Civil society organisations and scientists to signatories to the Paris Agreement

A Call for Global Leaders to Act: Pledge to Protect Wetlands at COP30

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We, the undersigned civil society organizations and scientists, respectfully urge you to place wetlands at the forefront of the global climate agenda at COP30 and take urgent steps to conserve and protect these ecosystems, vital to all life on Earth.

Wetlands play an indispensable role in regulating our climate[1]. They have a very high capacity for carbon storage, storing the largest amount of carbon per unit area of any terrestrial ecosystem[2]. Peatlands alone store an estimated 450–650 billion tonnes of carbon, equivalent to 31–45 times global greenhouse gas emissions in 2023[3]. Despite covering just 3–4% of the Earth's land surface[4], peatlands contain as much carbon as the world's forests[5] and store up to one-third of the world's soil carbon[6].

However, these essential wetland ecosystems are among the most threatened on the planet, disappearing at a rate three times faster than forests[7]. Inland wetlands, in particular, have suffered extensive and rapid loss, driving declines of 81% of inland wetland species populations since 1970[8]. While forests are rightly and repeatedly 'name-checked' in climate negotiations, wetlands lack the same attention despite their critical contribution to climate protection.

At the same time, even the most iconic continental wetlands in the Global South, such as the Pantanal in South America, the Okavango Delta in Africa and the vast peatlands of the Congo Basin and Southeast Asia, are facing unprecedented pressures from water abstraction, industrial agriculture, resource extraction, and unsustainable infrastructure development[9,10]. Wildfires exacerbated by the climate crisis are becoming a regular occurrence in many wetland areas: In 2015, 2.6 million hectares of Indonesia's forests and wetlands burned, releasing 1.6 gigatonnes of CO2 – comparable to Germany's annual CO_2 emissions[11]; in 2020, nearly one third of South America's Pantanal, was also lost to wildfires[12], releasing 115 million tonnes of CO_2[13], equivalent to Belgium's emissions for that year.

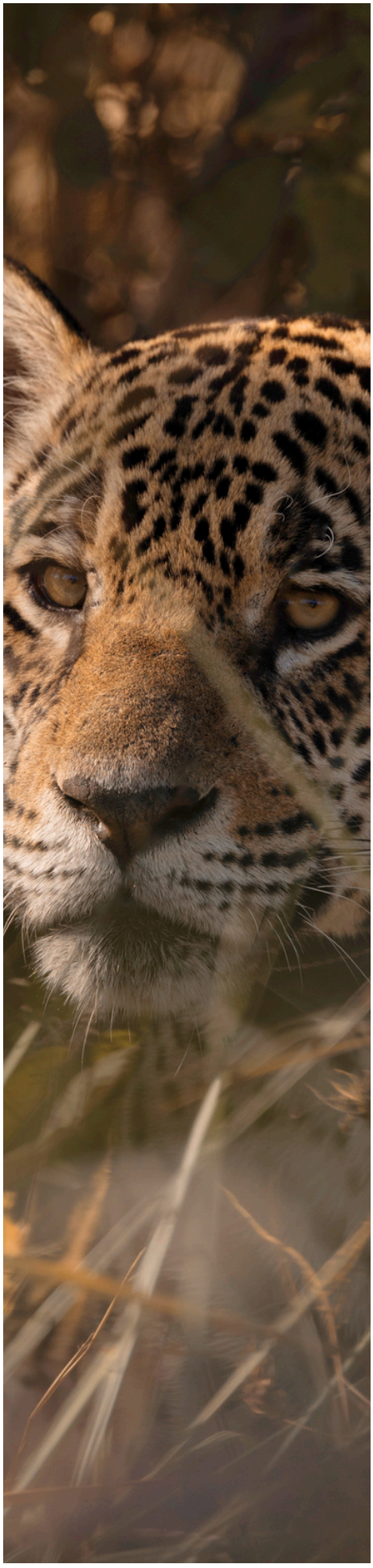
When drained or degraded, wetlands release massive quantities of greenhouse gases, transforming them from carbon sinks into vast carbon sources that exacerbate the global climate crisis[14].

Degraded peatlands, covering just 0.4% of the Earth's land surface, are responsible for an estimated 4% of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions annually[15], excluding emissions from fires. If current trends continue, greenhouse gas emissions from drained and degraded peatlands will consume an estimated 12-41% of the remaining emissions budget to keep heating below +1.5 to +2°C[16]. The case for swift action to protect wetlands as a critical nature-based solution to the climate crisis is undeniable.

Significant climate mitigation potential exists in tropical peatland countries where an estimated 800 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced annually (equating to 1.5% of global emissions) through peatland conservation and restoration[17]. Currently, just 17% of peatlands lie within protected areas, significantly less than other high-value ecosystems such as forests (38%)[18].

Freshwater wetlands mitigate climate change and provide critical benefits for people and biodiversity. They buffer against floods, storms, and droughts, helping build resilience, particularly for communities in vulnerable regions, protect water quality, regulate hydrological cycles, and underpin immense biodiversity and livelihoods[19].

Freshwater wetlands provide services valued at US$27 trillion per year, representing 24.7% of the total monetary value of all biomes[20]. Conserving and restoring wetlands is a win-win-win for people, nature, and climate, contributing not only to climate mitigation and adaptation but also to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and global biodiversity targets.



As COP30 approaches, we have an unprecedented opportunity to elevate the role of wetlands in international climate policy. COP30 will be a defining moment for the global community to demonstrate united leadership. Now, more than ever, it is essential for nations to reaffirm their commitment to nature-based solutions and ensure wetlands are prioritised in national climate strategies.

We call on the Parties to the Paris Agreement to:

1. **Pledge to protect and restore freshwater wetlands** as a priority in national climate action plans (NDCs) and long-term strategies, including those to expand the designation of protected wetland areas.
2. **Increase bilateral cooperation and technical support** for wetland conservation and restoration in the Global South, prioritising biomes with extremely high climate and ecological value, such as the Pantanal, Southeast Asia's peatlands and Congo Basin.
3. **Collectively pledge to protect freshwater wetlands**, uniting to agree on clear, measurable targets for wetland protection and restoration, supported by adequate financial resources for implementation.
4. **Strengthen Indigenous peoples' and local communities' active participation** in wetland management and conservation and promote recognition of customary tenure and traditional use practices in relation to their protection.

The role of wetlands in both climate mitigation and adaptation is undeniable. Let us unite, at COP30 and beyond, to place wetlands at the heart of the global climate agenda, ensuring they continue to serve as powerful, natural allies in the fight against climate change.

We trust in your leadership and commitment to safeguard our climate, planet and our shared future.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Friends of the Earth Bulgaria


African
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The
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The role of wetlands in both mitigating and adapting to climate change is undeniable, and their protection must be central to our efforts in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.