



Introducing the Convention on Wetlands

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The Convention on Wetlands provides the framework for international cooperation and national action for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. More than 90% of UN member states are “Contracting Parties” to the Convention.

The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. It includes all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fishponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans.

Wetlands are central to sustainable development as they supply all our fresh water.

What does the Convention on Wetlands do?

The Convention's mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world".

Under the **three Pillars** of the Convention, the Contracting Parties commit to:

- Work towards **the wise use of all their wetlands** through national plans, policies and legislation, wetland inventory, management actions, and public education;
- Designate suitable wetlands for the List of **Wetlands of International Importance** (the "Ramsar List") and ensure their effective management;
- **Cooperate internationally** on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands.

Wise use of wetlands

The Convention defines the wise use of wetlands as "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development". Wise use implies the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and all the services they provide, for the benefit of people and nature.



What do wetlands do?

- Store water and ensure its quality, providing resilience against drought.
- Protect against flooding and the impacts of storms.
- Provide food and services such as transport and recreation.
- Store more carbon than other ecosystem types and are important for climate change mitigation and adherence to climate change agreements.
- Support diverse habitats that reinforce genetic, species, and ecosystem biodiversity, playing a key role in the lifecycles of many species and in annual migration patterns.



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What is happening to wetlands and what can we do?

Pollution and climate change, linked to the growing human population, are contributing to the deterioration and disappearance of wetlands. Excessive demand on these ecosystems is compromising their ability to perform vital functions.

To counter this, we must manage wetlands and their resources sustainably, restore degraded ecosystems, and create new wetlands to ensure the services we rely on.

How does the Convention work?

- The [Conference of the Contracting Parties \(COP\)](#) meets every three years to decide on common global priorities, and promotes policies and guidelines to advance the objectives of the Convention.
- The [Standing Committee](#), made up of Contracting Parties representing the six regions of the Convention, meets each year to guide the Convention between meetings of the COP.
- The [Scientific and Technical Review Panel](#) provides guidance on scientific and technical matters for the Convention.



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- The [Secretariat](#) in Gland, Switzerland, manages the day-to-day activities of the Convention, and publishes Convention documents and the “Ramsar List” of Wetlands of International Importance. It is administratively supported by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Each Contracting Party is responsible for its implementation of the Convention, and designates an [Administrative Authority](#) as its focal point for these efforts.
- Countries are also encouraged to establish a broad-based [National Wetland Committee](#).
- Contracting Parties can place Wetlands of International Importance “Ramsar Sites” with a changing ecological character on the [Montreux Record](#), and technical assistance such as a Ramsar Advisory Mission can be provided.
- Private companies and public and community organizations are encouraged to contribute to the mission of the Convention.

Working together for wetlands

The Convention has six formally recognized “International Organization Partners”, which support Contracting Parties in the implementation of the Convention.

- BirdLife International
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
- Wetlands International
- WWF International
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)



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The Convention collaborates with a network of partners:

- Biodiversity-related conventions including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the World Heritage Convention (WHC), and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES);
- Project funding bodies including global environmental funds, multilateral development banks, and bilateral donors;
- UN agencies such as UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, and the UN Economic Commission for Europe, and specific programmes such as UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme;
- Non-governmental organizations including The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, the Society of Wetland Scientists, the International Association for Impact Assessment, and many others.

How is the Convention funded?

The Conference of the Parties provides a core budget every three years to be administered by the Secretariat, and each Contracting Party pays a percentage related to its contribution to the United Nations budget.

Implementation of the Convention at the national level is funded by each Contracting Party. Many countries and donors, including the private sector and International Financial Institutions, support the mission of the Convention by providing funding for projects around the world.

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan is the key document guiding implementation of the Convention on Wetlands. It informs the activities of Contracting Parties, the work programme of the Convention Secretariat, the support of other bodies of the Convention such as the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and the International Organization Partners (IOPs).

The first Strategic Plan, covering the period from 1997 to 2002, was agreed on by the Contracting Parties at COP6 in 1996. The current (fourth) Strategic Plan came into effect in 2016 and runs until COP15 in 2025, at which a fifth Strategic Plan will be adopted.



Learn more and get involved

The Secretariat publishes guidance and information to help the Contracting Parties and others manage wetlands and ensure their wise use.

The Secretariat maintains a comprehensive web site with information on wetlands, Wetlands of International Importance, and Convention processes. A series of online handbooks presents the guidelines adopted by the Conference of the Parties.

www.ramsar.org

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Take part in [World Wetlands Day](#), the Convention's annual campaign day, on [2 February](#). The Secretariat prepares promotional and educational materials which can be adapted to local languages and contexts.

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