
- Global Biodiversity Outlook 4: [www.cbd.int/gbo4](http://www.cbd.int/gbo4)
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention): [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)
- World Wetlands Day 2015: [www.worldwetlandsday.org](http://www.worldwetlandsday.org)
- Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

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