



THE SOURCE
2023 Annual Review
Wetlands International



Wetlands
INTERNATIONAL



**WETLANDS
INTERNATIONAL
IS THE ONLY
GLOBAL NOT-FOR-PROFIT
ORGANISATION
DEDICATED TO
THE CONSERVATION
AND RESTORATION
OF WETLANDS**

What are wetlands?

Wetlands occur wherever water meets land – mangroves, peatlands, marshes, rivers, lakes, deltas, floodplains, flooded forests, ricefields, and even coral reefs.

Wetlands exist in every country across the world and every type of region – polar, tropical, wet, dry, high and low altitude.

Healthy wetlands are key to restoring nature and healing our climate, yet the world has lost two-thirds of wetlands since 1900.

Urgent action is needed to reverse this decline and revive these natural wonders.

Our Vision

A world where wetlands are treasured and nurtured for their beauty, the life they support and the resources they provide.

Our Mission

To inspire and mobilise society to safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature.

FROM OUR CEO



CEO, Management Team and Supervisory Council in Malindi, Kenya (November 2023)

The world is waking up to the critical importance of wetlands. If 2022 brought big global commitments – notably the Mangrove Breakthrough and the Global Biodiversity Framework – then 2023 was the year of action. More countries committed to safeguarding and restoring mangroves, and there were significant new finance pledges. A coalition of governments launched the Freshwater Challenge, which seeks to restore 300,000 km of rivers and 350 million hectares of wetlands. Our call for a global Peatland Push at the UN climate summit, to urgently safeguard and restore peatland carbon stores, was widely supported. More countries included wetland solutions within their national climate change mitigation and adaptation plans.

'The Blue Nile in Lake Tana, Ethiopia is a vital wetland that is rich with sediment and supports 50% of the country's freshwater resource, and reminds us of the power, fragility and constantly changing nature of wetland ecosystems'
Former CEO Jane Madgwick

In our own projects on the ground, we continued to demonstrate the benefits of healthy wetlands for communities, for biodiversity and for the climate. Our work ranged from working with farmers in the Pantanal to improve cattle grazing practices, to improve cattle grazing practices to prevent fires, to supporting communities to manage scarce water resources in the Sahel to prevent conflict, to strengthening livelihoods for fishers in Kenya reducing the pressure on mangroves. We unlocked funding for peatland restoration from Peru to Ireland to Mongolia, and guided government principles for mangrove restoration in Indonesia. Importantly, we worked through partnerships like Blue Lifelines for a Secure Sahel and the European WaterLANDS project to take these efforts to scale, and we used our connections to influence policies, share knowledge and best practices, and channel new finance towards wetland conservation and restoration. We now must continue to invest in strengthening our organisation to accelerate and scale up our impact.

This has been a year of transition for Wetlands International, following the departure of our long-serving CEO, Jane Madgwick. Jane joined Wetlands International in March 2004, and was instrumental in turning our organisation into the leading global voice for wetlands, with a network of 19 offices operating in many countries worldwide. Thanks to her courage, passion and leadership, Wetlands International stands ready to inspire and mobilise action for wetlands on an unprecedented scale. We are immensely grateful to Jane for her two decades of service – and are delighted that she will continue to have a role in our organisation as a lifelong Counsellor of Honour.

Meanwhile, I have been deeply honoured to take on the role of CEO as we start our search for a permanent successor. In this, I am grateful for the support of our newly reconfigured Management Team. Femke Tonneijck, our new Director of Programme Impact, is responsible for overseeing and guiding our major programmes to meet the goals set out in our Strategic Intent. Maria Stolk, our



new Director of Network Development, drives and oversees institutional strengthening of our growing global network. Ron van Leeuwen, our Director of Resources, continues to provide strategic leadership for the Finance, Governance, HR, Risk & Compliance, and IT functions. I am also grateful to our Supervisory Council, which guides and oversees our policies and strategy. This year, we welcomed a new Chair, Jan Karel Mak, along with four new members, Tiega Anada, Frederick Kwame Kumah, Janet Nieboer and Helen O'Connor.

Finally, my thanks to all of our staff, partners and supporters. We have achieved much together in the past year, and we realise there is a lot to improve on still. I look forward to continue to work with you preventing conflict to safeguard and restore the world's wetlands for people and nature.

Han de Groot
CEO, Wetlands International



The Pozuelos Lagoon in the Puna region of Argentina is a High Andean wetland of great importance for biodiversity and local communities. But it is under threat from pollution from extensive mining activity, livestock overgrazing and pasture, and peatlands degradation. Wetlands International works with local communities to bring about sustainable grazing for cattle, while also restoring the wetland habitat and advocating for better wetland management.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Challenge accepted! COP28 brings freshwater boost

The **Freshwater Challenge** was launched by six countries – Colombia, DR Congo, Ecuador, Gabon, Mexico and Zambia – at the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York. By UNFCCC COP28 in Dubai in December 2023, a further 38 countries had joined the Freshwater Challenge, becoming the world's largest initiative to restore degraded rivers, lakes and wetlands and to protect vital freshwater ecosystems.

The Freshwater Challenge aims to restore 300,000 km of degraded rivers – equivalent to more than seven times around the Earth – and 350 million hectares of degraded wetlands, which is an area larger than India, as well as conserve intact ecosystems. As one of the organisations supporting the initiative since the very onset, we have been providing technical knowledge and strategic guidance, and have been pushing hard to bring more governments on board.

Private sector organisations have pledged their support to the country-led effort, including IKEA and AB InBev, the world's largest brewer. Importantly, the Freshwater Challenge will take an inclusive, collaborative approach, working with Indigenous people, local communities and other water users to co-create solutions to improve to tackle the climate and nature crises.

Going forward, we will provide technical assistance, facilitate knowledge exchange and support resource mobilisation.

Explore more:
[Water Action Agenda](#)



Corredor Azul is a ten-year programme led by Wetlands International and funded by DOB Ecology. The Corredor Azul encompasses the fourth largest wetland system in the world, the heart of which is the Paraná River and the Paraguay River in South America.



Mangrove mapping in Lamu, Kenya

Mangrove Breakthrough unlocks progress

Since the announcement of the **Mangrove Breakthrough** at the UN Climate Change Conference in 2022 (COP27), we have been a driving force in mobilising cross-sectoral collaboration to conserve the world's remaining mangroves, restore half of recent losses and double the area of mangroves under protection by 2030.

Inspired and based on data from the Global Mangrove Watch that Wetlands International convened, as well as our work as part of the Global Mangrove Alliance, the Mangrove Breakthrough will drive massive investment and mobilisation of state and non-state actors. At UNFCCC COP28 in Dubai, more than 50 governments had endorsed the Mangrove Breakthrough targets, representing around 60% of the world's mangroves. Ministers, Indigenous peoples and local community organisations, financial institutions, donors, NGOs and other supporters presented progress and ambitious commitments on policy, finance and technology to deliver the Breakthrough.

