



## **Wetlands International welcomes the 2030 Action Targets and calls for a focus on wetlands**

Wetlands International welcomes the ambitious yet highly relevant 2030 action targets calling for conservation and effective management of at least 30 percent of global land- and sea areas, especially of particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people (target 3); and that at least 20 percent of degraded freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems are under restoration, ensuring connectivity among them and focusing on priority ecosystems (target 2).

We draw attention to the role wetlands conservation and restoration can play in assisting global community to achieve these targets.

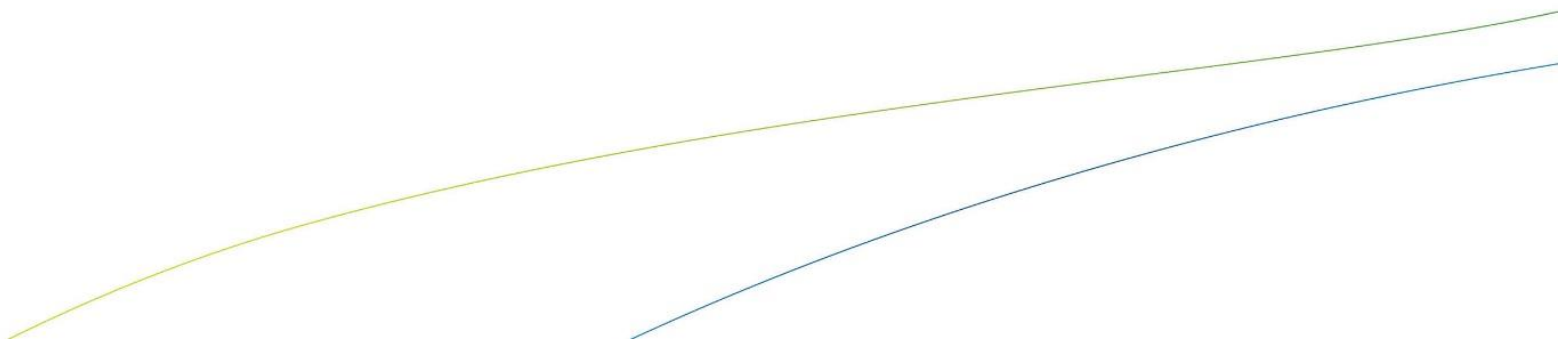
Currently covering 12 million km<sup>2</sup>, wetlands harbour a disproportionately high species diversity, while also providing a range of ecosystem services critical for human survival. Unfortunately, up to 87% of the global wetland resource has been lost since 1700. We lose wetlands three times faster than natural forests. Wetland-dependent species are in serious decline. Since 1970, declines have affected 81% of inland wetland species populations and 36% of coastal and marine species. The unprecedented loss of wetlands limits the possibility of achieving the goal of halting and reversing biodiversity loss, and the overall ambition set in the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Stepping action on wetlands conservation, management and restoration is a no-regrets pathway for achieving the ambitions set in the draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. The science is clear and the social and economic cases for recovering wetlands are powerful. Wetlands offer effective nature-based solutions to global problems. But environmental protection of wetland sites is not sufficient since the fluidity of water means that effective action requires coordination across landscapes and national boundaries. Even so, by stepping up action to safeguard and restore wetlands we can save nature, better capture and store water, improve food security through sustaining agriculture and fisheries, keep carbon out of the atmosphere, and safeguard cities and settlements from the worst impacts of floods and droughts.

Annexed to this statement are specific wetlands targets that can assist countries in halting and reversing wetlands loss and degradation. These have been drawn up using the best available evidence and inputs from a number of stakeholders.

We invite the CBD national focal points, and stakeholders to consider wetlands targets while preparing the next draft of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Jane Madgwick  
Chief Executive Officer





## Annex: Wetlands International proposed global targets for wetlands recovery by 2030

Until now, the complexity and range of benefits from wetlands, and the difficulties of analysing and evaluating their status has precluded the adoption of agreed targets of the kind agreed for forests and some other major ecosystems. But that is changing. On World Wetlands Day 2020, the International Organisation Partners of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, who include Wetlands International, proposed an emergency recovery plan under which we and our partners called for action to reverse the rapid worldwide decline in freshwater biodiversity overall.

In terms of global conservation and restoration targets – which we invite others to adopt and drive towards – Wetlands International proposes global, habitat-based targets, based on the best available science, that reflect the scale of change needed to improve ecological and social resilience. A fuller explanation of the basis of these targets and the key references are available on our website. This will be kept updated as we work with others to improve and expand the set of targets.

By addressing these targets, actors will be contributing to achieve the Global Goals, 2030. National and regional responses to such wetland targets can be stimulated and guided by real-time information using integrated data sets, trend analyses and standard accounting for wetland habitats, such as provided by Global Mangrove Watch ([www.globalmangrovetwatch.com](http://www.globalmangrovetwatch.com)).

We invite partners, wetland scientists and policy makers to work with us to improve, refine and expand this set of targets and to enable their uptake and monitoring. And further, to scope and develop the wetland knowledge platforms which can help enable effective implementation.

