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## Establishing priorities for wetland conservation and management, Kimberley region

By Tanya Vernes & Stewart Huxtable, Kimberley Wetlands Project, WWF-Australia

### Background

The Kimberley region is both biologically and culturally rich, with much of this richness associated with, or dependant upon an equally rich diversity of wetlands; from near-pristine river systems, seasonally ephemeral pools, marshes and creeks, to coastal wetlands and estuaries. Many of these wetlands are of high Aboriginal cultural significance and are associated with important heritage sites and the practicing of contemporary culture, while they are also of value to enterprises such as tourism or pastoralism and various forms of recreation such as bushwalking, birdwatching or fishing. In order for land managers to appropriately and sustainably manage wetland assets we need to establish a greater understanding of these values and uses, and the processes threatening them.

"Establishing priorities for wetland conservation and management in the Kimberley" is a project established by WWF and funded by NHT to collate existing knowledge of wetlands across the Kimberley region and generate a baseline of information on current threats, uses, cultural and biological values of such sites, in conjunction with land owners and managers. This information will then be available for planning the management and conservation of wetlands and their associated cultural and biological values.

### Progress to date

Tanya Vernes (WWF) and Scott Goodson (WA Department of Water) have recently completed a series of field studies to collect new data from 40 wetland sites across the Kimberley including:

- " Inland wetlands of Roebuck Bay
- " Wetlands and mound-springs near Derby
- " Wetlands and creeks on Walcott Inlet
- " Wetlands on the Fitzroy river
- " Carlton Hill mound-springs
- " Durack River wetlands

These on country visits and consultations with Traditional Owners, Indigenous Rangers, land holders and managers have enhanced understanding of wetland values and threats, and practical measures to address them. A variety of data has been collected, allowing us to identify the existing range in physical condition, cultural values, uses, and threats to wetlands, including data on:

- " Chemical and biological indicators of water quality
- " Vegetation and biological communities
- " Presence of feral animals
- " Presence of exotic/invasive plants
- " Land use
- " Land management
- " Cultural values



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(L to R) Richard Benning, Patrick Victor, Lloyd Nulgit, Clayton Victor, Rowan Nulgit and Tanya Vernes surveying Munja wetlands, West Kimberley © Phil Palmer

We are currently collating the information from field research and community consultation (Phase 2) with that derived from the desktop study (Phase 1), to establish priorities for wetland management in the Kimberley, including management actions, research and monitoring (Phase 3). The resulting report and maps will be provided for community and agency use to help improve management and protection for wetlands in the Kimberley.

**Contact:**

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