Mobilising finance will be a key challenge, so the launch of a practical finance roadmap – developed with our partners at the Global Mangrove Alliance and the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions – was an important step forward. Governments including Germany, Norway and the UK as well as the Green Climate Fund, the UN Environment Programme and the Bezos Earth Fund announced new finance to address the drastic under-funding of mangrove conservation. Complementing these efforts, we secured a US\$2 million grant from the Bezos Earth Fund to develop a pipeline of investible mangrove projects and establish a Mangrove Breakthrough secretariat.

While the Mangrove Breakthrough offers huge opportunities for mangrove restoration, it is critical that this is done right to ensure long-term benefits for people, nature and climate. With partners from the Global Mangrove Alliance and the Blue Carbon Initiative, we launched Best Practice Guidelines for Mangrove Restoration endorsed by the world's leading scientists and practitioners. These science-based guidelines enable successful mangrove restoration through community-based ecological restoration approaches. They cover ecological, social and financial factors that can make or break a restoration project.

To further support restoration efforts, the Global Mangrove Alliance also launched a Mangrove Restoration Tracker Tool to help practitioners record and monitor their progress. This will enable better sharing of information and insights across mangrove restoration projects.

Explore more:
[Mangrove Breakthrough – Financial Roadmap](#)
[Best Practice Guidelines](#)
[Mangrove Restoration Tracker Tool](#)



Towards a Peatland Push

After the Mangrove Breakthrough and the Freshwater Challenge, is it time for a global **Peatland Push**? That was the suggestion from Wetlands International at an official side event that we hosted at UNFCCC COP28 highlighting the climate, water and biodiversity benefits of peatlands.

Despite covering just 3% of the Earth's surface, peatlands lock up 30 % of carbon stored on land, more than twice the amount in all of the world's forests – so long as they remain wet. By acting as natural sponges, they also reduce the risk of both droughts and floods. But 15% of the world's peatlands have been drained for agriculture, forestry and grazing, and conversion continues, contributing more than 5% of global GHG emissions (similar to aviation and shipping combined).

While agriculture is a leading cause of peatland destruction, the relationship between peat and food production doesn't have to be a negative one. Working with knowledge institutes, we develop innovative solutions such as paludiculture - sustainable wet agriculture on restored peatlands - which can support food production and livelihoods while locking up carbon and maintaining the other benefits peatlands provide.

In northeast Germany, for example, farmers have been cultivating Typha, a flowering wetland plant also known as cattail or bullrush, which can be used for construction and insulation materials. Other potential high-value paludiculture activities include harvesting peat moss for use in horticulture and herding water buffalo. Meanwhile in Indonesia, we've worked with communities to grow sago instead of oil palm on peatlands, which is helping raise the water table while strengthening livelihoods and food supplies. Further, in Malaysia and Indonesia we work with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil to avoid peatland drainage and stimulate rewetting.

 **Explore more:**
[Towards a Global Stocktake for Peatlands and Other High-Carbon Ecosystems: Status and Scaling up Potential](#)



Safeguarding and restoring peatlands are critical actions if the world is to meet climate targets under the Paris Agreement. Our official side event at UNFCCC COP28, moderated by Han de Groot (CEO) highlighted policies, funding, and best practices for keeping these carbon sinks in tackling climate change. Femke Tonneijk, Director of Programme Impact, called for the urgent creation of a global Peatland Push to secure the future of peatlands, unlock finance, and galvanize collective action.



Paludiculture - the sustainable wet agriculture on restored peatlands in Bederkesa, Germany - supports food production and livelihoods while locking up carbon and maintaining the other benefits peatlands provide.

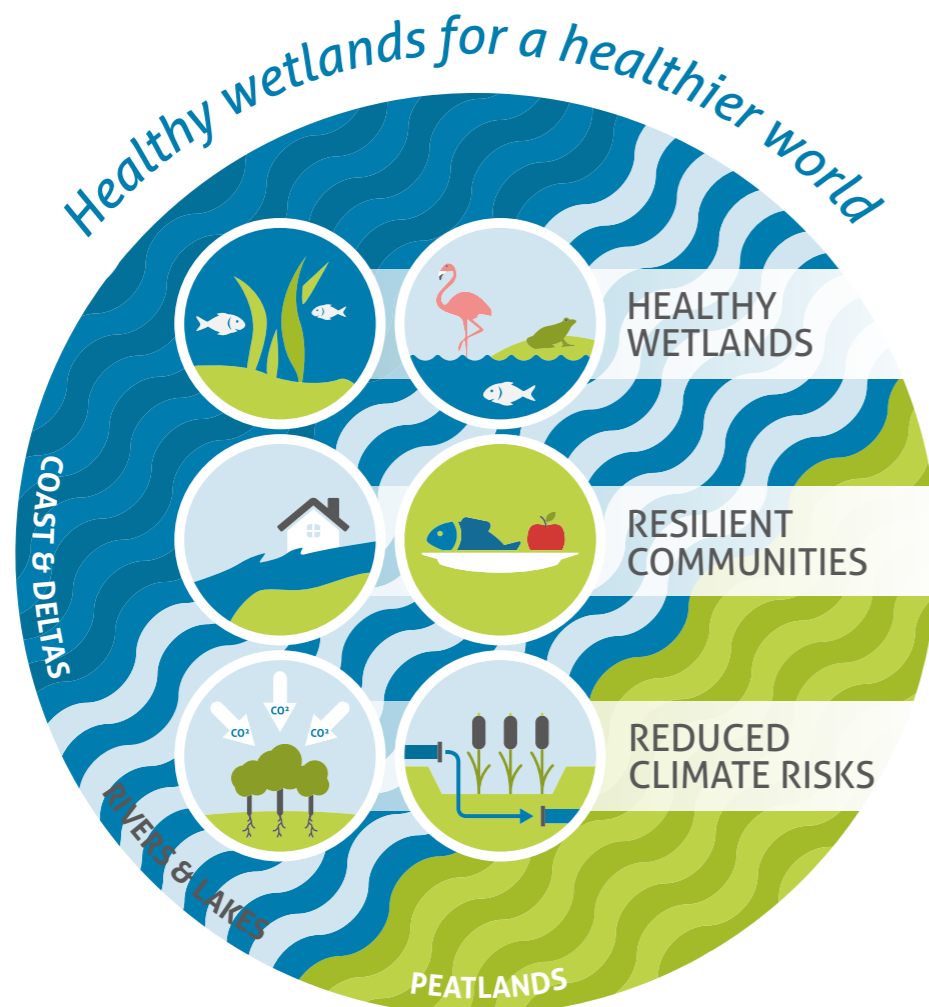
STRATEGIC INTENT 2020-2030

Over 2020-2030 Wetlands International aims to safeguard and restore tens of millions of hectares of wetlands, bringing multiple returns for nature and people. Our theory of change encapsulates the three main phases of our work: to inspire, mobilise and upscale. These are the key ingredients of our organisational strategy for the period 2020-2030.