**Peatlands:** The remaining undrained peatland carbon stores remain intact and 10 million hectares of drained peatland are restored, by 2030.

Locking up carbon in peatlands, as well as the maintenance and recovery of other values of drained and degraded peatlands, including their roles in water storage and biodiversity conservation, depends on keeping them wet or fully restoring them through re-wetting. The on-going high greenhouse gas emissions due to drainage means that for peatlands to become carbon neutral in accordance with the Paris Agreement, the remaining peatlands must be conserved and around 50 million hectares need to be rewetted to prevent carbon emissions, by 2050. This is the total current area of drained peatlands, taking into account that around 15 million ha of former peatlands is not restorable as the peat has already been completely oxidised (Global Peatland Database, Greifswald Mire Centre and Joosten, 2021).

Materialising large scale conservation and restoration efforts to achieve this outcome depends on peatland assessments, technical and institutional capacities, as well as finance, policies and social acceptance. Therefore, a target of 10 million hectares is proposed as a feasible while still challenging target for 2030.

**Mangroves:** A net gain of 20% in global mangrove cover, by 2030.

Mangroves are highly valued for their rich biodiversity, the nursery role they provide in fisheries, their potential to store vast amounts of carbon (so-called blue carbon) making them critical for climate regulation and mitigation, as well as for protecting coasts from erosion and enabling communities to adapt to climate change. Of an estimated original 33 million ha of mangroves, half was lost, with an additional 15-20% severely degraded, by 2015. At this rate of loss mangroves will disappear over the next 100 years.

The target aims to address feasibility as well as the need for large scale recovery to restore ecosystem functionality. It takes into account likely positive changes in coastal zone policies and practices as well as the permanent loss of former mangrove land to aquaculture, farming and urban development and limitations imposed by climate change.

**Rivers and floodplains:** Remaining, free-flowing rivers and floodplains remain intact and river connectivity is enhanced, restoring floodplain ecosystem functionality and area.

Riverine floodplains are very complex, dynamic and diverse ecosystems. As producers of food and regulators of water and carbon, their health is of huge importance to freshwater biodiversity, global climate and development agendas. Dams, levees and other factors such as rapid spreading of alien invasive species often severely disrupt flow and sediment pulses. These affect river – floodplain interactions and can cause a cascade of effects which have real consequences for biodiversity, human livelihoods and societal resilience to water shocks.

It was recently estimated (Grill et al,2019) that only 37 percent of rivers longer than 1,000 kilometres remain free-flowing over their entire length and 23 per cent flow uninterrupted to the ocean. There are many advances in understanding how climate, human interventions and floodplain dynamics influence the natural functions of the riparian system, biodiversity and ecosystem services. However, the development of a simple global target to drive conservation and restoration remains a challenge at the time of writing.

**Tidal Flats:** A net gain of 10% in area of tidal flats, by 2030.

Protection and restoration of tidal mudflats is vital and urgent to conserve globally threatened biodiversity in light of sea level rise associated with current and future climate scenarios, as well as coastal and inland human development and associated changes in river discharge and sediment flows. It is estimated that 16% of tidal flats have been lost over the last 3 decades (Murray et al, 2019). The target to restore 50% of the recent loss over the past three decades (1990 benchmark), means approximately a net gain of 10%. This modest target recognises the low feasibility of mudflat restoration, given the increasing human development demands in coastal zones. The target is meant to imply not only an area gain but also return to a state of good ecological functionality, to support

the full range of ecosystem services. Within this, priority should be given to protecting and restoring critical sites for migratory shorebirds.

**Wetlands for migratory waterbirds:** 50% of the estimated 7000 critically important sites identified along flyways come under favourable management, by 2030.

The conservation and recovery of the world's 2,500 migratory and resident waterbird populations along all major flyways requires favourable management and restoration of a connected network of an estimated 7,000 critically important wetland sites worldwide. This depends on no net loss of already identified critical sites and net gain through identification and improved management of other critical sites. The proposed target uses numbers of critical sites as a proxy for the adequacy of site networks needed by waterbirds at the population level.

“Favourable management” is the terminology adopted by the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership and while further work is needed to agree how to measure this, we consider it to be a concept and approach to targets that could be adopted globally. The proposed 50% level of ‘favourable management’ is a balance between ambition and reality. It takes into account current and future climate scenarios that are expected to affect spatial distribution and availability of suitable habitats, with losses in many regions (Breiner et al in development, Nagy et al, in development). The intention is to improve the target and monitoring by introducing measures of network functionality and connectivity in future.

*Greifswald Mire Centre. (2021). Global Peatland Database.  
Retrieved from Greifswald Mire Centre:  
<https://greifswaldmoor.de/global-peatland-database-en.html>*

*Grill, G., Lehner, B., Thieme, M. et al. (2019). Mapping the world's free-flowing rivers. Nature 569, 215-221.  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1111-9>*

*Murray, N.J., Phinn, S.R., DeWitt, M. et al. (2019). The global distribution and trajectory of tidal flats. Nature 565, 222-225.  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0805-8>*