



NEWS RELEASE

17 February 2009

For immediate release

Wetlands and our Environment

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) through its institutes of Soil, Climate and Water (ARC-ISCW) and Plant Protection Research (ARC-PPRI) embarks on research pertaining to wetlands through programmes such as:

- Providing guidelines for delineation of wetland soils;
- Creating indicators of catchment health for wetlands;
- Providing guidelines for sustainable agriculture in wetlands;
- Status assessment of peatland swamp forests;
- Providing guidelines for the identification of alien aquatic plants and the eradication thereof. These are documented in the publication *Invasive Aquatic Plants*, Henderson and Cilliers (2002), which can be purchased from the Agricultural Research Council

2nd February each year is World Wetlands Day. It marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar. Each year since 1997, government agencies, non-governmental organisations and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general.

The slogan for 2009 is "Upstream – Downstream", designed around the theme of wetlands and river basins and the role that wetlands play in surrounding environments.

There is a connection between a healthy wetland eco-system and human health. In the developing world, one in five people do not have access to clean drinking water. Poor management strategies that support the health of wetland eco-systems can affect the health of humans, with wetland-related diseases claiming the lives of 3 million people each year and bringing suffering to many more.

It is estimated that 1,4 billion people live in water basins where water uses exceed sustainable levels.

Water is an essential part of the food chain and farmers would not be able to produce food without water. So even though we may live in the city, it is important to know how we manage water and its origins.

The theme for World Wetlands Day 2009 - "We All Live Downstream" - draws attention to the need for good management of river systems. This ensures that all users of the water resources can continue to benefit from the goods and services that they provide.

Within a catchment area, most water resources are connected in some way, and are therefore influenced by each other to some degree. Activities in one part of a river system can affect downstream ecology and water users. Often, downstream degradation can have a profound influence upstream through disrupting ecological processes or even affecting rainfall patterns.

The ARC is the country's premier agricultural research institution and is responsible for maintaining national assets and undertaking programmes or rendering services that are required by the Department of Agriculture and other stakeholders. Part of the responsibility is to inform citizens about conserving our wetlands.

On World Wetlands Day 2009 a group of learners, accompanied by researchers from ARC-ISCW and ARC-PPRI, were taken to Tshwane's own wetland area. The Colbyn Valley Wetland, less than 10 km from the city centre, is important for its peatland. Peatlands are developed over hundreds of years in conditions of low-energy flow and anaerobic breakdown of vegetation.

A presentation highlighting natural features of a wetland was made by Ms Lianda Lotter, a researcher at ARC-PPRI. This was followed by a treasure hunt, where the learners walked through the wetland and were given clues that would help them identify its features.

Further to this Ms Mmakgabo Matlou, a young researcher at ARC-ISCW, encouraged learners to take on careers that will allow them to participate in science and research. This will lead to expanding the science skills base of South Africa.

The ARC continues to use such platforms to educate the public about ecologically sound management practices pertaining to the natural resources through expertise from its various research institutes.

For more information on research programmes relating to wetlands contact:

Ms Adri Theron
Public Relations Officer
ARC-ISCW
Tel: +27 12 310 2518
Cell: +27 82 445 6269
E-mail: adril@arc.agric.za

Information on alien aquatic plants:

Ms Angela Bownes
Researcher - Aquatic Weed Biocontrol
ARC-PPRI
Tel: +27 33 355 9712
E-mail: BowmesA@arc.agric.za

(Ends)

RELEASED BY:

Shantall Ramatsui
Public Relations Officer
ARC-PPRI
Tel: +27 12 808 8000
Mobile: +27 82 353 5590
E-mail: shantall@arc.agric.za



Piet Muller from GDACE sharing knowledge



Participants eagerly trying to find features of the wetland