For this period, we are orientating our work to achieve three, interconnected global impacts: healthy wetlands, resilient wetland communities, and reduced climate risks.

Our vision, targets and strategic interventions are organised in three streams: Coasts and Deltas, Rivers and Lakes, Peatlands.

We measure our progress across these three streams according to the following three interconnected global impacts and six outcomes.



Healthy Wetlands



Wetland habitats and functions safeguarded and restored

We aim to help conserve a selection of the most intact wetland ecosystems and restore others within a full range of wetland types across the world. We also aim to restore other freshwater systems, peatlands, deltas and coastal ecosystems for their intrinsic, cultural and ecosystem-service values. We will prioritise ecological networks that connect landscapes, such as flyways and swim-ways.



Wetland species recovered

Building on our long track record for waterbird conservation, we will contribute to the conservation of wetland biodiversity by working on selected flagship species and groups of species linked to specific habitats.



Reduced societal conflict and displacement from wetlands

We will in particular strive to resolve situations where deterioration of wetlands - caused by upstream abstraction, climate change or population growth - contributes to loss of livelihoods, human displacement, conflict and migration. Where necessary, we will use peacebuilding and conflict resolution measures to address imbalanced power relations between stakeholders, building capacity for vulnerable and marginalised people to defend their rights to water and wetland resources.

Reduced Climate Risks



Wetland carbon stores secured and enhanced

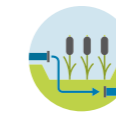
We aim to bring wetlands into activities to adapt to and mitigate climate change, which is otherwise a threat to the integrity of all wetlands. Improving the condition of peatlands, river systems and coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass beds will also reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases and return many to their role as carbon sinks.

Resilient Communities



Water and food secured for wetland communities

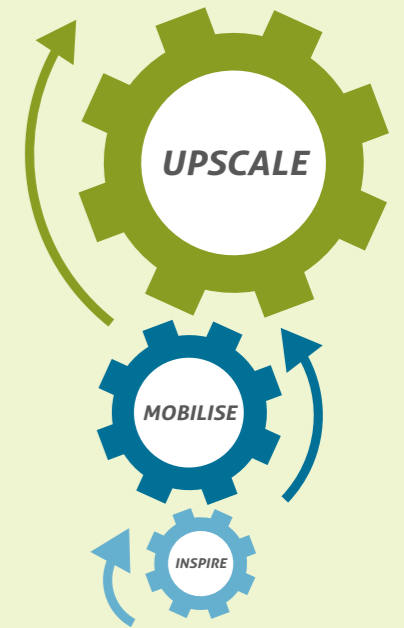
We aim to prevent further wetland loss and degradation that undermines the natural productivity and water storage capacities of peatlands, floodplains, mangrove forests, deltas and lakes. We aim to improve and diversify the livelihoods of people dependent on wetlands, and promote best practices in agriculture and aquaculture, integrating wetland values into the local economy.



Wetland Nature-based Solutions integrated into infrastructure developments

We aim to steer urban water infrastructure investment and land use planning towards using wetlands to meet challenges such as water insecurity and flooding that are conventionally addressed by civil engineering - an approach that often causes further loss and deterioration of wetlands.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



Inspire

- We translate science into policy and practice
- We demonstrate innovative solutions
- We show where the key wetlands are and how they are thriving or threatened

Mobilise

- We train practitioners and support decision makers
- We build alliances around compelling landscape visions and global goals

Upscale

- We create enabling policy and investment environments
- We unlock finance for wetlands



ACHIEVEMENTS

This section presents our 2023 achievements. These are organised along our three streams of work (Coasts and Deltas, Rivers and Lakes, and Peatlands) and in relation to the ambitions laid out in our Strategic Intent 2020-2030.

OUR SCORING SYSTEM



On track to exceed target (we will achieve the target before 2030)



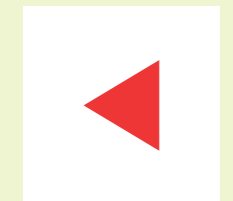
We expect to achieve the target by 2030



Substantial progress, but more time is needed to reach our target



So far, there is no significant overall progress



The situation is deteriorating and adaptive management is needed



Lamu harbours approximately 61% of the Kenya's mangrove forests. Wetlands International has been working with the local communities, authorities, civil society and research institutions towards mangrove forest restoration where women have a 50 per cent representation as they are mainly involved in restoration efforts.

COASTS AND DELTAS

Goal: Safeguard and restore coastal wetland ecosystems as essential features of resilient and productive coastal landscapes.

Healthy wetlands

2030 TARGET: Safeguard 2 million hectares of high value coastal wetlands, including vital wildlife migration corridors

Working towards the ambitious goals of the Mangrove Breakthrough, we have grown the Global Mangrove Alliance to over 80 members. Member organisations from civil society organisations and knowledge institutes have organised themselves in 12 country chapters, which are currently developing national mangrove strategies in countries including Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya and Mexico. Beyond mangroves, we became a founding member of the World Coastal Forum, playing an active role in its efforts to conserve and restore coastal ecosystems.

We've directly contributed to these initiatives through landscape projects in Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia that have brought over 600,000 hectares of wetlands under improved

management and restored more than 1,500 hectares of mangroves. These interventions have been replicated by others on a much larger scale. To further upscale our efforts, we've developed various tools and training materials. For example, we trained hundreds of mangrove practitioners across the tropics, and more than 4,200 users visit the [Global Mangrove Watch](#) platform each month, up more than 50% from 2022. We published and shared a roadmap for investment in mangroves and guidelines on ecological mangrove restoration approaches. In Japan, we developed a framework for monitoring biodiversity in mudflats, seagrass, algal beds and rocky shores, while in China we introduced an evidence-based approach to mudflat restoration.



In Japan we developed a framework for monitoring biodiversity in mudflats, seagrass, algal beds and rocky shores.

Resilient wetland communities

2030 TARGET: Integrate wetlands into 8 million hectares of coastal production systems
PROGRESS: We are slightly behind schedule. Most of our impact comes through policy work which can be hard to attribute. We are working on this, while also planning to expand our focus on commodities, such as aquaculture production and rice farming.

This year, we supported tens of thousands of people to improve their livelihoods while safeguarding wetlands. In the Saloum Delta, Senegal, more than 55,000 people are benefiting from sustainable mangrove-based livelihoods and 81 women's savings and loans groups have provided financial independence for 22,000 people. In Guinea Bissau, sustainable rice farming is reviving 150 hectares of saline wastelands, reducing pressure on mangroves elsewhere and providing a compelling example for upscaling.

