



Wetlands: Providing more than a billion livelihoods

More than a billion people depend on wetlands for a living! Just stop and think about that number – and about what a wetland actually is. The Ramsar Convention defines a wetland as any land area that is saturated or flooded with water, either permanently or seasonally, along with all beaches and shallow coastal areas.

This definition covers all inland wetlands such as marshes, ponds, lakes, fens, rivers, floodplains, and swamps... as well as the whole range of coastal wetlands which include saltwater marshes, estuaries, mangroves, lagoons and coral reefs. Then we should add in all man-made wetlands such as fishponds, rice paddies, and salt pans.

Wetlands host a diverse range of jobs, including a few we might not normally think of:

Rice farming

- Rice, grown in wetland paddies, is the staple diet of 3.5 billion people and accounts for 20% of all calories consumed by humans.

- Almost a billion households in Asia, Africa and the Americas depend on rice growing and processing for their main livelihoods.
- Some 80% of the world's rice is produced by small-scale farmers and is consumed locally.

Fishing

- The average human consumes 19 kg of fish every year. Most commercial fish breed and raise their young in coastal marshes and estuaries. In addition, more than 40% of fish production is now through aquaculture.
- More than 660 million people depend on fishing and aquaculture for a living.

Tourism and leisure

- International tourists spent US\$ 1.3 trillion worldwide in 2013, and an estimated half of them seek relaxation in wetland areas, especially coastal zones.
- The travel and tourism sectors support 266 million jobs, and account for 8.9% of the world's employment.

Transport

- Rivers and inland waterways play a vital role in transporting goods and people in many parts of the world. In the Amazon basin, rivers carry 12 million passengers and 50 million tons of freight each year, sustaining 41 shipping companies.

Water provision

- Vast networks deliver fresh water and remove and treat wastewater, while employing large workforces. For example, Bangkok's Metropolitan Waterworks Authority employs over 5,300 staff.
- The bottled water industry delivered over 70 billion gallons of water in 2013. Danone sells major brands such as Evian, Volvic, Bonafont and Mizone, and employs more than 37,000 people in its water businesses worldwide.

Traditional wetland product-based livelihoods

- Medicinal plants, dyes, fruits, reeds and grasses are just a few of the wetland products that provide jobs, especially in developing countries.
- Reeds and papyrus collected from the Barotse floodplain wetland in Zambia are estimated to be worth US\$ 373,000 per year to local communities.

