

Wetlands and Water: The Facts

We are in a growing water crisis that threatens people and our planet. We use more water than nature can replenish, and are destroying the ecosystem that water and all life depend on most - Wetlands.



What wetlands do

Fresh and saltwater wetlands sustain humanity and nature. They support our social and economic development through multiple services:

Store and clean water

- Wetlands hold and provide most of our fresh water.
- They naturally filter pollutants, leaving water we can safely drink.

Keep us fed

- Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production sector, while inland fisheries alone provided **12 million** tonnes of fish in 2018.
- Rice paddies feed **3.5 billion** people annually.

Underpin our global economy

- Wetlands, the most valuable ecosystem, provide services worth **US \$47 trillion** a year.
- More than **one billion** people rely on wetlands for income.

Provide nature a home

- **40%** of the world's species live and breed in wetlands. Annually, about **200 new fish** species discovered in freshwater wetlands.
- Coral reefs are home to **25%** of all species.

Keep us safe

- Wetlands provide protection from floods and storms with each acre of wetland absorbing up to **1.5 million** gallons of floodwater.
- Wetlands help regulate the climate: peatlands store twice as much carbon as forests, with saltmarshes, mangroves and seagrass beds also holding vast amounts of carbon.



We have a finite amount of water and our current use is unsustainable

3 Freshwater Facts

- Only **2.5%** of water on Earth is fresh water, mostly stored in glaciers, ice caps and underground aquifers
- Less than **1%** of freshwater is usable
- Rivers and lakes hold **0.3%** of surface water



Freshwater Consumption

We use **10 billion tons of water every day:**

- **70%** used for food cultivation
- **22%** consumed by industry and energy
- Water use increased sixfold in **100 years** and rises by **1%** annually



Water crisis

Population growth, urbanization and consumption patterns have put unbearable pressure on wetlands and the water in them:

- Almost all global freshwater sources are compromised with **82%** of the world's population exposed to high levels of pollution in their water supply.
- **2.2 billion people** don't have safe drinking water with an annual economic cost amounting to **\$260 billion**.
- Water equivalent to the annual flow of the Volga River, Europe's longest river, is squandered in **1.3 billion tons** of food wasted from farm to fork each year.
- Water insecurity was a key factor in conflict in at least **45 countries** in 2017.
- **14%** more water is needed to produce **70%** more food by 2050 for **10 billion people**.

Wetland loss impact

Our water consumption means less water for nature. Wetland loss and pollution has intensified a water crisis threatening all life:

- Nearly **90%** of the world's wetlands lost since 1700's, those remaining are disappearing three times faster than forests.
- **25%** of all wetland species and 1 in 3 freshwater species face extinction.
- Climate change is reducing surface and groundwater in already dry regions, resulting in increasing competition for water.



Five solutions

We could have enough water for nature and us if we:

- Stop destroying, start restoring wetlands
- Don't dam rivers or over extract from aquifers
- Address pollution, clean up freshwater sources
- Increase water efficiency, use wetlands wisely
- Integrate water and wetlands into development plans and resource management



South Africa integrating water management

Identifying and understanding the value of 22 strategic water sources fundamental to South Africa's water and economic needs has led to nearly 50 integrated water interventions aiming to increase water quantity, improve water quality and expand economic development. Although the water sources cover only 8% of land area, they provide half the country's surface water that supports 51% of the population and 64% of the economy. Interventions include:

- Integrating wetlands and built infrastructure into water management to better serve Durban and Pietermaritzburg.
- Conserving the Umzimvubu River system from source to sea through restoration and management while supporting economic development.
- Improving water quality of the Berg River supplying water-stressed Cape Town and surrounding agricultural areas exporting 70% of produce to Europe.

UK's model wetland restoration

Europe's largest coastal wetland restoration, a 670-hectare waterscape of saltmarshes, lagoons and mudflats at Wallasea Island, was designed as a long-term flood defence with climate change and rising sea levels in mind.

A model nature-based solution with active human management, the wetlands were restored on reclaimed farmland using 3 million tonnes of waste London clay.

The saltmarshes absorb waves, reducing pressure on ancient sea walls, while sluices control water levels within the lagoons enhancing wildlife habitat. The restoration recovers some of the 30,000 ha of Essex saltmarshes lost over 25 years providing £1 billion worth of coastal flood defences in the UK. These saltmarshes also lock up large stores of carbon.



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#RestoreWetlands

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