

World Wetlands Day Fact Sheet

Each year on February 2, the global community, led by the Ramsar Convention*, celebrates the wonder of wetlands. This year's theme, "Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People" highlights the effects that the health – or ill-health – of wetlands can have on the health of people all over the world.

Ninety percent of the world's population lives in close proximity to wetlands. For those of us living in a landscape dominated by the Nation's largest estuary, the Chesapeake Bay, we are no exception. This important ecosystem is part of our everyday lives as we take pride in its beauty, rely on its resources, revel in its recreational values, and perhaps on occasion, take it for granted. In this regard we share many of the same beliefs and practices with 90% of the world.

Extent of Loss

Global

Capturing and holding rainfall and snowmelt, retaining sediments, and purifying water, wetlands play a vital role in the water cycle. Yet, in the 20th century we destroyed 50% of the world's remaining wetlands, and we've physically modified others with dams and canals which have significantly fragmented and altered water flow in 60% of the world's largest rivers – often compromising the many valuable ecosystem functions upon which we depend.

Local

It is estimated that the three Bay states have lost roughly 58% of their wetlands since colonial times. Wetlands continue to be threatened by sea-level rise and developmental pressures despite increased restoration efforts.

Pollution

Global

In addition, our impressive increased food production in the past 50 years has often been at considerable cost to the health of wetlands and freshwater supply - agriculture now claims 70% of global freshwater withdrawals. We have put further pressure on the remaining wetlands through the high levels of nitrogen and phosphorous, pesticides and sediment loads in surface and groundwaters from agricultural activities. NOTE: While agriculture is the key sources of pollutants in the developed world, human waste takes center stage in many developing countries, where 90-95% of sewage is dumped, untreated, into water systems.

Local

Pollutants and toxics, deposited on the land, are transported to the Bay after a rain. Each year, nearly 300 million pounds of nitrogen enter the Bay's waterways. The increased number of fish consumption advisories and the increase in size and duration of "dead zones" indicate severe water quality and consequently human health issues.



Fisheries Impacts

Global

Over 90% of the marine fish catch is dependent on coastal waters for breeding and nursery areas, the health of these wetland ecosystems is directly dependent upon what we do to our inland wetlands. 80% of marine pollution originates from land-based sources. This situation will not likely improve with a projected 1.7 billion additional people on the planet in the next 20 years.

Local

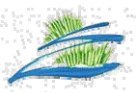
According to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's annual State of the Bay Report, Crab populations are 40%, Rockfish 75%, Oysters 2% and shad 7% of the estimated historical level. While loss of wetlands alone cannot account for the dramatic population decreases, loss of wetland habitat and decreased water quality limit recovery.

While we share the same problems associated with wetlands we can also share in the shaping the solutions. To learn more, visit your local wetland specialists or Environmental Concern on the web at www.wetland.org.

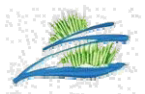
Dedicated to promoting public understanding and stewardship of wetlands through experiential learning, native species horticulture, and restoration and creation initiatives Environmental Concern, based in St. Michaels, MD has been a leader in the field of wetlands since 1972.

Have you loved your wetland today?

* Named for the location of the conference, Ramsar, Iran, The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was signed in 1971. Since 1971, 1179 Ramsar sites or Wetlands of International Importance totaling over 1000,000,000 hectares of wetlands in 133 countries have been designated (www.ramsar.org).



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