

Briefing paper

Global Wetland Outlook 2025

The Global Wetland Outlook 2025 (GWO 2025) is the most recent and comprehensive assessment to date of the state, value and trajectory of wetlands worldwide. Produced under the leadership of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Convention on Wetlands, the report draws on contributions from over 60 experts from more than 16 countries. These contributors include representatives from national government agencies, international environmental NGOs, research institutes, UN bodies, and academic institutions.

The report summarises the latest empirical data on wetland extent, loss and degradation trends, the economic value of ecosystem services and the investment scale required to meet international restoration and conservation targets.

Against the backdrop of major global policy frameworks, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the report presents vital evidence to inform national and international priorities. It supports the design of investment strategies, the integration of wetlands into climate and biodiversity commitments, and the development of monitoring systems to track progress.



GWO 2025 serves as a diagnostic and strategic planning tool for policymakers, planners and technical experts. It quantifies the ecological and economic costs of inaction, highlights the growing financing gap and identifies ways to increase the scale of effective wetland conservation and restoration.

Methodological approach

The GWO 2025 uses a multi-source methodology:

- **Extent and trends:** This analysis utilises Earth observation (e.g., Global Mangrove Watch and the WET Index), national reports, and peer-reviewed scientific literature to estimate trends in wetland area and degradation since 1970.
- **Valuation:** It derives economic value estimates from over 1,500 entries in the Ecosystem Services Valuation Database (ESVD). These values are scaled using benefit-transfer techniques and adjusted by socio-economic factors (e.g., the Human Development Index).
- **Coverage:** The assessment encompasses 11 major wetland types, including both freshwater systems (e.g., peatlands, rivers, and lakes) and coastal and marine systems (e.g., mangroves, coral reefs, and tidal flats).
- **Cost data:** Draws on cost data from 49 published studies covering restoration and conservation scenarios in a variety of geographical locations and contexts.

Extent, trends, and risks

Depending on classification and monitoring methods, **wetlands currently cover between 1,425 and 1,800 million hectares globally**. These include inland freshwater systems, coastal wetlands and marine-associated types, such as peatlands, mangroves, lakes and coral reefs. However, these ecosystems are experiencing widespread and persistent loss and degradation.

Since 1970, an estimated **411 million hectares of wetlands have been lost worldwide**, representing a **22% decline in global extent** and an average **annual loss rate of 0.52% per year**. These losses are unevenly distributed, with the highest rates occurring in low-income regions where wetlands are more ecologically critical and closely linked to local livelihoods, food systems, and water supplies. The wetland types that have experienced the most significant historical declines include inland

marshes, peatlands, and lakes.

Degradation is now as pressing a concern as outright loss. Currently, **approximately 25% of the remaining wetlands are classified as being in a poor ecological state**, and this proportion is increasing. National reports submitted under the Convention on Wetlands and global citizen science data (e.g., the 2024 World Wetlands Survey) confirm that the ecological condition of wetlands is deteriorating in most regions, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and is also increasingly worsening in Europe and North America. Cumulative pressures, including land-use change, pollution, agricultural expansion, hydrological disruption, invasive species, and the impacts of climate change -such as rising sea levels and drought - drive these declines. These drivers are frequently interlinked, leading to nonlinear and difficult-to-reverse degradation processes.

Economic and strategic implications

Despite the ongoing loss, wetlands remain among the most economically valuable ecosystems in terms of area. According to the Global Wetland Outlook 2025, the remaining 1.425 billion hectares of wetlands generate an **annual ecosystem service value of between \$7.98 trillion and \$39.01 trillion**. These services include flood regulation, water purification, carbon storage, supporting fisheries and agriculture, and providing cultural benefits.

The net present value (NPV) of maintaining and managing existing wetlands wisely until 2050 is **estimated to exceed \$205 trillion (median)**. This highlights the long-term value of proactive conservation, particularly when compared to the cost of reversing degradation. At the same time, the cumulative loss of wetland ecosystem services **between 1975 and 2025 is conservatively estimated at \$5.1 trillion**, with inland wetlands contributing most to this loss.

Scale and cost of action

To achieve Targets 2 and 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), which aim to restore 30% of degraded ecosystems and conserve 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and marine areas, large-scale action is required in wetland landscapes.

- **Restoration:** At least **123 million hectares must be restored** to address wetland loss since 1970. If degraded but extant wetlands

are included, this figure could exceed 350 million hectares.

- **Conservation:** **428 million hectares of remaining wetlands must be effectively conserved** via protected areas or other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

Restoration costs are significantly higher than conservation costs. Based on data from

49 studies across 185 sites, the **annual cost of restoration ranges from \$1,000 per hectare (ha) to over \$70,000 per ha, depending on wetland type and condition.** Conservation costs, by contrast, are a fraction of these figures. This underlines the economic efficiency of prioritising the protection of intact wetlands before they are lost or degraded.

The estimated global financing required **to achieve wetland conservation and restoration targets is \$275-550 billion per year** — a figure that significantly exceeds current investment levels. Currently, biodiversity conservation across all ecosystems **accounts for only 0.25% of global GDP**, indicating substantial underinvestment in wetlands despite their strategic importance to biodiversity, climate, water and disaster resilience agendas

Action pathways

The GWO 2025 sets out four strategic pathways to addressing the wetland crisis and achieving global goals:

1. **Improve natural capital valuation and integration in decision-making.**

Economic systems often undervalue public goods, such as the services provided by wetland ecosystems. Adopting natural capital accounting methods, such as the SEEA, and utilising tools like TESSA or Earth observation platforms can enhance cross-sectoral decision-making.

2. **Recognise wetlands as an integral component of the global water cycle for all people.**

Wetlands are not isolated features; they play a critical role in global hydrological flows and should be recognised as shared infrastructure to ensure water security climate resilience, and reduce disaster risk.

3. **Embedding and prioritising wetlands in innovative financial solutions for nature and people.**

Wetlands must be incorporated into biodiversity and climate finance instruments. The report highlights proven tools such as blue bonds, biodiversity credits and payment for ecosystem services (PES). Public-private partnerships and debt-for-nature swaps can unlock large-scale funding.

4. **Unlocking a private and public financial mix for investment in wetlands as nature-based solutions.**

Conservation is more cost-effective than restoration. Public finance should incentivise wetland-friendly private investment and remove subsidies for harmful land use. Regulatory environments, guarantees and nature-based solutions (NbS) frameworks are critical for scaling up.

The GWO 2025 report concludes that the current rate of wetland loss and level of underinvestment are economically and ecologically unsustainable. Data confirms that wetlands are among the most valuable and threatened ecosystems globally. However, their full contribution is not reflected in policy, planning or finance.

This report provides the basis for:

- Prioritising wetland conservation over costly restoration.
- Setting national restoration and conservation targets aligned with the KM-GBF.
- Developing costed investment plans and embedding wetlands in climate and biodiversity finance portfolios;
- Strengthening reporting systems and leveraging Earth observation for real-time monitoring.
- Scaling up integrated planning across the water, agriculture, energy and infrastructure sectors.