

# Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) Wetlands South Africa West Rand District Municipality



## Wetlands awareness raising & land use planning workshop Report

**Venue:** Imbizo Chamber, West Rand District Municipality, Randfontein

**Date:** 1 December 2015



### Summary

On 1 December 2015, West Rand District Municipality (WRDM) and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability hosted a ‘Wetlands awareness raising & land-use planning’ workshop as part WRDM’s involvement in the Local Actions for Biodiversity (LAB): Wetlands SA project. The workshop intended to create awareness of the important role wetland ecosystems offers municipalities and how to effectively consider wetlands in land-use/spatial planning.

WRDM identified the need to engage with the disaster management and spatial planning staff from both the district and inlying local municipalities on wetland issues. Wetlands play an integral part in disaster risk reduction, as well as supporting water security and purification. To this end, it is important for planners to take cognisance of the benefits posed to WRDM by conserving wetlands by taking wetlands into consideration in land-use applications and developing spatial development frameworks.

The workshop also made provision for municipal officials to engage with individuals from other relevant institutions, most notably the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD)’s Biodiversity directorate was represented, providing very insightful information on wider biodiversity management from a provincial point of view, opportunities for municipal-provincial collaboration and more importantly, advice on how to improve biodiversity management on the local level. The attendance of Working for Wetlands complimented the approach by providing technical input into the value and functionality of wetlands, and what this means for WRDM going forward. The South African Biodiversity Institute presented on the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act

16 of 2013 (SPLUMA), providing much needed clarity on the complexities the amended act holds for municipalities in terms of land-use planning and biodiversity management, and what tools exist to assist WRDM going forward.

***NB: All presentation given at the workshop will be made available in PDF and disseminated along with the final report.***

## Workshop Objectives

The workshop was an interactive and open discussion process. It strived to enable planners to learn about the importance of wetlands at a local level, providing a platform for participants to provide input to how wetlands conservation can support West Rand District through enhancing economic development, disaster risk reduction and service delivery in general by taking cognisance of wetlands in planning.

The workshop objectives were:

1. To explore the link between wetlands, municipal land-use/spatial planning and service provision for municipalities.
2. To better understand the role of stakeholders in aligning work in terms of wetlands management and conservation with municipal planning.
3. Provide a platform for discussion surrounding these issues in West Rand.



*Figure 1: Workshop participants shared their knowledge and understanding of wetland ecosystems.*

## Workshop

The workshop was attended by planning, disaster risk management and environmental officials from district and local municipalities, province and the private sector. West Rand District Municipality (WRDM) is part of the LAB: Wetlands SA project (see Annex 1), an initiative funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability in 11 district and metropolitan municipalities in South Africa.

The workshop aimed at creating awareness about the essential importance of conserving and management of biodiversity, with a specific emphasis on wetland ecosystems. It was viewed important by WRDM to increase awareness amongst district and local municipal planning staff, given that development has significant impact on the natural environment. In addition, the workshop intended for promote the project as a whole, ensuring successful implementation going forward.

The LAB Wetlands SA project aims to lessen some of the challenges being experienced due to climatic changes by promoting and enhancing the protection and appropriate management of the regions wetland ecosystems for the benefit of those whom inhabit it. The workshop was the perfect platform for WRDM to engage on the issues, fleshing out challenges and opportunities, mapping relevant stakeholders and strategically planning the way forward.

The session started with a welcome by Herina Hamer: Executive Manager of Regional Planning and Economic Development. Ms Hamer noted and welcomed the attendance of all present, in particular the representatives from the various local municipalities within the West Rand District, as well as the representatives from the various Provincial and National entities. She stressed the importance of having a multi-sectoral approach towards ensuring the sustainable management and protection of the regions natural assets, and the usefulness of being cognizant of environmental impacts on planning and vice versa.