In the Parana Delta in Argentina, we supported five artisanal fisher groups to add value to their products and rolled out more sustainable cattle ranching practices across 12 ranches covering 18,000 hectares, and strengthened the management plans for three protected areas. In China, we supported 30 local authorities and coastal zone managers to adopt evidence-based conservation planning, including a focus on restoring feeding habitat for migratory waterbirds in former aquaculture landscapes.

Reduced climate risks

2030 TARGET: Mainstream Building with Nature and promote blue carbon solutions, influencing €10 billion of investments in coastal infrastructure solutions.
PROGRESS: We are slightly behind schedule. We are making strategic recruitments to mobilise a large Nature-based Solutions initiative in Southeast Asia in and to strengthen our internal capacity on conservation finance.

Together with the EcoShape consortium and Dutch civil society partners, we launched a €120 million innovation programme to demonstrate, document and disseminate Nature-based Solutions in the Netherlands. This programme complements other initiatives such as a US\$3.5 billion Asian Development Bank investment programme that

seeks to restore and maintain critical wetlands along the East Asian-Australasian flyway. As part of this, together with Birdlife International and other partners, we identified 50 priority sites for migratory waterbirds and helped define business cases for conservation and restoration of these sites.

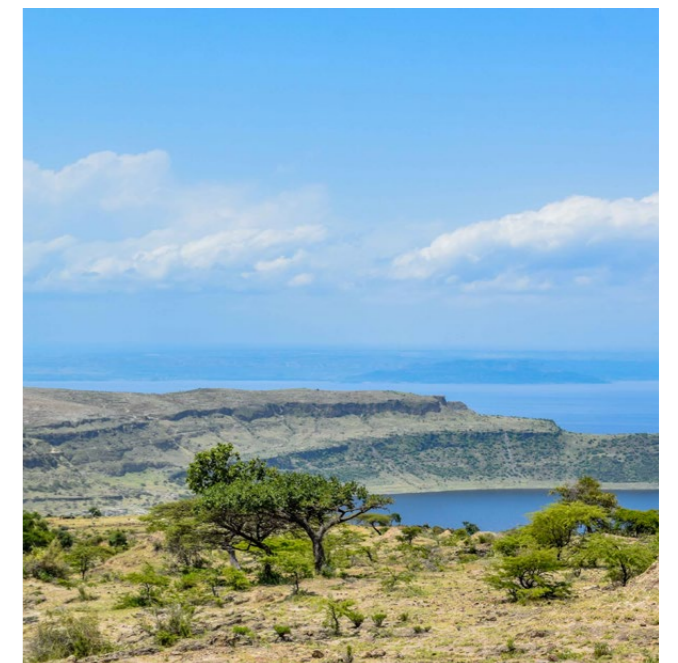
RIVERS AND LAKES

Goal: Catalyse investment to safeguard and restore rivers, lakes and their accompanying wetlands as part of wider freshwater systems; and to provide water security for people and nature, climate resilience, and sustainable and peaceful landscapes.

Healthy wetlands

2030 TARGET: Safeguard 10 million hectares of high-value river and lake wetlands in five basins

While our Strategic Intent mentions five priority river basins, our work to safeguard and restore wetland habitats and functions now encompasses more river basins – including progress this year in Argentina, Brazil, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Kenya, Mali, Senegal and the Philippines. This has included supporting livestock grazing and fire management of key wetlands sites like the Pantanal and Iberá marshes in South America, and working with communities and government on integrated water resource management in the Niger and Volta basins in West Africa and Omo basin in East Africa. In the High Andes of Argentina and Peru, we have supported communities with alternative livelihood choices such as sustainable cattle grazing that help conserve wetlands and raised awareness of the impacts of lithium mining on freshwater ecosystems. Our work is also contributing to wetland species recovery such as flamingos and pelicans in these landscapes. To better capture this, we have developed a standardised system for monitoring biodiversity in Ethiopia's Central Rift Valley.



Ziway Shalla is a closed water basin, located in the Rift Valley of Ethiopia, and is the country's most important wetland area. Our work there aims to secure a balanced ecosystem and improve water security in the area. We do this by supporting smallholder farmers by showcasing best practices, introducing efficient irrigation systems, and undertaking watershed interventions at the most critical sites to raise awareness about unsustainable land management, subsequent erosion, and long-term consequences.

Resilient wetland communities

2030 TARGET: Safeguard and restore 60 million hectares of wetlands as integral elements of productive river and lake landscapes.

PROGRESS: We are behind schedule. We are at risk of not achieving this target and need to clarify how to account for direct and indirect achievements in productive landscapes.

From the High Andes to the Sahel, our country programmes have worked across multiple wetland landscapes to strengthen food and water security for wetland communities, contributing to more stable incomes and greater resilience. This has included work to improve the management of natural resources. For example in the Ziway-Shalla basin in Ethiopia we have developed a water allocation plan to resolve conflicts over access. In the Inner Niger delta, Mali, where people's livelihoods are affected by the increasing variability in water availability due to climate

change and upstream water allocation decisions, we have strengthen sustainable fisheries, and introduced better grazing practices to minimise impacts on rivers and wetlands. In Argentina and Peru where we have decreased the pressure on wetlands by implementing better grazing management techniques with local communities. Building communities' resilience against climate change was an important area of focus, as well as working with women, young people, Indigenous peoples and marginalised groups.

The Pantanal is the largest tropical wetland on the planet sprawling across Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia. Yet in recent years, intensifying pressure from deforestation driven by infrastructure development and land conversion are putting the survival of the Pantanal in jeopardy.

Reduced climate risks

2030 TARGET: €500 million committed to Nature-based Solutions in freshwater wetlands, for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

PROGRESS: We have not made significant progress so far. We will focus on strengthening our finance expertise, securing commitments from governments through the Freshwater Challenge, and facilitating wetlands partnerships between the EU and key countries.

We were at the first UN Water Conference in almost half a century in New York in March, ensuring wetlands and freshwater ecosystems were high on the agenda. The main outcome of the conference was the Water Action Agenda, which contains over 700 voluntary commitments from governments, private sector, civil society and others, adding up to more than US\$300 billion. The headline commitment was the launch of the Freshwater Challenge, as well as commitments on water and sustainable development with the Water, Peace and Security partnership and on water for climate and source-to-sea approaches. We also saw progress on advancing the rights of nature, including the rights of wetlands.

We also made progress working with communities to enhance their capacity to identify and implement Nature-based Solutions at the local level. In Kenya, we secured a €875,000 investment from the World Bank through their Financing Locally-Led Climate Action Programme, and inspired other donors and partners including the Dutch Embassy and Concern Worldwide to develop sustainable fisheries and climate-smart agriculture programmes around Brazil.





