

Forests and wetlands

Wetlands store carbon **10-20** times faster than terrestrial ecosystems.

There are **2,000**ha of wetlands on our land.

“Half of the world’s wetlands have disappeared since 1900. Development and conversion continue to pose major threats to wetlands, despite their value and importance.” WWF



Wetlands are ecosystems rich in biodiversity that deliver tangible economic value...

What are wetlands?

Wetlands are aquatic systems that can be permanently, intermittently or even rarely saturated. Because wetlands occur between these extremes, they are often viewed as transitional ecosystems that share characteristics of both wetland and non-wetland habitats. See illustration overleaf.

How do you know when an area is a wetland?

- Wetlands are areas where the water table is usually at, or near the land surface, either permanently or seasonally
- The substrate is predominantly undrained waterlogged soil
- The area is covered by water-loving species such as egg reed or is a papyrus marsh or sedge-dominated seep
- Temporarily wet areas, dominated by grass species, are only classed as wetlands if there is a high proportion of wetland soils showing signs of waterlogging.

What is the environmental status of wetlands?

Alarmingly, the world’s wetlands are under siege. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment¹ found that damage to and loss of wetlands is more rapid than that of other ecosystems. As a result, species dependent on both freshwater and coastal wetlands are declining faster than those reliant on other ecosystem types.

Where are wetlands found?

Wetlands are found where the topography (land formation) or geology obstructs or slows down the movement of water through the catchment (eg very flat land formations), or where groundwater is discharged to the surface, causing the surface soil layers in the area to be temporarily, seasonally or permanently wet.

Many wetlands occur in areas where surface water collects and/or where groundwater discharges to the surface (commonly referred to as seeps, springs or fountains), making the area wet for extended periods of time. Other wetlands, such as estuaries and sometimes even coral reefs, occur along our coasts.

The abundance of water creates an environment where hydrophytic (water-loving) plants, that are adapted to wet conditions, tend to grow in abundance. These plants in turn affect the soil and hydrology by further slowing down the movement of water and by producing organic matter that may accumulate in the soil.

“Our focus is on rehabilitating and conserving our wetlands. We particularly look at improving the water functioning features of these wetlands to provide a sustainable flow of good, clean water and a sound habitat for biodiversity.”

Dr David Everard

Divisional Environmental Manager, Sappi Forests

Our undertaking to **remove all commercial timber** from **riparian** and **buffer** zones surrounding **wetlands** is **nearing completion.**

Globally, **wetlands deliver** services valued at **US\$4.9 trillion.**

Our wetlands are managed to provide a **sustainable flow** of **clean water** and a **sound habitat** for **biodiversity.**

