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# ZIMBABWE WETLAND POLICY

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MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE, TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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## **Foreword**

**TO BE FILLED**

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**Minister of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality  
Industry**

## **1. Introduction**

Zimbabwe is endowed with various natural resources including wetlands. These cover 3% of the area (11 717.4 km<sup>2</sup>). Of the available wetlands a meagre 21% are stable while 18 % are severely degraded and 61% moderately degraded. This excludes reservoirs, dams and impoundments that cover 652 151ha and permanent rivers and streams that cover over 5700km. The country has two categories of wetlands which are inland wetlands and man-made wetlands the former tend to decrease with decreasing amount of mean annual rainfall from agro-ecological Natural Regions I to V. They are further subdivided into flood plains, riverine, pans, swamps, dambos/vleis and artificial impoundments and are also known by various terms such as vleis, dambos, matoro, mapani, dekete, dufunya or amaxhaphozi. All these types of wetlands represent complex hydrological and hydrogeology patterns of wetlands influenced by amounts of rainfall received and its drainage, respectively and latter also influenced by the soils and the hydrogeology.

Since acceding to the convention in May 2013, Zimbabwe has developed two national reports on the status and implementation of the convention. The first report was submitted in 2015 and the second report in January 2018. The country has designated seven wetlands of international importance. These are Lakes Chivero and Manyame, Driefontein Grasslands, Chinhoyi Caves, Manapools, Victoria Falls National Park, Cleveland Dam and Monavale Vlei.

## **2. Definitions of terms**

**i. Environmental conservation** is an umbrella term that **defines** anything done to protect the planet and **conserve** its natural resources so that every living thing can have an improved quality of life. **Put simply, it refers to the wise use of a resource.**

**ii. Integrated management:** This is a combination of physical, technical, administrative, and legal practices relating to wetland in a manner designed to increase combined benefits or achieve a more equitable apportionment of benefits from both sources. Inventory: A complete list of items such as property, goods in stock, or the contents of a wetland.

Preservation refers to the non-use of a resource

**iii Wetland development** means the carrying out of an activity or operation which includes the construction of ditches, mechanical disturbance of the ground, alteration of normal water level fluctuations, infilling, drainage, dredging, channelization, and removal of vegetation cover and/or organic matter on a wetland for social or economic benefits, or the making of any change in the use or the intensity of use of any wetland which affects its hydrologic characteristics or functions.

**iv Wetlands:** “Areas of marsh, fen, peat land or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salty, including areas of marine water, the depth of which does not exceed six metres. In addition wetlands may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to

wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres” (Ramsar, 1971).

- It is an area of land which is saturated by water either seasonally or perennially.
- Wetlands are places where dryland meets, or is inundated by, water.

**v. Wetland Indicator:** This refers to wetland characteristics, for instance grass and/or tree species that provide a valid and reliable way to measure status or health of a wetland.

**v. Wetland Management:** Wetland management generally involves activities that can be conducted within, and around wetlands, both natural and man-made, to protect, restore, manipulate, or provide for their functions and values.

**vi. Wise use of wetlands:** “the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development”.

**vii. Sustainability:** The development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs.

**National Assets** –Wetlands can be declared as national assets by the Minister with their use being directed to the best interest of the Nation.

### 3. Types of wetlands

**Flood Plains:** These are associated with the major drainage systems and tend to be well developed in low lying flat areas. These are found in the Zambezi Valley and around the Save-Runde confluence.

**Pans:** Depressions that collect and retain water from the surrounding uplands. They are generally saline due to the accumulation of salts brought by water that eventually evaporates and are found in hotter areas of the country.