PEATLANDS

Goal: Scale up the conservation and restoration of peatlands as a contribution to biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable development – ensuring that all remaining undrained peatlands stay intact, while 50 million hectares of drained peatlands are restored by 2050.

Healthy wetlands



2030 TARGET: Safeguard over 20 million hectares of high-value peatlands, including bringing five major peatland landscapes back into good ecological condition.
PROGRESS: We are slightly behind schedule. We are making progress to mobilise governmental actors in restoring and safeguarding large peatland areas, we are developing better systems for mapping high-value peatlands to understand where they are, what state they are in and what the main threats are in order to focus climate and biodiversity driven action at country level.

This year brought new protection status for 350,000 hectares of peatlands in Tierra del Fuego, after we worked with the government of Argentina to achieve Ramsar designation for Peninsula Mitre. We helped develop guidelines for better managing tens of thousands of hectares of peatlands in Junín National Reserve, Peru. We have supported a number of governments to identify and map peatlands so they can be included in their national climate and biodiversity plans as an enabling condition to safeguard them. For example, we have supported countries including Argentina, Peru and Indonesia to incorporate peatlands into their climate NDCs. In East Africa we worked on

transboundary peatlands in the Nile Equatorial Lakes basin by working with communities and on water management in Uganda. In the EU, meanwhile, the new Nature Restoration Law proposes the restoration and rewetting of millions of hectares of peatlands, in part a result of our advocacy efforts in partnership with others. Through the Wet Horizons project, we helped develop a GIS platform to guide peatland and wetland restoration, considering the needs of end-users in the process as a stepping stone towards a Global Peatland Watch, building on the successes of the Global Mangrove Watch.

With support from Greenchoice, and working with partners Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, and our knowledge partner Care for Ecosystems, Wetlands International is restoring the hydrology of degraded peatlands in Mongolia

Resilient communities

2030 target: Enable community-based conservation and restoration of 10 million hectares of peatland.

PROCESS: We are slightly behind schedule. We are developing community-based solutions, unlocking private finance for peatland restoration at landscape scale. By pioneering novel solutions and sharing our knowledge and experiences we catalyse further climate action.

We secured significant investment for large-scale peatland restoration projects in Peru (2,600 hectares) and Mongolia (25,000 hectares) which will deliver impact for indigenous communities and nomadic herders over the next five years with significant upscaling opportunities. Through a community-based approach, we improve local socio-economic conditions and long-term livelihoods such as herding yak, and increase protection of endangered flora and fauna such as the beautiful and rare endemic and endangered Junin Grebe (with fewer than 360 individuals remaining), Junin Rail and the Lake Junin Frog, once believed to be extinct. In Europe, we worked with Rewilding Europe to test the possibilities of commercially funded (carbon funding) peatland restoration delivered in partnership

with communities in Ireland, Scotland, Lithuania and Poland. We released a report with Landscape Finance Lab on how to mobilise investor-driven funding for community-based peatland restoration. Bringing government and landowners on board is a complex process, but we've been making progress, developing partnerships and knowledge, and at least one large-scale project has been agreed in Ireland. Long-term, large-scale impact depends on strong partnerships and co-creation approaches, and we're developing a framework to guide collaborative processes in peatland restoration. We have also been using knowledge on where and how to restore wetlands and peatlands in Europe to influence the EU Nature Restoration and Soil Health laws improving the state of millions of hectares of peatlands across Europe over the next decade.

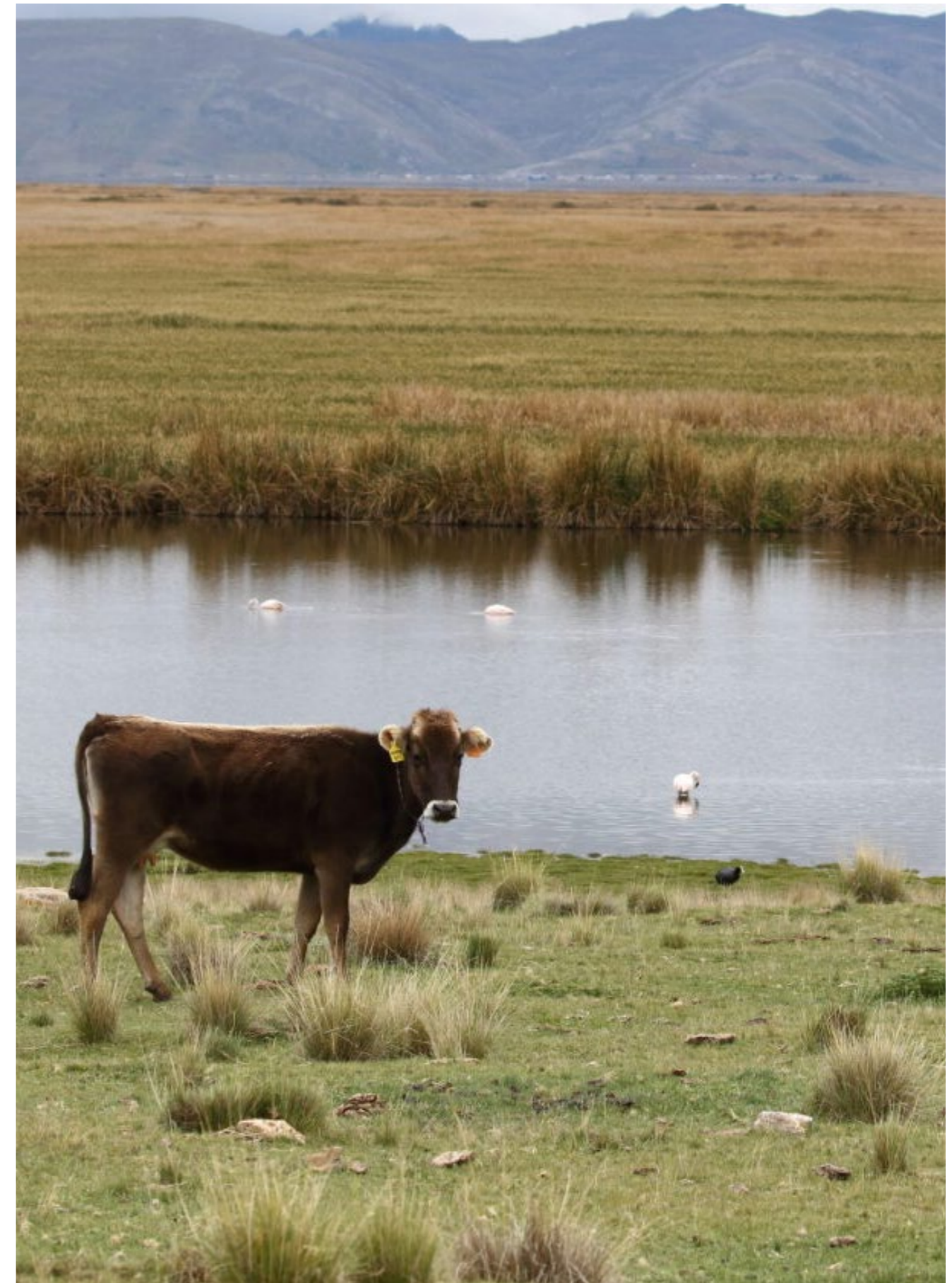
Reduced climate risks

2030 target: Reduce the impact of peat-based industries in 10 million hectares of peatlands, with a focus on palm oil, pulp and timber.

