

THE VALUE OF WETLANDS FOR CITIES

According to the United Nations, 55% of the world's population currently lives in urban areas, with this number projected to grow to 68% by 2050. While wetland ecosystems are increasingly being recognized as highly valuable natural assets that provide a wide range of benefits to urban communities, the services they provide are under immense pressure due to rapid urban expansion and human activity. With 35% loss globally since 1970, wetlands are our most threatened ecosystem, disappearing three times faster than forests*.

This fact sheet accompanies an illustrated poster and provides more in-depth information on some of the most significant aspects of urban life and municipal management that wetlands improve and contribute towards, as well as what cities can do to enhance these benefits.

*Global Wetland Outlook: Special Edition 2021



We support the



BENEFITS OF URBAN WETLANDS



Water resources

- Water supply & purification
- Stream flow regulation
- Wastewater treatment

Wetlands play a pivotal role in water resource management by acting as **natural filters that purify water**, effectively removing pollutants and enhancing water quality. Through their capacity to **regulate stream flow**, wetlands **mitigate floods and droughts**, providing essential support to local ecosystems and human communities. Additionally, wetlands contribute to waste treatment by **filtering and breaking down pollutants, nutrients and organic matter**.



Climate regulation

- Carbon sequestration
- Disaster risk reduction: floods & fires
- Urban heat mitigation

Wetlands are vital in mitigating further climate change by acting as a **store of carbon** and contributing to **global climate targets**. Urban wetlands also play a critical role in disaster risk management and climate resilience by acting as **natural buffers that control floods**, mitigate fire risks, and regulate local climates, helping to reduce the impact of extreme weather events on communities. Additionally, wetlands contribute to urban heat mitigation by **cooling surrounding areas** and offering valuable spaces that enhance a region's capacity to adapt and withstand the adverse effects of a changing climate.



Livelihoods & poverty reduction

- Water supply
- Harvestable natural resources
- Agricultural benefits

Wetlands are essential for fulfilling basic human needs by **providing a reliable source of water supply** and availability to clean water for drinking and sanitation, and aiding in poverty reduction through **sustaining livelihoods and agriculture**. These ecosystems also offer **harvestable natural resources** and agricultural benefits, supporting local communities with **fisheries, timber, and fertile lands**, thereby contributing to food security and economic well-being.

BENEFITS OF URBAN WETLANDS



Healthy ecosystems & biodiversity

- Habitat provision, ecological corridors & pollination
- Support the migration of species
- Erosion control & soil conservation

Wetlands provide vital **habitats for roosting, nesting and feeding a rich array of wildlife species**, and they support pollination processes. Beyond their local significance, they also serve as indispensable links in the migration of various species, forming part of **dynamic ecological corridors** that run through cities to enable the movement and genetic exchange of wildlife populations, thus safeguarding biodiversity on a broader scale. Urban wetlands also help cities adapt to climate impacts by **controlling erosion and conserving soil**, acting as natural sponges to reduce flooding, preserving soil integrity and water quality.



Culture, recreation & education

- Cultural, religious and aesthetic value
- Recreational spaces
- Educational resources

Wetlands play a vital role in enriching culture, providing **spaces for traditional practices, and fostering a deep connection to nature**. They offer unique opportunities for recreational activities such as **bird watching, fishing, and boating**, while serving as invaluable outdoor classrooms that educate people about the intricate ecosystems and environmental balance that wetlands sustain.



Job creation & upskilling

- Training in wetland rehabilitation and management
- Tourism and recreational benefits
- Research opportunities

Wetlands contribute significantly to job creation and upskilling by offering opportunities for training in wetland rehabilitation and management, **fostering a skilled workforce dedicated to preserving these vital ecosystems**. Additionally, wetlands generate employment through **tourism and recreational activities**, while also providing a platform for research and scientific exploration, further enriching local economies and enhancing our understanding of these intricate habitats.

HOW CAN CITIES ENHANCE AND PROTECT THE BENEFITS THAT WETLANDS PROVIDE?

The benefits provided by wetlands play a vital role in supporting crucial municipal functions, bolstering the local economy, promoting sustainability, and enhancing the social wellbeing and resilience of cities and their urban communities. It is imperative for local decision-makers to recognize the invaluable contributions offered by wetlands and to prioritize their conservation and restoration, in order to effectively fulfill their mandates and responsibilities. An essential part of this is integrating wetland management goals into municipal planning, policies, budgeting, decision-making processes, and operational strategies that collectively shape development and its regulation.

OTHER IMPORTANT ACTIONS INCLUDE:

- **Take stock of the wetland management status quo** by reviewing basic wetland information and the drivers and pressures affecting wetlands in the municipality.
- **Integrate national and city level policies** affecting wetlands.
- **Develop a wetland strategy and action plan** to direct management interventions.
- **Develop integrated development plans and allocate budgets** to guide the approval of land uses and urban development, which is important for wetland management.
- **Develop and pass by-laws** that influence the flows and pollution in the upstream catchment, or that regulate buffer zones.
- **Impose rates and other taxes** to create financial incentives to manage and conserve wetlands through the municipal rates and tax system.
- **Impose fines** for environmental non-compliance or contraventions to disincentivize unlawful activities that destroy/degrade wetlands.
- **Regulate land-use and development** in the jurisdiction area by including effective wetland management controls and minimizing impacts to wetlands.
- **Focus on infrastructure and basic services**, such as stormwater infrastructure design, management and maintenance, water and sanitation, electricity and gas reticulation, refuse removal, municipal roads, municipal public transport, street lighting, among others.
- **Provide social and welfare services** by improving public parks and associated recreational facilities.

