



Mondi Wetlands Programme

The business case

An estimated 55% of South Africa's wetlands to date have been significantly damaged due to poorly managed agriculture and commercial forestry, mining, urban development, pollution, dam-building, erosion and fire. Moreover, 6 million South Africans do not have access to drinking water and therefore rely on streams, rivers, marshes and other types of wetlands to supply them with enough clean water to satisfy their needs. Because Mondi's commercial activities (commercial forestry and processing plants) use significant volumes of water, they rely on healthy wetlands and riparian zones. Mondi has therefore taken a leading role in promoting the awareness, better management and protection of the remaining wetlands and more importantly, the rehabilitation of damaged wetlands, in order to secure its license to operate and for the benefit of South Africa and its communities.

Introduction: The Mondi Wetlands Programme - an internationally recognized ecosystem project

Mondi is the principle sponsor of the Mondi Wetlands Programme (MWP). This is a partnership between Mondi and South Africa's two largest NGO conservation organizations (WWF South Africa and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa) together with the Mazda Wildlife Fund. It is WWF South Africa's premier freshwater project, forming part of their Global Freshwater Programme. The project has achieved international recognition for the success in bringing about social change that encourages wetland users and owners to manage their wetland resources in a more environmentally relevant manner.

A wetland is a family name given to many different types of waterlogged land including springs and seeps, marshes, floodplains, swamp forests, mangrove swamps and estuaries, all connected by rivers and riparian areas.

Wetlands and water play a key role in human life. Even with our advancing technological skills, we still depend on our natural ecosystems to sustain us. Wetlands play a pivotal role in the management of our water flows, including the purification and storage of our water. They control erosion and are also vital for biodiversity protection, tourism, environmental education, grazing, subsistence agriculture, and as a source of food and plant materials for rural communities. Their health is therefore critical for sustainable development.

The services or functions that Wetlands provide include: a reduction in the severity of droughts and floods by regulating stream flow; purification of water in freshwater systems; and the provision of habitats for many different plants and animals. Some of the goods or values that wetlands provide include fodder, human food, fish, fiber and wildlife.

What are wetlands worth?

Nature – one of the most respected scientific journals in the world – reported that worldwide, wetlands are worth some US\$ 4.9 trillion (over R30 trillion) a year.

We are finally appreciating the invaluable products and services that wetlands provide us with, and people are willing to spend large amounts of money rehabilitating degraded wetlands. One-third of the world’s population already lives under water stress. The amount of freshwater is fixed, yet the human population will increase by 70 million people a year. Americans have valued wetlands, and published their findings in *Nature* (Nature 387, 253 – 260):



Gully erosion in the process of drying out and destroying a portion of the wetland at Gilboa before the MWP collaborated with the government’s Working for Wetlands program to rehabilitate the site in 2003

Type of wetland	Value US\$ per hectare per year
Estuaries	22,382
Seagrass/algae beds	19,004
Coral reefs	6,075
Tidal marshes/mangroves	9,990
Swamps/floodplains	19,580
Lakes/rivers	8,498

Mondi and wetlands

Mondi is an international paper and packaging group and in 2007 had revenues of nearly US\$ 10 billion (€6.3 billion). Its key operations and interests are in western Europe, emerging Europe, Russia and South Africa. The Group is principally involved in the manufacture of packaging paper and converted packaging products; uncoated fine paper; and specialty products and processes, including coating, release liner and consumer flexibles. Mondi has production operations across 35 countries and had an average of 35,000 employees in 2007.

Water is South Africa’s scarcest natural resource, and an estimated 55% of South Africa’s wetlands to date have been significantly damaged through overgrazing, poorly managed agriculture, mining and commercial forestry, urban development, pollution, dam building, erosion and fire. If the current supply and demand rates continue, South Africa’s water resources will be fully utilized by 2025.

Mondi, as a significant user of water, has responded to the challenge of wetland protection and rehabilitation in South Africa. As the main sponsor of the MWP, Mondi actively supports the MWP through the implementation of sound wetland practices and as a leading example to all land users.

Wetlands as a tool in poverty alleviation

It is estimated that some 60% of the children in rural South Africa are malnourished. Wetlands are one of the food security “safety nets” potentially available to impoverished people.

More than anyone else, poor rural people depend on the life-support functions provided by wetlands. Wetlands provide livelihood resources in the form of drinking water, land for



subsistence cultivation and grazing, plant material for construction and craft production, and most importantly the maintenance of cultural and spiritual beliefs. From a food security point of view, wetland cultivation, if done sustainably, is particularly important especially during droughts. In addition, urban and rural wetlands are economic resources that can attract tourism and leisure activities offering further opportunities for local communities.

