

Beneficial role of wetlands highlighted at seminar

South Africa's thousands of desecrated wetlands could have played an important role in mitigating some of the effects of the floods experienced at the start of 2011 had they not been destroyed. This was one of the main messages of the Wetlands seminar organised by the Agricultural Research Council's Institute for Soil Climate and Water (ARC-ISCW) and the International Mire

Conservation Group (IMCG) in February. The seminar was held to commemorate World Wetlands Day. More than 114 000 wetlands have been mapped in South Africa to date, covering around 8% of the country's surface area. Apart from their role in flood attenuation wetlands provide important services and goods to especially rural communities, while playing a role in improving water quality

and providing a habitat for many threatened and endangered species. Wetlands – especially peatlands – have also been shown to be natural carbon stores. The focus this year fell on forested wetlands of which only a few are found in South Africa. Most notable are the swamp forests situated along the country's Eastern coastline and of which very little is known.



IMCG Chair Piet-Louis Grundling hands over a Certificate of Merit to ARC-ISCW Manager Dr Mpheko Maila in recognition of the council's work in the field of wetlands.



ARC-ISCW Manager Dr Mpheko Maila welcoming delegates to the event.



Water Research Commission Research Manager Bonani Madikizela was one of the speakers at the event. The Commission has spent R50-million on wetlands research in the last eight years.



Independent consultant Retief Grobler of Imperata Consulting explained the occurrence and importance of forested wetlands in South Africa.

All photographs by Lani van Vuuren