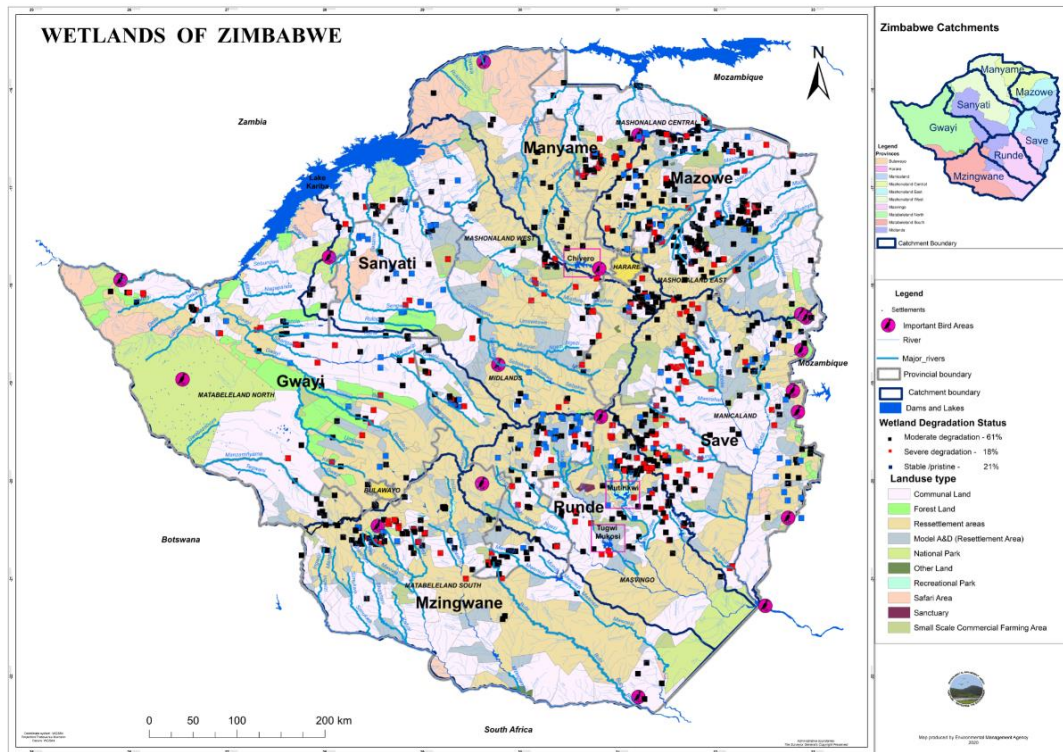
**Swamps:** Zimbabwe does not possess significant swampy areas. These are mostly found in the low lying areas at the confluence of rivers

**Artificial impoundments (dams & lakes):** There are over 8 000 man-made impoundments ranging from very small single farm units to very large ones.

**Artificial wetlands** –waste treatment (Sable Chemicals and Hwange Power plant,

**Dambos:** This is a ChiChewa word that is used to describe a grassland in both Zambia and Malawi. Locally these ecosystems would be referred to as *doro*, *dekete* 'bani' (Shona), Amaxaphozi (IsiNdebele) or 'vlei' (adapted Afrikaans). Also there are riverine

dambos which are found along most of the country's major drainage systems.



**Fig 1. Distribution of wetlands in Zimbabwe and conservation Status**

#### **4. Challenges in Wetland Management**

The disruption of wetland functions has a high cost economically, socially and ecologically. The disturbance of their natural balance can affect provision of ecological goods and services. The disruption of valuable wetlands must cease, the diversity of remaining wetlands must be retained, and where possible rehabilitation, restoration and re-creation of wetlands must be attempted.

Unsustainable agricultural activities on wetlands have very high negative impacts on the ecosystem. High impact activities that



relate to agriculture include drawing irrigation water, particularly at commercial scale, grazing of both big and small animals, disturbance of the soil structure and water flows, introducing unsuitable plants as well as invasive alien species that include flowers and other ornamental plants, forest plantations of trees with high rates of transpiration .

Wetlands are also affected directly by construction activities which occur within or at their margins and indirectly by construction which occurs on neighbouring areas. Construction and settlement increase activity and hence compaction of the wetland. Mining is also another activity that negatively affects wetlands. Mining operations on wetlands result in major environmental modifications. These modifications depend on type of mineral being extracted, methods of mining and topography being worked. Topographical effects of mineral extraction on wetlands include removal of natural vegetation cover; removal of topsoil; exposure of vast bare rock surface; creation of open pits, quarries and spoil depressions which may fill by seepage; creation of vast areas of spoil piles which seep and erode and are physically unstable; accelerated runoff; greatly increased erosion and ground water lowering. Physical effects of mineral extraction on wetlands include drainage of wetland areas; filling of wetlands with spoil; widening of stream beds; alteration of stream courses through diversion and impoundment; increased silt load and turbidity, as well as decrease in both light penetration and wetland habitat diversity. Chemical effects of mineral extraction on wetlands include addition of both chemical elements to wetlands habitat as well as increased of salt content of wetlands, lowering of pH, reduction of free oxygen. Contamination of ground water aquifers and pacing of heavy metals into solution are also major chemical effects of mineral extraction on wetlands.