PROCESS: We are on track. Our work on palm oil alone covers 4.5 million hectares of production landscapes, a large proportion of which are peatlands.


The relationship between peatland and land use has been on the agenda this year, after we used the platform of UNFCCC COP28 to highlight the impacts of growing commodity crops on drained peatlands – including the release of stored carbon and loss of habitat. We've been working with members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil to limit impacts on peatlands in Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as making sure this is on the agenda of importing companies and countries – including through the EU Deforestation Law. As a board

member of Responsibly Produced Peat (RPP), we engaged with European governments to drastically reduce peat use in domestic horticulture, while in East Africa, we worked with communities to raise awareness of the negative consequences of peat extraction by tree nursery operators and small-scale coffee farmers.



Wetlands International, with the support of Greenchoice and other partners, is improving peatland management in Lake Junín, Peru. Through a community-based approach, the project aims to improve local socio-economic conditions and long-term livelihoods, and increase protection of endemic flora and fauna.


FEATURED PROJECTS



[Water Dialogues](#)



[Trans-European Swimways Programme](#)



[Greenchoice Mongolia](#)



[To Plant or not To Plant](#)

[Lake Junin](#)



[Corredor Azul](#)



[Mangrove Capital Africa](#)



[SaWeL](#)



FUNCTIONING OF THE ORGANISATION

Our network

Wetlands International operates as a global network of offices with shared values and purpose, working on a joint strategy to safeguard and restore wetlands worldwide.

We have offices in 19 countries and we are active in many more. In 2023, we opened a new project office in Sierra Leone, attached to our West Africa Coastal Office based in Senegal, and closed our office in Russia, where we have now halted all activities due to the war.

The Global Office, based in the Netherlands, facilitates work across the network and provides leadership and support in representation, programme development, communications, global advocacy, fundraising, and risk management. It nurtures the work of the network and ensures we are all aligned with decisions taken by the Global Management Team, Global Board, Network Management Team, and Programme Leadership Team.

The Global Board, consisting of the Wetlands International CEO and all Heads of Office, is responsible for strategic decisions on positioning, priority setting and institutional issues, which are then adopted by the Global Management Team. The

Global Board delegates operational decision-making to the Network Management Team, which has members drawn from Heads of Office and senior global functions. The Programme Leadership Team leads policy and proposal development and prepares them for decision-making.

Governance

Wetlands International is a non-profit organisation with charitable status in the Netherlands and in countries where it operates. The organisation has two complementary forms of international governance: an Association of Members (governments and NGOs), and a foundation overseen by a Supervisory Council whose members also constitute the Board of the Association. In cases where Wetlands International offices have an independent legal status, they are governed by their own boards and the organisation's CEO is an ex-officio member.

Strengthening our organisation

2023 was a year of transition for Wetlands International, with a new CEO, a reconfigured Global Management Team, and several new members joining our Supervisory Council. We embarked on a journey in which country offices and our network-wide streams – Coasts and Deltas, Rivers and Lakes, and Peatlands – prepared a Strategic Review and Plan to pinpoint where we are now and what it will take to reach our 2030 goals. Informed by this effort, we will be preparing dedicated office development plans and a joint Network Development

Plan that will strengthen our organisational foundations so that we are well equipped – organisationally, financially, professionally – to scale up. We are and will continue supporting our network of offices to address needs in leadership skills, structure and governance, finance and operations, project and knowledge management and impact monitoring. We will set up a new team focusing on strengthening our monitoring, evaluation and learning, and assisting our network in a systematised approach to holistic landscape restoration. Our recent investments in the “4 Returns” framework guidebook and related tools will help landscape practitioners to work on this together.

During 2023 we invested in the network teams to drive joint work on partnerships, philanthropy and general fundraising. Through better coordination as a network, we aim to improve proposal writing, develop critical fundraising assets and materials, launch a mentorship programme, and develop donor stewardship and corporate engagement plans.

While this work is still ongoing, we are now in a much better position to work together as a network, to overcome challenges and harness opportunities, enabling us to meet our ambitious goals during this vitally important decade.

Annual Leadership Meeting 2023

The Annual Meeting in November 2023, in Malindi, Kenya hosted by our Eastern Africa Office, brought

Risk management

A risk register for the network is updated regularly and discussed at least once a year with the Supervisory Council. We consider the organisation to be in a good position to deal with these risks, due to its stronger financial position, which means that we can take mitigation measures more quickly when required.

THE TOP 5 RISKS IN DECEMBER 2023:

	Risk area	Risk	Potential Impact	Mitigation measures
1	Operational	Impact of AI on our operations (positive/negative) as a knowledge organisation	Can improve efficiency and productivity. AI will change the nature of knowledge functions, such as ours. We cannot oversee those consequences yet	Make inventory of in-house AI use, get external support for use to full potential.
2	Operational	Insufficient staff capacity and skills to deliver complex, co-funded international projects	Inability to absorb and implement new opportunities	Proposal design includes organisational development wherever possible. Close cooperation with Heads of Office on capabilities and development needs. Additional recruitment support in the Global Office and the network.
3	Governance	Political instability (conflict in Ukraine, Mali and Middle East, Europe swinging right affecting climate policy & funding)	Programme operations and funding is greatly reduced	Maintain close contacts with Heads of Office, diplomatic networks and donors. Strengthen cooperation with local communities. Incorporate flexibility in project design.
4	Operational	Tight labour market slowing recruitment and leading to gaps in staffing and stress for current staff – in network offices and Global Office	Inability to implement current programmes correctly or to start new ones and overwork symptoms among staff	Support offered to address Eastern Africa vacancies (S2S); extra (interim) capacity added to Global Office staff; greater use of external recruitment agencies; improve our marketing of vacancies.
5	Financial	Insufficient quality and late submission of audits from offices (local partners' finance reports are insufficient)	Delays in reports, cashflow and ultimately an impact on reputation	Investing in network support functions (senior finance staff), to be covered eventually by regular project budgets; training and capacity building in project implementation (also for partners)



Annual Meeting with Program Leadership Team, Supervisory Council, Management Team and Heads of Office in Malindi, Kenya

GLOBAL OFFICE SOCIAL REPORT 2023

together programme and office heads, our new Global Management Team and the Supervisory Council. This strategic meeting was a chance to assess collective progress, discuss outcomes from the strategic review process, and sharpen priorities to accelerate and upscale our impact for the years ahead. It also included a visit to the mangrove forest of Mida Creek which included valuable exchanges with local community conservation groups. The Global Board met to confirm the key decisions and actions, including investing in monitoring, evaluation and learning systems, fundraising priorities, reassessing the scope of our biodiversity work, and further strengthening our theory of change.