A round of introductions was coupled with attendees sharing their expectations for the workshop ahead, and also sharing their knowledge and understanding of wetland ecosystems. From responses, it was clear that there is a broad understanding of wetlands across WRDM and a large majority of attendees knew and understood what wetlands were. Key responses which were shared included:

- *Wetlands are important for:*
  - *Flood attenuation*
  - *Water purification*
  - *Biodiversity preservation (plant and animal life)*
  - *Regulating surface runoff*
  - *Recreation and tourism*

The wealth of knowledge set the tone for the remainder of the workshop and ignited pertinent points of discussion and debate.

### **Defining wetlands and the role of ecosystem services**

Mr. Farai Tererai of the Department of Environmental Affairs' Working for Wetlands (WfW) programme provided the workshop with valuable insight into wetland ecosystems. Mr. Tererai went into detail on what wetlands are and what characteristics are prominent in the different types of wetlands. Importantly he highlighted the numerous values of wetlands and why it is important, especially for municipalities, to do their utmost in protecting their wetlands. Healthy and functioning wetlands play in integral role in the landscape and can contribute immensely towards service provision. Wetlands act as huge water sponges, which make them perfect for flood attenuation and storing surface water (runoff). These ecosystems are also natural water purifiers and act as a source of water/ and food for communities.

Though the threats (erosion, development/human activities/alien invasive vegetation) to wetlands ecosystems are quite rife, it is still mitigatable and should be high on the priority list of municipalities. Mr. Tererai urged the delegation to get in touch with Working for Wetlands and become part of wetland community. WfW are conducting wetlands rehabilitation and restoration projects nationally

and are doing fantastic work towards the management and conservation of South Africa's wetland ecosystems.

There were interest from the attendees regarding artificial/constructed wetlands. It was a difficult topic to discuss as no specialist on the topic was present. With that being said, both WfW and ICLEI through the LAB Wetlands SA project are promoting the management and protection of naturally existing wetland ecosystems. When asked about the rehabilitation and restoration of wetlands, Mr. Tererai stressed the importance of ascertaining the reason for the restoration (flood attenuating/water purification/animal sanctuary) and plan and implement restoration accordingly.

### **Defining climate change & the role of wetlands in disaster management**

It was important to set the tone for the workshop by looking at the climatic situation of the region; historically, presently and also future predictions. Ms. Kirsty Robinson from ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a climate change specialist and presented on the ever-present environmental phenomenon, looking at the impact of humans on the changing climate and how the rainfall and maximum temperatures have been fluctuating over the last decades. More notably, her findings suggest an increase in both maximum and minimum temperatures leading to a general warming in the area – possibly increasing the likelihood of dry weather spells leading to drought. The change and condition of the rainfall patterns are uncertain and there it is advised that WRDM's future planning considers a decrease in annual rainfall but also increasing intensity during the rainy season.

It is important when discussing climate change impacts, to consider the key function of wetlands in relation to climate change. Wetlands have the potential to store water and slowing surface run-off. This is important in the climate change context, as projections indicate that climate change will, in some places, cause an increase in the intensity of rainfall events, increasing the likelihood of floods.

WRDM can reduce climate change impacts by adequately managing and protecting existing wetlands. Wetlands themselves are vulnerable to climate change and therefore investments should be made to ensure they are healthy and functioning at full capacity before the onset of climate change. Healthy wetlands play a key role in climate change adaptation in that investment in wetlands allows for planning for both flood and drought scenarios. As such, it is important for stormwater and sewage engineers to plan for an entirely new scenario.

### **Role of SPLUMA: land use planning related to biodiversity planning at a local level**

The West Rand District is one of the first district councils in South Africa to have a gazetted Bioregional Plan to inform land-use planning, environmental assessment and authorisations, and natural resource management outside of protected areas. More importantly, the Bioregional plan includes a map of priority areas which coincide with land-use planning and decision-making guidelines. The plan also informs the districts Spatial Development Framework (SDF), which in turn, informs development in the district.

In terms of the new Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013 (SPLUMA) Regulations, municipalities are the competent authority of land-use and development application. This means that municipalities now have added responsibility to ensure the protection of the environment is taken into account when considering land-use applications.

