



Wetlands: wise use basics on site

A wetland site can be less than a single hectare, as much as 6 million hectares, or anything in between. These are dynamic areas open to natural and human influences. Wetland managers and decision-makers all grapple with one fundamental question: How can we keep a resilient wetland ecosystem that provides for human well-being and still sustains biodiversity and many other wetland services?

There isn't any one-size-fits-all solution, but experience shows a range of practices that seem to work.

Good practices in wetlands planning and management

Integrate local stakeholders from the start

People who occupy, own, govern, or rely on the wetlands have a natural interest in them. Involve them directly and take their needs into account.

Do a wetlands inventory and impact assessment

Note the extent and types of wetlands, the biodiversity present (what species, how abundant, how are they threatened), the other services they provide, and who relies on them.

Evaluate the likely impact for a range of possible uses and activities for the site.



Create a wise use plan for the site

Map out how the site will be used in a way that ensures its viability for the long term. The plan might:

- Define what activities can happen in which zones of the site and at which times.
- Enable hunting and fishing at natural replenishment levels.
- Outline a water management approach for how the site's water is sourced and for how groundwater is affected, taking a wider, basin-oriented view.
- Include knowledge and capacity-building for the community.
- Consider eco-tourism potential and how a visitor centre might support this.



Interesting examples of wise management in action



Name or create an authority to implement the plan

Specify who has the power to implement the plan, and make sure all stakeholders are clear on this.

Monitor the site for changes

Carry out regular observation and monitoring as laid out in the plan.

Apply for Ramsar Site designation

If your site is not yet a designated Wetland of International Importance, consider the visibility, fundraising and tourism benefits that Ramsar Site designation can bring. Discuss the possibilities of designation with your government.

Mauritania Diawling National Park Ramsar Site

- The lower delta of the Senegal River was extraordinarily rich in biodiversity until the construction of two dams in 1986 and 1990. Mangroves and fisheries nearly disappeared.
- Ten years later, the Diawling National Park was established. An IUCN-facilitated stakeholder study recommended re-establishing the pre-dam flood cycle.
- Sluiceways and embankments for re-flooding were placed using the knowledge of local fisherman. The timing and level of the re-flooding is now agreed to meet both their needs and those of women who collect grass stems for weaving.

Fiji Cakaulevu reef system

- The Great Sea Reef, locally known as Cakaulevu, is the world's third longest continuous barrier reef system.
- In 2004, a biodiversity survey conducted by WWF South Pacific confirmed the site's international importance. The organization began working with the local communities and other stakeholders.
- The resulting broad-based management plan promotes the sustainable harvesting of fish while restoring areas of coastal wetland and the reef itself.

- Ten years later, the area's condition is greatly improved, and the local community is requesting WWF's help in designating Cakaulevu as a Ramsar Site.

Lao PDR Xe Champhone Ramsar Site

- This Ramsar site is a mix of marshes, swamps, and woodland forest that flood during the rainy season, when it becomes an important fish spawning area and home to the critically endangered Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*).
- Local people have adapted their traditional rice farming and fishing practices to the annual rise and fall in water level. They also consider some parts of the site to be sacred.
- In 2011 the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the local IUCN Country Office initiated a project to study the local community's laws and customs and to integrate them into the official management plan for the site.



Need more detail? Try the Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks!

A series of Wise Use Handbooks, authored by Ramsar experts, explains all of the good practices touched on here in much greater detail. The handbooks can be downloaded free of charge from www.ramsar.org/wise-use-wetlands.

The Ramsar Convention



The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, is a global intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It is the only global treaty to focus on one single ecosystem.

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