



POLICY BRIEF 11

Urban Wetland protection and restoration

**Learning from Bogotá's conservation
and co-management policies**



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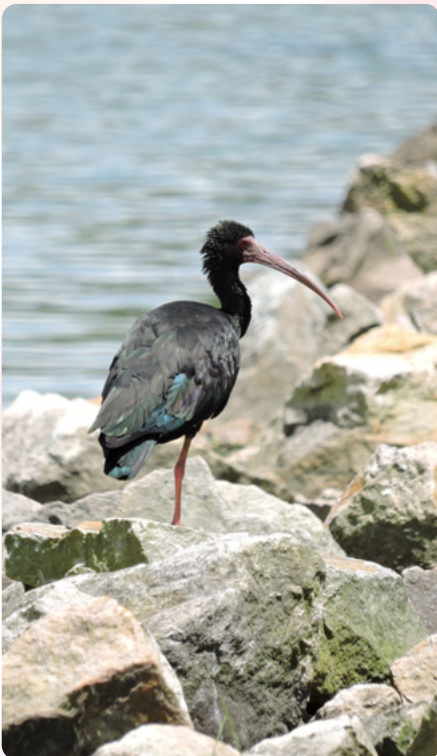
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Wetlands are ecosystems of great ecological and cultural richness. However, throughout Latin America and Europe, human activities such as cattle ranching, agriculture and urbanisation have destroyed many of these ecosystems. Based on the concrete experience of the city of Bogotá, this document proposes recommendations for conservation policies for these ecosystems in urban and peri-urban contexts.

COVER IMAGE: La Conejera wetland. Luis Fernando López, Instituto Humboldt





La Conejera wetland. Luis Fernando López, Instituto Humboldt

Key Messages

- Establishing and strengthening legal instruments is critical to ensure the long-term protection of urban wetlands. The creation of a robust and adaptive legal framework ensures that environmental protection policies can evolve along with changes in the urban environment and community needs, thus ensuring the conservation of valuable these and other urban ecosystems for future generations.
- It is essential to recognise the specific context in which the management of urban protected areas such as wetlands is framed, in order to minimise conflicts between highly restrictive biodiversity conservation strategies and urban development needs and ecosystem use.
- A legitimate land use plan is required for all stakeholders, consistent with the conservation of natural ecosystems, which contributes to maximising human wellbeing in cities.
- It is essential to guarantee the monitoring of conservation and/or ecological restoration actions in urban wetlands through strategic alliances with academia, the private sector, and the public.



Conservation policies in the wetlands of the Bogotá Savanna

In Bogotá, the historical planning of the urban centre and expansion areas negatively impacted natural ecosystems such as wetlands. The extent of this impact is evident in the lack of connectivity of these water bodies, the absence of representative species, the loss of native vegetation, pollution, and environmental conflicts. For this reason, in 2004, the city of Bogotá adopted the Wetlands Policy of the Capital District of Bogotá¹ and in 2018 wetlands were protected under the Ramsar Convention.² This international treaty advocates the conservation and wise use of wetlands as a contribution to achieving sustainable development worldwide. In recent decades, through the articulated work between civil society organisations and the district government, instruments have been generated to improve the state of these ecosystems and their governance, as well as their recognition within the planning and management of the city.

The objective of the Wetlands Policy is:

- 1** to mitigate drivers of wetland deterioration;
- 2** establish ecological restoration plans in degraded areas;
- 3** and consolidate the conservation of these ecosystems through coordinated inter-institutional management, citizen participation, and overarching ecological management.

The Ramsar Site Complex of Urban Wetlands of the Capital District, the first complex of urban high Andean wetlands in Latin America, stands out as an important strategy for the conservation of both the ecological characteristics and cultural values of said ecosystems. Furthermore, the effective implementation of the Ramsar calls for strengthening scenarios for research and environmental education. That is, a comprehensive strategy that incorporates the goals and actions aimed at research and education that favour the appropriation of spaces and understanding their role in urban environments is necessary.



El Salitre wetland. Paola Isaacs



Camellones Muiscas, Northern edge of Bogotá. Diana Ruiz

Although these mechanisms have allowed progress in the management of Bogotá's wetlands, there are still important socio-environmental conflicts that affect their functionality due to formal and informal urbanisation processes, contamination, and negative perception of wetlands. It is therefore essential to strengthen comprehensive strategies that include the participation of different actors and sectors of society. One of these strategies is the Wetlands Roundtable, a participatory board in which the different interventions carried out by the mayor's office within the framework of District Wetlands Policy are discussed with community, social organisations and district organisations. Another important strategy is the generation of knowledge, advice and support for bird watching and nature tourism initiatives in wetlands that allow the community to access the benefits of urban nature while advancing conservation objectives. The monitoring of actions derived from the aforementioned programs and instruments is a key tool for the continuity of these programs and to promote the active participation of different urban stakeholders in the conservation and management of these ecosystems.

In sum, the historical transformation of urban wetlands has been recognized by the community and district authorities as a priority. Mechanisms have been generated to advance in the conservation of these ecosystems. However, a greater institutional commitment and the effective engagement of diverse actors is still required to guarantee greater policy impacts. In the face of accelerated urban expansion and densification, the continuity of policies and plans for the protection of wetlands should be ensured without depending on the will. Additionally, innovative strategies should be included to reduce conflicts between protected, urban and rural areas. The success of wetland conservation in Bogotá depends on the dialogue between policy instruments such as urban protected areas and urban planning that integrates such ecosystems at the core of the urban development.

Policy Recommendations

Inspired by the Bogotá experience, you will find below some key policy recommendations for conservation and sustainable management of wetlands that can be adapted and applied to different urban contexts, thus contributing to biodiversity, climate change mitigation and the well-being of local communities.

- **Develop and strengthen specific legal frameworks and regulations that provide legal protection for wetlands and other valuable ecosystems within urban and peri-urban areas.** This may include the creation of special protection categories for wetlands, the implementation of laws that regulate the discharge of pollutants into water bodies, and the enactment of regulations to establish ecological zoning mechanisms that designate specific areas for conservation and others for sustainable development.
- **Strengthen monitoring, and command and control actions to ensure that wetlands are a safe environment for the community, as well as the social appropriation of these spaces, through educational campaigns and citizen participation.**
- **Maximise the advantages of community participation and the equitable sharing of benefits associated with the protection and restoration of urban wetlands, through paid co-management programs, nature tourism, research networks, among others.**

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 867564