Mr. Sagwata Manyike of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) spoke about the complexities of SPLUMA but also highlighted the various tools available to municipalities when considering biodiversity/wetlands in land-use and spatial planning. In relation to development and

environmental authorisations, SANBI recommends that municipalities insert a requirement into their by-laws indicating that each application must be accompanied by a map of the priority biodiversity areas in relation to the site.

### **Case Studies: Examples of incorporating wetlands into local planning**

Ms. Liz Metcalfe of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability presented on case study examples from Cape Town and Durban North where wetlands were incorporated in local planning and development. With urbanization occurring at a staggering pace, the need for development is high up on the priority agenda, and in more cases than not, the natural environment takes a knock, with the need for development taking preference over the conservation of natural wetlands. In most cases, wetlands ecosystems are being degraded and destroyed and seen as just being “open spaces perfect for development”, which leads to severe consequences (e.g. flooding) in the future. So it begs the question: how do we meet our development requirements and protect our biodiversity at the same time? To do this, it is critical that existing tools such as the Bioregional Plan are sufficiently considered.

Where a compromise is required to meet development needs, it is still important to reduce the impact as much as possible. Having adequate policies, plans and strategies in place is therefore critical.

*Please refer to Ms. Metcalfe’s presentation (attached) for details on the case studies presented.*

### **In-depth discussion**

Attendees were well engaged throughout the workshop, asking pertinent questions, raising current challenges and debating possible solutions. An open discussion opened the floor to discuss solutions to the challenges raised during the workshop. The following themes emerged from the discussion.

#### Enhancing capacity

Staff from both the district and local municipalities emphasized the amount of work going into taking biodiversity into consideration when making planning decisions, making use of the WRDM’s Bioregional Plan for guidance on where Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) occur and where development would be deemed appropriate to occur. It was noted that the smaller municipalities do not have the capacity to effectively consider environmental issues, and the need for decision-makers to be capacitated was extensively and mutually stressed by the municipal staff. Furthermore, with the new SPLUMA regulations, there is a concern that appeals of Planning Tribunal effectively puts the decision-making in the hands of politicians, who are not always cognizant of the role of biodiversity in supporting service delivery. As such, capacity-building and awareness-raising are required, and a platform to initiate conversations between politicians and technical officials would be of great use. It is also important to be mindful of changing personnel and politicians such that awareness-raising needs to be continual and evolving process.

#### Making the case for considering biodiversity and wetlands

When considering awareness-raising, it was suggested that the message needs to be driven home from different angles, not just a ‘conservation’ point of view, but also from a service delivery and community-upliftment angle. For this to happen, there is a need to make the case by communicating the ‘success stories’ at the community-level.

#### Integration

One of the biggest concerns cited was the lack of integration between departments, particularly at a higher level. By engaging with various sectors e.g. Roads and Water & Sanitation, conflicts might be

reduced or even avoided. It was suggested that for real success, better integration needs to be instigated at the policy level.

### Partnerships

The lack of capacity at the municipal level is keenly noted, and the importance of partnerships with provincial and national government, as well as external bodies such as ICLEI (through LAB: Wetlands SA) and the Gauteng City Region Observatory (GCRO) to support municipalities is key moving forward.

### Proactive solutions

Finally, more proactive spatial planning can reduce conflicts, and there are instruments that can be used to bring environmental considerations more strongly into Land Use Schemes: an overlay was suggest to be an effective tool in this instance. Disaster management is currently reactive, and needs to be more proactive in considering how to reduce risks in the first instance.



*Figure 2: West Rand Wetlands Workshop attendees*

## Wrap up and way forward

The workshop was very well received by all attendees, whom felt that the content and points of discussion were all relevant to the current situation in WRDM. Planning and Environmental staff from the district and local municipalities are working towards better consideration of biodiversity in land-use and development, and ways to improve (be it through continuous cooperative governance, interdepartmental collaborations, engagement with ICLEI) will continue to be explored.

