



## World Wetland Day 2020

Guyana is known as the 'Land of Many Waters.' In a bird's eye view you will be able to see a vast network of rivers and creeks spread throughout the country. Even so, it is not only the aesthetics of our waterways that we can boast of, but rather, the intricate link to the unique ecosystem and the diversity of life they support. To that extent, wetlands are of significant importance to the world.

Wetlands can be defined as a distinct ecosystem that is flooded by water, either permanently or seasonally, where oxygen-free processes prevail. This year theme selected is '**Wetlands and Biodiversity**' as we join the world in observing World Wetlands Day on February 02, 2020, let us raise awareness about the vital role of **wetlands** for us and our planet.

Wetlands have been called "biological super systems" because they produce great volumes of food that support a remarkable level of biodiversity. In terms of number and variety of species supported, they are as rich as rainforests and coral reefs. Their combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients, and high primary productivity is ideal for the development of organisms that form the essential base of our planet's food web.

### What are Wetlands?

Wetlands are areas of land where water covers the soil all year or just at certain times of the year. They include:

- Billabongs, lakes, lagoons
- Saltmarshes, mudflats
- Mangroves, coral reefs
- Bogs, fens, and peatlands.
- Swamps, marshes

### Values/ Importance of Wetlands

- Cleaner Waters
- High Biodiversity
- Less Food Damage
- Cooler Planet

- More Recreation
- Healthy Economy

### **Wetlands and indigenous peoples in Guyana**

Indigenous communities are very much dependent on the natural environment to meet their local needs. The rainforest, river, creeks and associated with wetlands have been key to the lives of indigenous people throughout the centuries. Our Indigenous brothers and sisters have strong cultural and traditional ties to the lands they occupy. More so, it has long been recognized that they have played a vital role in protecting and managing these ecosystems, way before the implementation of conventional conservation measures such as National Protected Areas Systems.

Here in Guyana, the mega wetland area associated with the Rupununi, Essequibo and Rewa Rivers along with many lakes and ponds is known as the North Rupununi Wetlands. It's amazing how during the rainy season, the usually open dry savannas, soundly becomes a part of a massive flood plain. Wetlands form an important part of the livelihood of these communities; it provides, clean water, food, materials to make craft, housing material and traditional medicine. Even more striking is the fact that these communities have adapted well to these wetlands.

Hence, the Ramsar Convention encourages the integration of traditional knowledge in the wise use and management of wetlands. To that extent, it has been observed that Indigenous communities, by means of traditional fishing, hunting and harvesting practices, have naturally engaged in the respectful use and protection of these wetlands. Many of these traditional practices are passed from generation to generation. Other traditional knowledge may see the transfer of information through dance or stories. Today, the challenge is to address the changing dynamics within many Indigenous communities, where other things are competing for the attention of the youths. Consequently, many of these traditional knowledge are being lost.

## **To Reduce Pollution-**

- Improve drainage on your property to reduce rainwater runoff into your waterway or wetland (low impact development, rain gardens, etc.)
- Landscape your yard to minimize rainwater runoff
- Maintain your septic system carefully
- Use indigenous plants in your landscape plan to reduce watering and fertilizing needs
- Use natural methods of insect and disease control to minimize the use of pesticides
- Dispose of paint, oil, solvents and other toxic wastes properly
- Don't use exotic plants in fish or Lily ponds near waterways- they'll wash in and pollute

## **References:**

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetland>
2. <https://cobracollective.org/news/progress-towards-greater-recognition-and-integration-of-traditional-knowledge-in-guyana/>
3. <http://wetlandswatch.org/caring-for-wetlands-1>