Coastal wetlands, dunes, estuaries, deltas and lagoons

An Observatory For Monitoring Mediterranean Wetlands

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Knowing the state and evolution of coastal wetlands is a prerequisite for their effective management, and especially for convincing decision-makers to take the appropriate measures for their preservation. The Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO) was therefore launched in 2009 under the aegis of the MedWet initiative of the Ramsar Convention. After initial years devoted to developing effective partnerships, setting clear goals and defining indicators, a first-ever Overview of wetlands in the whole Mediterranean region is provided. More than 50% of wetlands disappeared in the region during the 20th century. This decline is continuing. Today, 15 to 22 million hectares of wetlands remain, 23% of which are artificial. The Living Planet Index highlights that wetland biodiversity shows contrasting trends. Some waterbird populations are faring well, particularly in the western part of the Mediterranean basin, whilst other vertebrate groups such as reptiles, amphibians and fish have seen their numbers drop by nearly 40% since 1970. A very strong and growing pressure on water resources underlies these trends. The quantity of water available for the environment and wetlands is decreasing, particularly in the southern and south-eastern parts of the Mediterranean basin. Stream flows have been significantly affected by the water drawn from rivers and the dams built on them. While water quality in Europe in terms of nutrients and heavy metals has generally improved since the 1980s, water quality has not been sufficiently monitored in other parts of the Mediterranean basin, where a degradation is likely due to more intensified agriculture. The main causes explaining the profound changes affecting wetlands include short-sighted economic development models, poor governance, demographic growth, lack of importance given to wetlands on the political agenda, the limited enforcement of laws pertaining to water and the environment, and the segmentation of conservationists and developers networks. Agriculture is the sector that has the most impact on wetlands, drawing 64% of the total amount of water used. Urbanisation, public infrastructure and tourism are all increasing the pressure on water resources in conjunction with the increasing concentration of populations along the coastline. The modifications affecting wetlands have an impact on human well-being.

Wetlands provide many services to humankind, which include water purification and flood control, and these services get reduced as wetlands are drained or degraded. However; some reasons for hope do exist, as the increasing number and surface of protected wetlands show. Key recommendations for preserving wetlands include : • Making people more aware that wetlands are natural infrastructures, which are useful to society, and that they must be treated as 'users' of water, which require annual flows of water if they are to continue providing these services. • Encouraging a more significant involvement of stakeholders, from policy makers to the civil society, • Strengthening the conservation measures, and the implementation of management plans. • Promoting conservation in non-protected wetlands, by actively participating in the drafting of land-use plans • targeting efforts to the inhabited coastal wetlands and river valleys, where wetlands are the most highly threatened.