The next steps for WRDM in the LAB Wetlands SA project is the compilation and development of a Wetland Report, engaging with workshop attendees and additional relevant stakeholders going forward, pulling together existing information relating to biodiversity/wetlands in the district, which will then act as a gaps analysis and feed into the next phase of developing a Wetland Strategy and

Action Plan. Engagement between WRDM and ICLEI will continue and foreseen to grow with ICLEI providing a strong support base to WRDM in ensuring the successful implementation of the LAB: Wetlands SA project.

## Annex 1 - Project Background

Wetlands are high-value ecological infrastructure, providing essential ecosystem services such as clean water, clean air, food, medicines, flood regulation, water storage and habitat for biodiversity. Wetlands also play a role in disaster risk reduction, and their effective governance could lessen the negative effects of climate change through, for example, flood risk reduction, temperature regulation and water and food security for communities.

However, wetlands are South Africa's most threatened ecosystems, with 48% of wetland ecosystems critically endangered, resulting in an urgent need to increase awareness of wetland importance; and to develop the capacity of local governments to incorporate natural wetland resource objectives into municipal governance mechanisms and Integrated Development Planning, as well as to implement and fund projects on the ground.

In South Africa, there is a wealth of national environmental policies, however, mechanisms for mainstreaming biodiversity through all spheres of government needs to be strengthened. Lack of staff capacity, budget constraints, absence of participatory governance, lack of political leadership and public awareness and support, as well as deficiencies in relevant guidance, tools and resources, make wetland biodiversity planning and management a neglected component of our country's municipal governance.

The Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands SA) programme's key goal is to protect priority natural wetland resources, thus enabling the supply of ecosystem services, and promoting resilient communities and sustainable local economies under a changing climate within South African local governments.

The key objectives of the LAB Wetlands SA programme are as follows:

1. To improve local government and citizen knowledge and understanding (at the individual, organisation and policy levels) of the value of biodiversity and wetlands.
2. To initiate the process of integrating ecosystem services and biodiversity into local government planning and decision-making in a coordinated, multi-sectoral, gender-sensitive and participatory way.
3. To implement and pilot on-the-ground wetland projects and promote the development of bankable project proposals.

The LAB: Wetlands SA project is facilitated and lead by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability Africa Secretariat, and funded by the USAID. This programme works in partnership with 9 District Municipalities and 2 Metropolitan Municipalities across South Africa.

## Annex 2: Agenda



### **West Rand District Municipality** **'Wetlands for Prosperity' Workshop**

**Date:** 1 December 2015  
**Venue:** West Rand District Municipality

**Facilitator:** Ryan Fisher (*ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability*)

09.00 – 09.30	<i>Registration (Signing of the Attendance Register and Tea &amp; Coffee)</i>
<b>Welcome &amp; Introduction</b>	
09.30 – 09.40	<b>Welcome by the hosts (10 mins)</b> <i>West Rand District Municipality</i>
09.40 – 10.00	<b>Introductions (20 mins)</b> Ryan Fisher: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i> (20 mins)
10.00 – 10.30	<b>Defining wetlands and the role of ecosystem services (20 min plus 10 mins Q&amp;A)</b> Farai Tererai: <i>Working for Wetlands</i>
10.30 – 11.00	<b>Defining climate change &amp; the role of wetlands in disaster management (20 min plus 10 mins Q&amp;A)</b> Kirsty Robinson: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i>
11.00 – 11.15	<b><i>Tea/coffee break</i></b>
11.15 – 11.55	<b>Role of SPLUMA: land use planning related to biodiversity planning at a local level (30 min plus 10 mins Q&amp;A)</b> Sagwata Manyike: <i>South African National Biodiversity Institute</i>
11.55 – 12.15	<b>Case Studies: Examples of incorporating wetlands into local planning (20 mins).</b> Liz Metcalfe: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i>
12.15 – 12.55	<b>In-depth discussion – 45 mins</b>
12.55 – 13.15	Wrap-up and way forward: <b>LAB Wetlands SA Project (20 mins)</b> Liz Metcalfe: <i>ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability</i>
13.15 – 13.30	Feedback Questionnaire and close
13.30	<i>Lunch</i>