## **5. Principles And Objectives**

- **Purpose of Policy**

The purpose of National Wetlands Policy is to guide wetlands management to become incorporated in development planning by the Government, private sector, development partners, traditional leaders, communities and individuals.

- **Objectives of the Policy**

The policy intends:

- a) Establish an effective and efficient institutional and legal framework for integrated management and wise use of wetlands which will provide an enabling environment for the participation of all stakeholders.
- b) Enhance and maintain functions and values derived from wetlands in order to protect biological diversity and improve livelihood of Zimbabweans
- c) Enhance capacity building within relevant institutions involved in management of wetlands.

## **6. Guiding Principles:**

I. Wise use: Due to the significant contribution of wetlands to the livelihoods of Zimbabweans, wetlands should be integrated into national economic planning for sustainable development, wealth creation and environmental management.

II. Precautionary principle: Where information is inadequate for decision making, the precautionary principle will apply. Lack of

full scientific information should not prevent implementation of measures to manage wetland degradation.

III. Collaborative and participatory approach: An integrated approach to wetland conservation and management should involve stakeholders at all levels including; government, local community, civil society and the private sector.

IV. The global dimension: the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies should be recognised and considered

V. Polluter pays principle: Persons who pollute wetland environments should meet the cost of cleaning them up, and also meet the cost of the pollution to resource users.

## **7. Functions and Services Of Wetlands**

**Flood Control and Soil Erosion Prevention:** Wetlands act as sponges, absorbing excess storm water from heavy rainfall, thereby ensuring flow regulation/ flood control and soil erosion prevention. Floodwater can be stored in the soils or retained as surface water, thereby reducing floodwater volumes downstream. In addition, wetland vegetation slows down the flow of floodwater resulting in silt and sediment retention and riverbank protection. Besides reduction of flooding events downstream, this process also ensures river flows are maintained for longer periods. Wetland vegetation also shields the soil from damage by strong waves and wind.

**Policy Statement 1:** Enforce relevant regulations and laws that promote maintenance of ecological integrity of wetlands.

**Policy Statement 2:** Ensure that wetlands are incorporated in spatial planning

**Policy Statement 3:** Institute measures to discourage the drainage of wetlands.

**Water Discharge and Recharge:** The retention ability of wetland enables them to discharge and recharge both surface and ground water resources respectively. The impeded drainage allows the water to stay in one place long enough to maximize infiltration, enhancing recharge of groundwater and aquifers. Excess water in wetlands and aquifers discharges into springs, rivers and other water bodies. Aquifers also play a complementary role by recharging wetlands during dry spells.

**Policy Statement 1:** Promote measures that ensure protection of water sources

**Policy Statement 2:** Declare selected wetlands as Ecological sensitive ecosystems

**Water Purification, Nutrient and Toxic retention:** Wetland vegetation absorbs nutrients and toxic substances from inflowing water thereby improving the quality of water downstream. Nutrients and toxic substances originate from agricultural, domestic and industrial sources. The materials eroded in the watershed are filtered by the wetland vegetation resulting in water purification. The sediment retained in the wetland protects downstream resources, such as dams, farmlands, rivers and lakes from silting. Sediment retention in the flood plains benefits agriculture by renewing nutrients and soil.

**Policy Statement 1:** Institute measures for efficient waste management from point sources.

**Policy Statement 2:** Support and promote enforcement of relevant regulations and laws related to environmental pollution.

**Policy Statement 1:** Stop and penalise all those that discharge waste into wetlands.

**Research and Education:** Many wetlands are important sites for scientific research and education. They are often used for studying long term global environmental status and trends.

**Policy statement 1:** Encourage and promote establishment of wetland education centres countrywide.

**Policy statement 2:** Publish regular education and research materials to provide continuous up to date information for better management of wetlands.