The Mondi Wetlands Programme

The MWP aims to bring about social change that encourages wetland users and owners to manage their wetland resources in a more environmentally relevant manner. It primarily does so by using a number of strategies to promote the rehabilitation and wise use of wetlands among key government agencies, and private and communal wetland users:

- Raising awareness
- Policy work and lobbying
- Catalyzing partnerships
- Research-based management tools and resources
- Training and on-the-ground support.

Since its launch in 1991, the MWP has been recognized as the most successful non-governmental wetland conservation program in South Africa, and is considered by its partner organizations to be a pioneering force for wetland conservation outside reserves in South Africa. Over the past 17 years, the MWP has moved wetland conservation from being a side issue to center stage. This has irreversibly changed the way government and communities, as well as the commercial forestry and sugar industries, manage their wetlands.

The MWP develops relationships with communities, government and other organizations in order to have a permanent impact on the conservation of South African wetlands. The MWP is involved in the wise-use and rehabilitation of wetlands with the clear focus of building wetland management competence and accountability among the many stakeholders to tackle this issue effectively.

The MWP's small team works at a national level by forging partnerships with key players throughout the country. It acts as a catalyst: enthusing, initiating, training, guiding, advising and helping other organizations to develop their wetland projects further. More specifically, the team works with Mondi to assist in the development and monitoring of compliance with its relevant wetland and environmental policies. The MWP also works in partnership with existing structures at both grassroots and political decision-making levels, including commercial farmers, government, agricultural and conservation extension services, historically disadvantaged rural communities, and key decision-makers on a national basis. In this way, the MWP's work can continue sustainably into the future.



Gilboa, two years after rehabilitating the wetland. Wetland boundaries have been delineated and all commercial trees in the buffer zone have been removed.

After 7 years of successful partnership, Mondi and WWF have extended the MWP for another five years until 2013. "The collaboration between Mondi and the Mondi Wetlands Programme has been a long standing and successful partnership," says Ron Traill, CEO of Mondi's South Africa Division. "Serving as a catalyst for change, the program encourages and inspires others to become involved in wetland conservation forging



further partnerships with government and other organizations to spread the wetland workload.”

Mondi and the Mondi Wetland Programme have been the main catalysts and sponsors of the procedure to delineate wetlands in South Africa. This procedure is vital, as many South African wetlands are seasonally wet, and it is often hard to determine where the wetland boundary is during the dry season and therefore where the adjacent buffer zone should be. The delineation procedure has been accepted as government policy and now forms a regulation for all land uses, including commercial forestry.

The MWP also developed a wetland policy with Mondi that, among other issues, committed the company to the withdrawal of all commercial plantations from wetland areas and adjacent buffer zones. Using Mondi’s example and status in the forest industry, the MWP worked with the forest industry to commit to the withdrawal of commercial trees from riparian areas to protect the wetlands and the associated water resources. This has resulted in the industry taking environmentally responsible action and removing thousands of hectares of incorrectly planted trees from wetlands and the buffer zones surrounding them, costing the industry approximately US\$ 100 million a year. The loss of production has been compensated by the provision of more water for downstream communities and the establishment of important biodiversity corridors, because it is the environmentally responsible thing to do.

The MWP played a key role with government in founding and supporting the innovative Working for Wetlands Programme in 2000, which rehabilitates degraded wetlands and facilitates their better management. This government-led and -funded (US\$ 10 million a year) initiative rehabilitates 40 wetlands a year, employs 2,000 of the poorest people in the country and provides its workers with life and job skills, increased self esteem, and an opportunity to escape the poverty whirlpool.

The MWP has also lobbied government and made sure that wetlands are an integral part of government policy to manage water resources. It has also focused on the sugar industry and worked with innovative farmers to develop new environmental and social norms for sustainable sugar cane production.

“The sustainability of South Africa’s water supply is not only imperative for environmental conservation, but also to South Africa’s economy,” says Dr. Morné Du Plessis, CEO of WWF South Africa. “South African businesses require natural resources, but with the present rate of water production and consumption, South Africa will not have sufficient freshwater supply to meet the rising demand by 2025.”

Results

The MWP clearly illustrates the power of partnerships with substantial benefits for business, the environment and the wider society including impoverished rural people.

The MWP has played a significant role in helping to establish Mondi’s environmental name and credibility in the industry, with media, local and international non-governmental organizations, networks, local communities and the government. This has allowed for the promotion of Mondi’s good environmental practices and served as a catalyst for further improvement. The forestry industry is leading other industries in the protection, management and wise use of wetlands and making a substantial contribution to water and biodiversity resources in South Africa.



About the WBCSD

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Our **mission** is to provide business leadership as a catalyst for change toward sustainable development, and to support the business license to operate, innovate and grow in a world increasingly shaped by sustainable development issues.

4, chemin de Conches
CH – 1231 Conches-Geneva
Switzerland

Tel: +41 (22) 839 31 00
Fax: +41 (22) 839 31 31

E-mail: carpenter@wbcسد.org
Web: www.wbcسد.org