

The Built Environment Selected Writings

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CHAPTER 2

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOWN PLANNING TO SUSTAIN WETLAND MANAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA

M. Zainora Asmawi

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the wetland management practice with respect to the involvement of town planning system in Malaysia. Wetlands are integral component of the environment and they are valuable environmental resource. Nowadays, wetlands are highly affected by the high rate of urbanisation process and the increase of population growth that leads to high demand of new development. Various human activities in alteration of the natural settings of the system had resulted in the degradation of these wetlands (Gillespie, 2007). There are both direct and indirect impacts of development on wetlands such as infrastructural expansion, which leads to the alteration of hydrological cycle among others. Due to the intensity of land use as a result of various human activities and climate change, there is a strong need to manage wetlands in a holistic approach so as to strengthen the efforts made by other agencies in maintaining the natural setting of the environment and sustainability.

Defining wetlands has been the subject of great debate over the time. However, most wetlands can be easily identified by three basic characteristics: the presence of water; the soil type of the wetland; and the types of vegetation growing in them. World Wetlands Day is celebrated around the globe on Feb 1. This means that it is highly appreciated for its precious values that support the life of mankind. Wetlands are among the world's most productive environments. Wetlands are recognised as an important natural resource; providing a range of social, economic and environmental benefits of one nation. It has significant importance, covering a wide spectrum of life (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Generic functions of wetland areas

Functions	Sector
To provide habitat and refuge for many migratory and threatened species.	Environment
To support high concentrations of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrate species.	Environment
To provide important storehouses of plant genetic material.	Environment
To play an essential role in natural hydrological cycles, provide water passage and storage, and may contribute to flood mitigation and the recharge of groundwater.	Environment
To purify water by filtering nutrients and sediments.	Environment
To help regulation of water quality, water discharge and recharge.	Environment
To provide coastal protection against destructive natural events, such as cyclones.	Environment