Earlier in the year, a special face-to-face meeting was held at the Global Office in July after the new management team was set up to work together on a transition plan, an institutional development roadmap and vision, and our strategic and business planning. The meeting included an inspiring field visit to Marker Wadden, a Building with Nature site in the Netherlands

Accountability

Transparency and accountability are core values, and we actively

seek feedback on our performance. A dedicated [webpage](#) provides our annual reports and accounts, and information about key global policies including the Conservation and Human Rights Framework, INGO Accountability Framework, Code of Conduct, Corporate Engagement, Anti-corruption, Ethical, Gender and Partnership policies. In 2023 Wetlands International made no changes to these policies.

Anti-corruption and whistle blowing

All staff are introduced to the anti-corruption policy in their induction and are encouraged to be vigilant and discuss any suspicious activities with their line manager or Head of Office. External stakeholders can also approach Wetlands International with any grievances or complaints related to possible cases of fraud, discrimination or mismanagement. The complaints procedure is available on the Wetlands International website. At the end of 2023 we received a fraud complaint related to our Tanzania Office. The Global Management Team commissioned an independent investigation. The case proved to be minor in financial terms and the required measures were taken including staff dismissal and stricter checks on procurement and expense

payments. All donors were informed and the case has been closed. Corporate social responsibility We strive to reduce any negative impact on the environment in our daily operations and act in a sustainable and socially responsible way, by choosing the most carbon friendly travel options when possible and only travelling when necessary, preferably opting for online meetings. Since travel is the most important part of our footprint, we fully compensate for the CO2 emissions from all company flights and train journeys. In 2023, our CO2 footprint from travel was 359 tonnes, which corresponds to about 11 tonnes per full-time equivalent staff.

In 2023 we sought to develop the staff capacity we need to deliver our strategy and emerging project portfolio.

We employed 14 new staff members, while 10 staff members left moving within our network or to pursue other opportunities. We engaged more people from abroad and rearranged various HR processes. Our updated HR plan seeks to support for personal development and training, foster teamwork and ensure a pleasant working environment for all staff. As part of this, we supported the Employee Participation Group to set up a Works Council to enhance two-way communication between management and staff in key decision-making.

Personal safety and integrity are a priority for Wetlands International. We have policies and practices about the behaviour staff can expect from each other and we endeavour to create a safe space to share concerns or complaints as they occur. The Global Office received no official complaints from staff in 2023. We continue to give attention to awareness and training on behaviour, transparency and integrity.



22 MALES
25 FEMALES



18
NATIONALITIES



HIGHEST LEVEL
EDUCATION
Phd 8 / Master 27
Bachelor 10 / Other 2



HEALTH
Sick leave 3.2%
Absenteeism frequency 1,2

45,⁹

AVERAGE AGE



CONTRACT TYPE
Permanent 31 / Temporary 16

47

STAFF
Total number december
FTE 40 / PT 12 / FT 35

0

INTEGRITY
COMPLAINTS
Internal 0 / External 0

SUMMARY OF FINANCE AND RESOURCING

This is a summary of Wetlands International's finances and resourcing in 2023. Detailed versions of the Annual Accounts of the Global Office can be found in Annex 1 & 2 and the full Wetlands International Project List in Annex 3..

Income and expenditures across our network

The total network project income was €22.4 million in 2023. In 2023, network offices received and managed 34% of total income directly from our donors. This is higher than in 2022 (28%), mainly thanks to larger programmes now being led by country or regional offices directly. Projects managed through the Global Office are mostly implemented by our network offices or by affiliated scientific institutions, partners and experts.

The main source of income in 2023 was from foundations, trusts and other non-profits at 56% (compared to 50% last year). Income from government grants made up a relatively smaller proportion at 36% this year (compared to 43% last year). In addition, 7% (5% last year) came from corporate funding through our collaboration agreements. Membership contributions declined from 2% in 2022 towards 1%

of total income in 2023. These contributions remain an important support for strategic investments such as enabling our waterbird monitoring work.

A full list of our projects can be found in the Annex, section 4. This list provides an overview of projects implemented in 2023 by office and includes the stream, amount funded, donor and donor type.

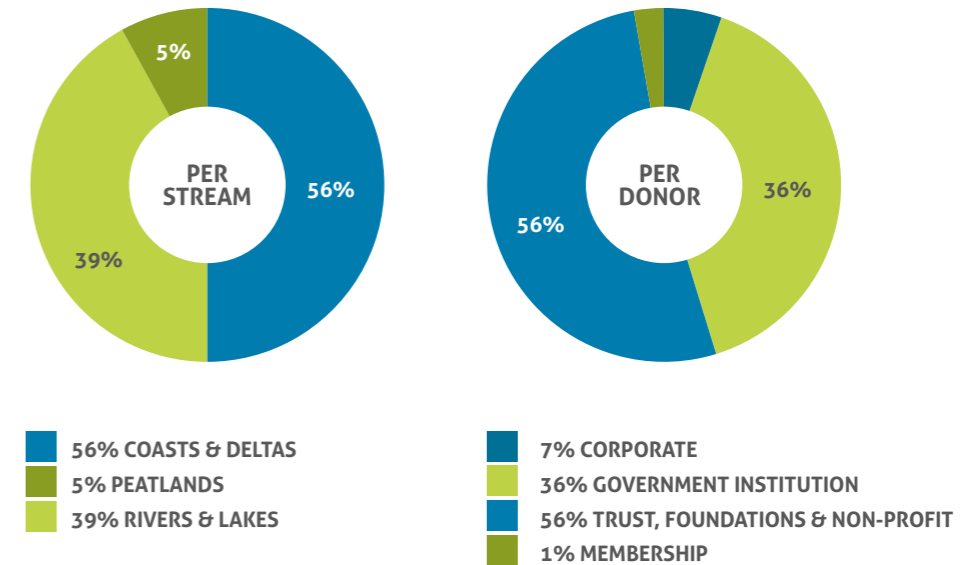
Across our three streams, Coasts and Deltas accounted for the largest portion of our income at 56% (last year 50%). Rivers and Lakes totalled 39% compared to 43% last year due to two large programmes coming to an end, and Peatlands contributed 5% (down from 8%, mainly due to one large programme ending).