**Policy Statement 3:** Encourage incorporation of wetlands as education centres in development plans

**Policy Statement 4:** develop educational curriculum that captures the value of wetlands

**Religious and Cultural Significance:** Religious beliefs world over are commonly associated with the use of wetlands. Wetlands are considered sacred. Beliefs and cultural practices are instituted to govern access and use of wetlands. Spirit mediums (an institution that is revered culturally) are believed to govern access to and use of wetlands in most parts of Zimbabwe.

**Policy statement 1:** Promote recognition and application of indigenous knowledge in wetland management.

**Policy Statement 2:** Encourage community participation in wetland management through establishment of functional local management institutions.

**Policy Statement 3:** Promote the conservation of wetlands of religious and cultural significance

**Policy Statement 4:** Restore powers of traditional leaders in wetland management

**Policy Statement 5:** Promote the conservation of wetlands of religious and cultural significance

**Habitat Services:** Habitat services include support for biodiversity (fauna and flora). There are various species of plants and animals which are found in wetlands across the country. For example, a few endangered bird species are still found in some wetlands.

**Policy statement 1:** Promote sustainable extraction and utilization of products derived from wetlands.

**Policy Statement 2:** Develop legislation to protect habitats for various organisms found on wetlands

**Policy Statement 3:** Develop Climate Change Mitigation measures to safeguard wetlands

**Tourism and Recreation:** Wetland ecosystems provide vital services and scenes which make them ideal for eco-tourism as people come to watch water features (ponds, falls, etc.), birds and crocodiles, among others. In Zimbabwe wetlands support local economy through visitors who travel from different parts of the world to view different aspects associated with wetlands. In this way wetlands play a critical role in supporting eco-tourism. Examples of recognised wetlands which support tourism in the country include: Victoria Falls, Mana Pools, Lake Chivero, Chinhoyi Caves and Cleveland Dam.

**Policy Statement 1:** Promote development and establishment of recreation and eco-tourism facilities as a way of wetland management.

**Policy Statement 2:** Enforce relevant regulations and laws that promote maintenance of ecological integrity of wetlands.

**Crop and Livestock Production:** Wetlands provide multiple services which sustain diverse livelihoods in both rural and urban communities. Activities that are widely carried out on wetlands include crop (rice, maize, sorghum, millet, beans, cassava and sweet potatoes ) and livestock production. Wetlands provide a

safety net for households who engage in agricultural activities all year round taking advantage of the fertile soils and perennial water supply.

**Policy Statement 1:** Promote efficient techniques and technologies for crop and livestock production on wetlands.

**Policy statement 2:** Promote environmental friendly agricultural practises.

**Policy Statement 3:** Promote and support conservation measures to maintain wetland ecosystem health.

**Policy Statement 4:** Agriculture is only permissible on a wetland under a permit from the Agency

**Policy Statement 5:** Undesirable plant species that negatively impact the hydrology of the wetland are disallowed, and where already introduced, will be replaced with appropriate wetland plants.

**Policy Statement 6:** Uncontrolled burning of wetland biomass is prohibited.

## **8. Management of wetlands**

Conservation and management of Zimbabwe's wetlands is vital for human livelihoods and the broad ecosystem services wetlands provide. Land tenure affects wetland management. Management of wetlands is generally through international, national and sub national legislation.

**Policy Statement 1:** Enforce relevant regulations and laws that promote maintenance of ecological integrity of wetlands.

**Policy Statement 2:** Strengthen coordination with key stakeholders

**Policy Statement 3:** Gazette all ecologically sensitive wetlands in Zimbabwe.

**Policy Statement 4:** Avail Resources for wetlands management

**Policy Statement 5:** Strengthen Environmental Subcommittees to manage wetlands.

**Policy Statement 6:** document the spatial distribution of wetlands in all districts

### **Wetlands of International importance**

Zimbabwe acceded to the Ramsar Convention on 3 May 2013, and has committed to implement the “three pillars” of the Convention which are:

1. To designate suitable wetlands for the List of Wetlands of International Importance (“Ramsar List”) and ensure their effective management.
2. To work towards the wise use of all wetlands through national land-use planning, appropriate policies, legislation, management actions, and public education.
3. To cooperate internationally concerning trans-boundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands.

**Policy Statement 1:** Identify, update and designate all wetlands that fulfil Ramsar criteria as Ramsar Sites

**Policy Statement 2:** Ensure Ramsar site management conforms to national legislation.

**Policy Statement 3:** Ensure that all invasive alien species are managed in Ramsar sites