

while others use wetlands for only part of their lives. The wattled crane, for example, is dependent on wetlands for breeding. The rich diversity of waterbirds in southern Africa (totalling 130 species) is the result of the many wetlands spread across the subcontinent. The wetlands of southern Africa are of international importance as they are the southern destination for many migratory wading birds.

### 3.4 People and wetlands

Wetlands have been used for centuries as grazing for domestic stock, and as a source of reeds used for thatching, hut construction and basket weaving. They provide opportunities for fishing, hunting and to observe wildlife, especially birds. Wetlands are appreciated for their beauty as open spaces and for their educational value.

### 4. Wetlands in trouble

To most people, words such as "marsh, swamp, bog and vlei", conjure up little more than the "four Ds" - dampness, disease, difficulty and danger. Because of this, wetlands have been regarded as wastelands to be converted into alternative uses such as cropland, dams, plantations of exotic trees, waste depositories and pastures. Many wetlands have been "reclaimed"

for industry and for the construction of airports, harbours and sewage treatment plants. Historically, wetlands have been drained in attempts to control malaria. All wetlands in southern Africa are threatened. The community vegetable garden is sustained by the wetland in terms of irrigation water and fresh produce namely: spinach and beetroot are sold there. Pick and Pay situated in the town of Kuruman.

### 5 Conclusion

The communities which seek to protect, maintain and sustain their wetlands should start by developing the LandCare committees/groups/forums. The LandCare committees/groups/forums will be responsible for the management of wetland and to secure funds from various government institutions and NGO's to sustain the wetlands. Communities can benefit from such structure because it is responsible for how the wetlands will be utilized by community members.

### 6. Contact information

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# Importance of wetlands



Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries  
Environmental Affairs



agriculture, land reform  
& rural development

Department:  
agriculture, land reform & rural development  
NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE  
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## 1. What is a wetlands?

According to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; "Wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres." Wetlands are one of the world's most important environmental assets, containing a disproportionately high number of plant and animal species compared with other areas of the world. Throughout history they have been integral to human survival and development.

**Picture: Kikahela wetland in Northern Cape Province funded by LandCare programme**

## 2. Kikahela wetland and sustaining livelihoods

Kikahela wetland rehabilitation project started in 2014/15 financial year through the community initiatives and partnership between Northern Cape Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development and Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The focus of the project was to protect the wetland through fencing to avoid being trampled by livestock and also to sustain the natural biodiversity of the wetland. Northern Cape Department of Agriculture,

Land Reform and Rural Development and Department of Agriculture (Which is this one, national or provincial?) with the LandCare conditional grant from DAFF had spent R42 208 000 for the financial year 2015/2016 in an effort to rehabilitate the Kikahela wetland. The activities that were undertaken to rehabilitate the Kikahela wetland include, among others: fencing materials, Labour (wages), protective clothing and signage for the project. The livelihoods of five community members of Kikahela village that include 2 females and 2 males had been sustained by the stipends received during the duration of the fence erection. The wetland is also sustaining the livelihoods of 29 small stock and large stock of farmers of Kikahela through the provision of drinking water for 840 animals that include the following: 200 cattle, 250 sheep, 2000 goats and 190 equines. The community vegetable garden is sustained by the wetland in terms of irrigation water and fresh produce namely: spinach and beetroot are sold to Pick and Pay situated in the town of Kuruman.

## 3. Why are wetlands important?

### 3.1 Flood busters

Wetlands associated with streams and rivers slow down floodwaters by acting as giant shallow pans.

Water flowing into these pans loses speed and spreads out. Plants in the wetland play an important role in holding back the water. The wetland acts as a sponge as much of the flood water is then stored in the wetland and is slowly released to the downstream areas, instead of it all rushing to the sea within a few days. This greatly reduces flood damage, particularly erosion, and ensures a more steady supply of water throughout the year.

### 3.2 Filters

Wetlands improve water quality as they are very good natural filters, trapping sediment, nutrients (e.g. nitrogen and phosphorus), and even pathogenic (disease-causing) bacteria. In addition, pollutants such as heavy metals (e.g. mercury, lead) and pesticides may be trapped by chemical and biological processes. In other words, the water leaving the wetland is cleaner than the water entering it.

### 3.3 Wetlands and wildlife

Wetlands are filters where sediments and nutrients accumulate; so many plants grow there, e.g. bulrushes, grasses, reeds, waterlilies, sedges and trees. The plants, in turn, provide food and a place for attachment and shelter for many creatures. There is more life, hectare for hectare, in a healthy wetland than in almost any other habitat. These productive places support huge numbers of insects, fish, birds and other animals. Some animals are completely dependent on wetlands,

**Community garden sustained by water from Kikahela wetland**

