

World Wetlands Day 2022: Wetlands actions for people and nature

Statement by Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands, 2 February 2022.

As we begin a pivotal year for biodiversity and climate, the science could not be clearer. Wetlands are critical to delivering on our common global commitments relating to biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development.

The Special Edition of the Global Wetland Outlook recently launched by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands shows the unmatched opportunities wetlands can offer – when we take the right actions.

In fact, wetlands are our most powerful ecosystems to combat climate risk.

Peatlands as well as blue carbon systems such as mangroves and seagrass beds are the most efficient carbon sinks on earth. Peatlands alone store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined. To achieve net-zero emissions we have to protect these ecosystems, and scale up restoration where they have been lost.

Some countries such as Seychelles, Costa Rica, Indonesia and the United Kingdom are already leading the way: including wetlands targets in their nationally determined contributions.

Wetlands also underpin economic development and human health and wellbeing.

Inland wetlands – such as lakes, rivers and marshes - provide almost all of the freshwater we consume and on which our economies depend, and are crucial in maintaining water quality. By absorbing and storing water they also reduce flooding during heavy rainfall, and provide water for dry seasons, preventing the onset of droughts.

And healthy marine and coastal wetlands such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds shield coastal communities from storms and extreme weather events.

For example, in Senegal, actions underway to restore 45,000 hectares of mangroves will provide community protection from storms, up to 18,000 extra tons of fish each year and store 500,000 tons of CO₂ over the next 20 years.

In addition, wetlands harbour rich biodiversity. 40% of the world's species live or breed in wetlands. But more than a quarter of wetland species are threatened with extinction.

This is why Contracting Parties to the Convention are taking action to protect more than 2,400 Wetlands of international importance across the world and mobilizing investments for wetlands to achieve multiple benefits. For example, Canada has invested more than a billion dollars to disaster mitigation and adaptation projects which include wetlands restoration.

Despite the critical values and benefits of wetlands, we continue to lose them faster than any other ecosystem, with 35% of global wetlands lost in the last 50 years. It is more urgent than ever to scale up actions to conserve and restore wetlands.

We know how to do it.

We know that these actions have critical benefits for nature, and for the one billion people who depend directly on them.

As the international community develops the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and commits to stronger climate responses, it is critical to integrate in both agendas actions for wetlands – to deliver the greatest impact for nature, climate and people.

The importance of wetlands and the urgency to take action was recognized by the UN General Assembly last year, when it designated the 2 February as World Wetlands Day: a moment to raise awareness of wetlands' importance for a sustainable and prosperous future.

World Wetlands Day is an opportunity to engage all stakeholders at all levels – to strengthen and multiply action for wetlands.

Whether by championing conservation, redirecting public and private funding streams, transforming agricultural practices, reducing water waste, contributing to restoration efforts or supporting local wetland clean ups, we can ALL take action.

A sustainable, prosperous future relies on actions we take today. As we come together to celebrate World Wetlands Day, I invite you all to value, manage, restore – and love wetlands. Because to inspire the level of wetlands action we need, we must ignite greater appreciation for our most valuable ecosystems.