



WWF

CASE STUDY

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Case study

THE PANTANAL HEADWATERS PACT: HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

The Pantanal Pact is a framework that aims to conserve the rivers and springs through unified collaboration across 25 municipalities in Mato Grosso state. Collectively, these rivers contribute 30% of the water that flows down to the Pantanal wetlands.



Giant water lilies in the Pantanal River

© WWF-Brazil

Rivers at risk

The Pantanal is the largest wetland on the planet. Despite the abundance of water in the wetland, the headwaters – the rivers that feed it - are considered to be at extremely high ecological risk. This was identified by a study undertaken in 2012 by WWF-Brazil in collaboration with its local partners. The *Ecological Risk Analysis of the Paraguay River Basin* highlighted the Paraguay River and its three tributaries; the Sepotuba, Cabaçal and Jauru, as critical areas. With this knowledge, WWF-Brazil decided to invest its efforts into the conservation of the Pantanal headwaters. In this area, the springs rise to form streams that feed rivers that flow down to the lowlands of the Pantanal floodplain. During the annual rainy season, 80% of the Pantanal is submerged under water. This annual flooding cycle is essential to maintaining the health of the wetland's ecosystem, and is responsible for sustaining the Pantanal's abundance of life.

How did the Pantanal Pact come about?

WWF-Brazil Conservation Officer, Ângelo Lima, acknowledges that the conservation of this area is of fundamental importance to everyone. "The Pact was conceived as a way of ensuring the Pantanal's ecological integrity and the continued existence of abundant clean water for all kinds of uses", he said.



Angelo Lima, discussing issues around the Pantanal Pact

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Early successes

The Pantanal Pact originated from a small scale springs restoration project in the Reserva do Cabaçal - a collaboration between WWF-Brazil and the local mayor, government and communities in a small municipality in Mato Grosso state. The project resulted in the total regeneration of a large eroded area with degraded springs, which were no longer functioning, i.e. no longer producing water. The success of this restoration work (shown in the photos) led to a desire to see the work expand to a much wider area.

Dariu Carniel, Executive Secretary of the Pantanal Springs Consortium, who has been involved in the construction of the Pact right from the beginning, says “the Pact is essential, not only for those living in the headwaters region but also for those living downstream. Water is our greatest asset. As long as we have water we have development; when we have no water we have no electricity and no production in the agricultural sector.”

A multi-stakeholder approach

This initiative was developed in the form of a Pact - a voluntary coalition across various sectors. By bringing together the different sectors; the public sector (represented by municipal governments and councils, and the federal state); the private sector (businessmen, especially representatives of agribusiness and the energy sector); and civil society (represented by NGOs, unions and associations) and building a heightened awareness and shared agenda around the importance of freshwater to all would foster positive actions that benefit the environment.

The alliance has the support of over 70 organisations and has received solid backing from the Mato Grosso state government. Each body that signs the Pact is expected to commit to at least three environmental activities in its region. These might include; recuperating degraded areas, making rural and state roads ecologically appropriate, improving basic sanitation, installing eco-friendly septic tanks (biodigestors or *biofossas*) in rural areas, and improving water resource and solid waste management. The Pact’s formal adherence document lists 34 shared priorities that have been identified and agreed by the participating organisations.



2010



2012



2014

The successful development of WWF's spring restoration project in the Reserva do Cabaçal.

© WWF-Brazil

Is our natural water supply changing?

Mato Grosso State University's professor Edinir Maria Serigatto believes that the Pact is an opportunity to increase people's consciousness with regard to taking good care of water resources; "people here in Mato Grosso have already noticed that it is raining less nowadays, they have observed the weather and seen how it has changed. The Pact is an opportunity for us to establish actions to protect our water resources".



Edinir Maria Serigatto

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Successes so far: 20 down, 5 to go

In June 2015 at the start of Mato Grosso's Environment Week celebrations, a total of 20 municipalities signed up to the Pantanal Pact. This major milestone was achieved after the Governor of Mato Grosso called upon the mayors of the 25 target municipalities to sign the Pact and commit to working on their three priorities to protect the Pantanal headwaters. WWF's next step is to continue working with the Ministry of Environment to ensure the signatories turn these commitments into actions and encourage the five remaining mayors to follow.



Pantanal headwater springs flow down to the wetlands

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Biologist, Luciana Souza, Head of the Environment Department of the Municipal Government of Barra do Bugres, sums up the significance of the Pact in a single word - hope. "To me this initiative offers us a chance to see that our greatest wealth, water resource, is conserved as it should be. I view the Pact in a very positive light especially the way it has been created, through dialogue and collective construction, rather than by the enactment of a law, which are often created but not complied with. The Pact has come to change that perspective. I have high hopes for it."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.
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