Looking ahead

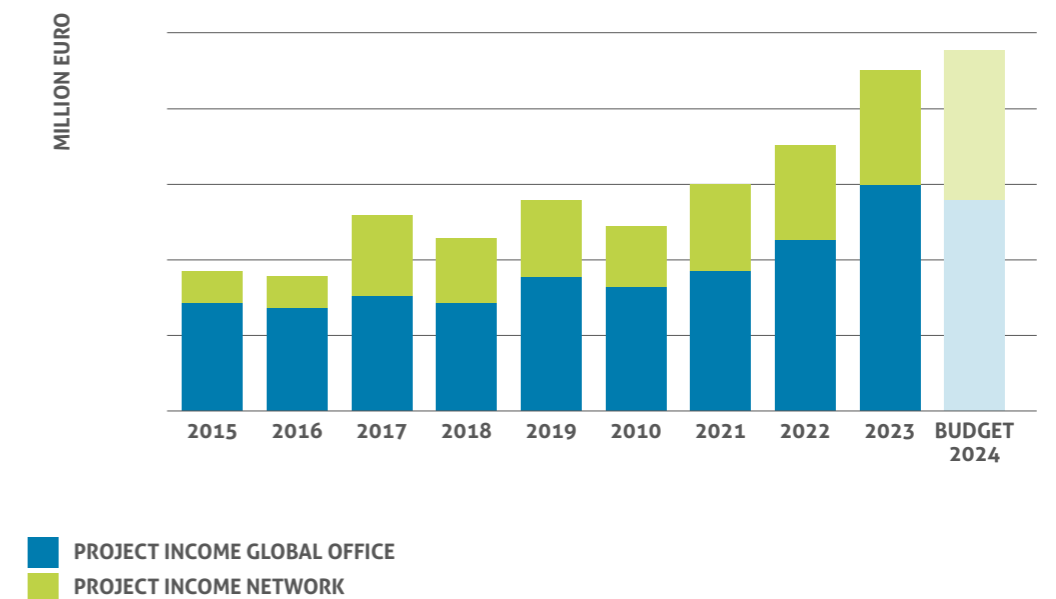
To realise our ambitions, we need to further invest in strengthening our organisation. We appeal to our donors to partner with us in this journey and unlock the full potential of the world's wetlands in tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

By strengthening our capacity to deliver our mission, these investments will have a huge multiplier effect. It will enable us to grow our influence and impact and leverage new financing and partnerships for wetland conservation and restoration, generating massive benefits for people, nature and the climate.

SOURCE OF INCOME GLOBAL NETWORK



TOTAL INCOME NETWORK AND GLOBAL OFFICE



WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

America

- 1 Latin America & Caribbean Panama
- 2 Brazil
- 3 Latin American & Caribbean Argentina

Europe

- 4 Global office
- 5 Europe

Africa

- 6 West Africa Coastal
- 7 Guinea-Bissau
- 8 Sahel
- 9 Ethiopia
- 10 Uganda
- 11 Eastern Africa
- 12 Tanzania

Asia

- 13 South Asia
- 14 Malaysia
- 15 Brunei
- 16 China
- 17 Philippines
- 18 Indonesia
- 19 Japan



Wetlands International collaborated with local partners in Lake Turkana, Kenya, to promote the regeneration and improved management of rangelands, sustainable livelihoods and ecosystem functioning. This led to a local leaders' dialogue, followed by a pilot restoration of 600 hectares of the Parar and Kapua rangelands with foxtail buffalo grass to preserve pastures for people and nature.

THANK YOU

Our targets for 2030 are hugely ambitious. We are seeking to safeguard and restore wetlands on a scale never seen before. And we can only do this by working in collaboration with others.

We are grateful to all our partners, existing and new, who have helped us mobilise action for wetlands and scale up our impact in 2023 – from national and local governments to knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector. Thanks too to all our members who provide vital financial support and collaborate closely in our programmes and policy advocacy.

We thank our strategic partners and donors who contributed so generously in 2023 to our work for the safeguarding and restoration of wetlands worldwide. We specifically thank donors who contributed flexibly to core resources and thematic funds, enabling us to enhance our global presence and foundational programming, and to deliver on our mandate for people and nature. In 2024 we look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen our organisation further, grow our influence, accelerate our profile, and leverage new financing and partnerships for wetlands worldwide.

We would especially like to thank our major donors in 2023:

- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), for funding “Wetlands 4 Resilience”, an ambitious 10-year global wetland initiative that seeks to influence policies, investments and business practices to regenerate wetland landscapes. Sida also funds our Source to Sea work that addresses the drivers of the loss of wetlands and their biodiversity in Eastern Africa.
 - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for supporting us on the path towards safeguarding Sahelian wetlands.
 - Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) for supporting wetlands conservation with integrated water resource management under the Ziway-Shalla Basin-in-Balance program.
 - DOB Ecology, for supporting major, long-term programmes to conserve and restore mangroves in Africa, and to conserve the river and wetland system of the Paraná-Paraguay and the High Andean wetlands in South America.
 - The International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, for enabling our work in the Sahel, West Africa and Indonesia.
 - Arcadia, for enabling our work to help conserve and restore intertidal wetlands along the Yellow Sea coast in China, a critically important part of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway for migratory waterbirds.
 - Rewilding Climate Solutions for supporting the development of carbon landscape propositions for peatland restoration and attracting further funding for upscaling.
- The COMON Foundation, for providing vital core funding to make our organisation more effective, as well as supporting our work to integrate wetlands and water issues into the 4 Returns methodology for landscape restoration in partnership with Commonland and Landscape Finance Lab.
 - The Dutch Postcode Lottery, for an invaluable three-year grant (2021-2023) enabling us to step up our work on wetland landscape recovery.

- Greenchoice, for supporting Wetlands International in restoring mangroves in Guinea-Bissau and supporting peatland restoration projects in Mongolia (25,000 hectares) and Peru (2,600 hectares).
- All the donors who fund the Global Mangrove Alliance, and in particular the Oak Foundation, DOB Ecology, COMON Foundation and the Dutch Postcode Lottery for their support for the Global Mangrove Watch platform.
- The Bezos Earth Fund for its catalytic support for the Mangrove Breakthrough, which will help establish coalition-building of technical, political and financial partners, the design of regional investment strategies and curation of a pipeline of locally-led mangrove restoration and conservation projects.
- Delegations of the European Union in Panama and Senegal for supporting our work in strengthening coastal marine governance in Panama and mangrove management in West Africa.
- The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its long-term support to the Water Peace & Security programme, at the cutting edge of the crucial poverty/climate interface and challenge.
- Donors who fund our work through the effective giving platform Effektiv-Spenden.

Thank you to all donors, partners, local actors on the ground, communities and traditional and Indigenous people we work with.



Laguna Colorada in process of restoration. Tuksa, Salinas Grandes, Argentina

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Oyster farming in Saloum delta, Senegal

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