Wetlands on Sappi land

| District | Plantation | Name | Size ha | Description |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------|---------|---|
| Bulwer | Comrie | Comrie wetland | 105 | A large wetland, approximately 35ha in extent adjacent to the 70ha Ngodweni Dam. Common Reedbuck and a family of Cape Clawless Otters are often seen. |
| Bulwer | Epsom | Epsom wetland I | 29 | Contains patches of indigenous forest and provides sanctuary for the nearby forest's fauna and flora. |
| Bulwer | Epsom | Epsom wetland II | 32 | Since being cleared, the river below the wetland has flowed continuously, even in times of drought. This wetland is important for water conservation, and the conservation of wetland fauna and flora. |
| Bulwer | Mossbank | Mossbank wetland | 96 | The upper section of this site consists of a large 40ha wetland previously planted to commercial trees. This wetland has now been rehabilitated, resulting in the water table lifting and improved water flow in the stream which meanders through an attractive valley system of some 16ha in extent towards the Mossbank Dam. |
| Camelot North | Elandshoogte | Taljaardsvlei | 27 | Taljaardsvlei is known for its rich diversity of orchid species; approximately 20 species of orchid have been recorded to date, including species not commonly found elsewhere in the region. One botanical gem found here is <i>Helichrysum Ecklonis</i> (Ecklon's Everlasting), a perennial herb that grows on grassy slopes; this is the most northerly distribution of this species in the country. It is rare in Mpumalanga and has only been found in a few localities in the Fort Nottingham area of KwaZulu-Natal and the former Transkei. |
| Camelot North | Helvetia | Swartkoppies spruit | 158 | Located along the Swartkoppiespruit, a tributary of the Elands River, the catchment area into which it falls was highlighted as irreplaceable in the Mpumalanga Aquatic Conservation Plan. The site also falls within a macro-ecological corridor identified as part of the Mpumalanga Biodiversity Conservation Plan. Waterbuck and Oribi have been recorded in the vicinity. |
| Inkwazi | Hall & Sons | Gladdespruit | 100 | A large floodplain, dominated by a grassland tree fern habitat and bracken fern in places. The critically endangered Incomati Rock Catlet has been recorded here. |
| Karkloof | Shafton | Nyaka-Nyaka vlei | 25 | The vlei begins below a large dam and supports a small, slow-flowing meandering channel. The stream is supplemented by a few small tributaries and widens out into a small floodplain wetland supporting a diversity of sedge and phragmites (large perennial grasses). It also contains a regularly used nest site of the African Marsh Harrier. |
| Karkloof | Shafton | Shafton-Kusane wetland | 72 | Situated on the northern section of Block A on Shafton plantation, this reclaimed wetland ecosystem supports a variety of wetland plants which provide habitat for a variety of bird and other animal species. |
| Karkloof | Shafton | Lion's River wetland | 130 | The site comprises a large floodplain either side of the Lions River as it flows towards Midmar Dam. During 1999, Sappi Forests, Rennies Wetland Project and Umgeni Water initiated a joint project to rehabilitate the site. Although still showing signs of disturbance, it is recovering well and has drastically improved from its previous state. |

Wetlands on Sappi land

| District | Plantation | Name | Size ha | Description |
|----------|----------------|-------------------------------------|---------|---|
| Karkloof | Winterton | Woodcote wetland and streams | 109 | The catchment areas are primarily grassland; a variety of shrub species including: <i>Leucosidea sericea</i> , known in English and Afrikaans as Ouhout; <i>Buddleia spp</i> (Butterfly Bush); and <i>Halleria lucida</i> (Tree Fuschia); occur along some watercourses that have been protected from fire. Tree ferns occur along streams. Reedbuck are often seen here. |
| Lothair | Lothair | Metula vlei | 310 | A continuation of the wetland on the Spring Grove property, bordering our land. The vlei is short grassland interspersed with marsh habitat in low lying areas. |
| Lothair | Mpulusi | Mpulusi grassland wetland | 677 | A large grassland of which 60ha falls on our property. Blesbok, Zebra, Wildebeest and Ostrich and a small Oribi population are present. |
| Umvoti | Hodgsons | Thornvale swamp | 6 | Wetland system dominated by the common phragmites reeds. |
| Umvoti | Clan | Satellite wetland complex | 200 | This large wetland system includes Satellite Dam, a bird sanctuary, and a number of linked wetland areas that are recovering following extraction of timber from the floodplain areas. The area is home to over 100 bird species and is a significant breeding ground for species such as Spurwing and Egyptian Geese, and Crowned and Fish Eagles. |
| Zululand | Lenjane | Lenjane wetland | 238 | Large wetland system that underwent successful rehabilitation in 2000-2001. |
| Zululand | Mooiplaas | Nomasila wetland | 132 | Wetland area supporting a number of bird species. Divided by saddles into two separate wetland systems. |
| Zululand | Zululand South | Tekweni wetland | 12 | Large wetland area previously planted with commercial trees. Provides habitat for numerous wetland bird species. |



African Spoonbil



Common Moorhen



Talhaardsvlei



Shafton wetland