

# World Wetlands Day Commemoration

## What is World Wetlands Day?

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of February each year is World Wetlands Day. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar. The Ramsar Convention is an inter-governmental treaty to promote national action and international operation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Zimbabwe is signatory to the Ramsar Convention. This year's national commemoration will be held in the Mutasa District of Manicaland at Domborutinira Wetland on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January under the theme "*Wetlands and Agriculture-Partners for Community Empowerment and Growth.*" The theme is in line with the United Nations Year of Family Farming. It provides an ideal opportunity to highlight the importance of wetlands in supporting agriculture.

## What are Wetlands?

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil, or is present either at or near the surface of the soil all year or for varying periods of time during the year, including during the growing season. They occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by water.

The Environmental Management Act (Cap 20; 27) goes further to define wetlands as:

*"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 riparian land adjacent to the wetland"*.

## Local Names of Wetlands

In Zimbabwe wetlands are also known as

Matoro(Shona)

Mapani(Shona)

Amaxhaphozi (Ndebele)

Zimbabwe is a Signatory to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of 1971 and has domesticated provisions for the protection of wetlands under the Environmental Management Act (Cap 20;27), Statutory Instrument 7 of 2007 on Environmental Management (Environmental Impact Assessment and Ecosystems Protection) Regulations and Government Gazette 380 of 2013. The Ramsar Convention embodies

commitments by member countries to maintain the ecological character of wetlands and to plan for the “wise use” or sustainable use of all of the wetlands in their territories.

### **Designated Ramsar Sites in Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe seven sites have been designated as Ramsar protected wetlands and these are:

Victoria Falls

Driefontein

Grasslands,

Middle Zambezi/Mana Pools,

Lake Chivero,

Monavale Vlei,

Chinhoyi Caves and

Cleverland Dam.

The Government Gazette 380 of 2013 declares 26 wetlands in Harare as protected areas.

### **Ecological goods and services of wetlands**

- Provide important habitat for a wide variety of wildlife;
- Ensure food security if sustainably utilized;
- Trap moderate amounts of soil running off nearby uplands before they enter lakes and streams;
- Maintain and improve water quality by filtering contaminants and excessive nutrients;
- Renew groundwater supplies;
- Help and control flooding and reduce flood damage;
- Fire control;
- Provide a source of economically valuable products such as wild rice and commercial fish;

- Support recreational activities including fish, hunting, nature appreciation, bird watching and so much more and
- Provide opportunities to participate in outdoor educational activities and to enjoy the aesthetic qualities of wetlands.

### **Drivers of wetland degradation**

Agricultural activities is one of the activities that lead to wetlands loss and degradation. This gives rise to the need to sustainably utilise water provided by these wetlands without tampering with their natural existence. Other activities include commercial and residential development; road construction; impoundment; resource extraction; industrial siting, processes, and waste; dredge disposal; care and cultivation of forest trees (silviculture); and mosquito control through drainage, channelization and use of toxic pesticides. In Zimbabwe, commercial and housing construction projects are the greatest threat to wetlands.

### **What does the law say?**

- The Environmental Management Act (CAP 20:27) and Statutory Instrument 7 of 2007 Environmental Management (EIA and Ecosystems Protection Regulations) govern wetland utilisation in Zimbabwe. Section 113 of the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27) section 113 gives the Minister of Environment powers to
  - declare any wetland to be an ecologically sensitive area and may impose limitations on development in or around such an area.
  - prohibit the reclamation or drainage, disturbance by drilling or tunnelling in a manner that has or is likely to have an adverse impact on any wetland or adversely affect any animal or plant life therein.
  - prohibit the introduction of exotic animal and plant species into a wetland.

Failure to abide by the law is a crime that attracts a fine not exceeding level eight (\$500, 00) or to imprisonment not exceeding two years or to both such fine and such imprisonment.

The Environment Minister can serve a written order to refrain any development on any wetland.

### **How can we conserve wetlands?**

### **DO's**

- Plant native species – they maintain the natural balance of the wetland;
- Protecting wetlands vegetation, including plants in the adjacent area is important to the overall function of the wetland. The plants in and around a wetland trap and filter out sediments and chemical pollutants and aid in groundwater recharge by retaining runoff waters;
- Direct storm water into wetlands especially in urban areas because they supply much of the water necessary to maintain wetlands;
- maintain a green belt around the wetland- a greenbelt is the natural vegetation found in that area;
- Fence the wetland for protection against animals that may destroy vegetation;

### **DON'Ts**

- Cut trees ,shrubs and other vegetation –this will disturb the natural balance of the wetland
- Avoid clearing, grazing or haying because this affects the soil structure, types of plants grown in the area, health of the vegetation and the filtering capacity.
- Introduction of non-native (exotic) plants damages or ruins ecosystems around the world. Exotic plants choke out native vegetation and alter the way wetlands function e.g. gum trees drain a lot of water;
- Fertilizers and pesticides represent a potential threat to the wetland. If they are used on adjacent or farmland they will eventually enter local waterways and the wetland and alter the ecological balance.
- Avoid dumping waste on wetlands, this causes land and water pollution.

You are cordially invited to the national World Wetlands Day Commemoration that will be held at Domborutinira Wetland in Mutasa District, Manicaland on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2014. You can also contact any EMA office for information on the commemoration of the event in your districts and provincial offices.

*Please talk to us we are always ready to listen. Email: [eeep@ema.co.zw](mailto:eeep@ema.co.zw) or 04 305543 / Toll free 08080028, sms/whatsapp 0779 777 094, Like our Facebook Page- Environmental Management Agency or follow us on Twitter @EMAeep.*