WHAT IS A WETLAND?

A wetland is defined in the National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998) as the land which is transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or the land is periodically covered with shallow water, and which land in normal circumstances supports or would support vegetation typically adapted to life in saturated soil.

TYPES OF WETLANDS

THE VALUE OF WETLANDS AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Wetlands were referred to as wastelands in the past, but far from being wastelands; wetlands are amongst the most productive ecosystems in the world. Wetlands play an important part in river catchments both directly and indirectly by contributing to flood control, drought relief, water storage, sediment & nutrient retention and export, soil protection, water purification, erosion control, sustained stream flow, food security, fish nurseries, groundwater recharge, reservoirs of biodiversity, wetland products, cultural values, recreation & tourism, climate change mitigation and adaptation amongst others.

ECOSYSTEM THREATS

WETLANDS AND AGRICULTURE

There are many ways in which poorly managed agriculture can negatively impact wetlands. This can lead to changes in the ecological character of a wetland and the possible permanent loss of its benefits to people.

Reducing the impacts of agriculture on water quality: Practices such as conservation tillage and integrated pest management can reduce the pollution loads reaching wetlands. Integrated pest management and targeted the use of pesticides can help to reduce the load of pesticides. Integrated production practices limit the need for pesticides. Sustainable land use practices can reduce soil erosion and nutrients from entering wetlands.

Reducing the impacts of agriculture on water quantity: Water re-use and wastewater use in agriculture can reduce withdrawals from wetlands. Integrated water resource planning can be used to ensure that wetlands are not过度开发.

WETLAND REHABILITATION

1. Address the cause of the damage e.g. over grazing or drainage ditches.
2. Attempt to re-establish the natural water flow patterns within the wetland.
3. Consider vegetation of buffer zones and wetland areas.
4. Remove invasive alien vegetation.
5. Follow up as necessary and monitor progress.

WETLAND PROTECTION LEVELS

- Wetlands make up only 2.4% of the country’s area, but 48% of wetland ecosystem types are critically endangered.
- South Africa has lost approximately 50% of the original wetland area.
- Approximately 200 000 wetlands remain, making up only 2.4% of South Africa’s area.
- Of South Africa’s 189 wetland ecosystem types, 48% are critically endangered, 12% are endangered, 5% are vulnerable, and 35% are well protected.
- Only 7% of South Africa’s wetland ecosystem types have no protection and only 7% are well protected.
- The numbers in the map below correspond to the list of RAMSAR sites listed above.

RAMSAR SITES IN SOUTH AFRICA (21)

Barberspan (7)
Blackbuck (3)
De Hoop Nature Reserve (2)
Namaqua Wildlife Reserve (2)
Koel Bay (6)
Lake Rietvlei (4)
Langkloof (7)
Moholoholo (18)
Molokwane (16)
Natal Drakensberg Park (13)
Ndumu Game Reserve (14)
Nkwenke Nature Reserve (22)
Orange River Mouth (10)
Prince Edward Islands (19)
St. Lucia System (5)
St Lucia Estuary (6)
Turtle Beaches/Coral Reefs of Tongaland (6)
Verlorenvlei Nature Reserve (21)
Wilderness Lakes (12)

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