



Wetlands events send another wake-up call for world's fresh water

Gland, Switzerland - As celebrations surrounding World Wetlands Day commence around the world, WWF, the conservation organization, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands have warned that unless more is done to protect vital wetlands, water shortages will be more severe in at least 60 countries by 2050, and flooding-related disasters could increase substantially.

Though efforts to conserve wetlands have intensified over the past years, of the 600 to 900 million hectares of freshwater wetland that exist around the world, only 60 to 70 million - less than 10 per cent - are protected. Wetlands play a crucial role in the supply of freshwater. Acting as giant sponges, they absorb rainfall and slowly release it over time, while helping to purify water and control floods.

"Governments must take concrete action in order to protect their populations from the dual threats of too little water or too much water," said Denis Landenbergue, Wetlands Campaigner for WWF's Living Waters Campaign. "Responsible governments should already be planning to secure the water supply for future generations. This will only be done if a much greater per cent of the world's wetlands are effectively preserved from threats such as drainage and pollution."

More than half the world's wetlands have been destroyed in the past 100 years, and today, over 800 million people around the world are without basic clean freshwater. Agriculture accounts for 65 per cent of the total water withdrawal on earth, and the economic value of renewable goods and services of fresh water and related ecosystems is estimated at USD 8.7 trillion per year-- up to 26 per cent of the total market value of global renewable resources. WWF is calling on all governments to recognize that protecting wetlands should not only be limited to developed countries - and in fact is a win win proposition for both the environment and the economy.

The Algerian government is one of those that have recognized the benefits of sustainable freshwater. During the week around World Wetlands Day, the Algerian government will designate ten desert wetland sites totaling about 1.8 million hectares, as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Known as gueltas and oases, this will be the largest block of wetlands to be conserved by a Mediterranean country. In addition, Algeria will be the first African country to designate oases, and the first country in the world to designate gueltas.

"What's significant is the growing awareness and direct participation, especially in developing countries, that nature is the source and conserving it is the only hope for safe, clean water. Not every country has a tropical rainforest or coral reef to conserve, but all have at least one type of freshwater ecosystem," said Dr. Nick Davidson, Deputy Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention.

For further information:

Lisa Hadeed, Living Waters Campaign, tel: +41 22 364 9030, email: lhadeed@wwfint.org
Kyla Evans, Head of Press, tel: +41 22 364 9550, email: kevans@wwfint.org

Note to Editors: A total of 80 million hectares of wetlands are protected under Ramsar around the world. These include wetlands other than freshwater wetlands.

This press release and associated material can be found on [http://www.panda.org/living waters](http://www.panda.org/living_waters)