

# **Swaziland**

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## **Location and area**

Swaziland is an independent monarchy in southern Africa, bordered on the east by Mozambique and on the southeast, south, west, and north by South Africa. It has an area of 17,363 km<sup>2</sup>. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Topography**

Swaziland is roughly oval-shaped and straddles the broken and dissected edge of the South African plateau. The elevation of the land decreases from west to east. There are four main geographical regions running longitudinally north-south:

1. The mountainous westernmost portion, the Highveld, has an average elevation of 900 – 1400 m and in places reaches an altitude of more than 1,800 m above sea level.
2. The hilly central Middleveld has an elevation of 400 - 800 m.
3. The eastern Lowveld is a rolling area that averages from 120 to 300 m above sea level.
4. The Lubombo Mountains bound the Lowveld on the east.

The principal rivers are the Komati, Usutu (Lusutfu), and Umbuluzi. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002, Mwendera 2003).

## **Climate**

The climate ranges from tropical in the Lowveld to temperate in the mountains. Rainfall, which is concentrated in summer (November to March), is light in the east and heavier towards the west. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002). The highest annual rainfall of 1,250 mm occurs in the Highveld. Temperatures vary from 12-20<sup>o</sup> C in the Highveld and from 18-20<sup>o</sup> C in the Lowveld (Mwendera 2003).

## **Land use**

The major land use are rainfed and irrigated crop production and livestock grazing. 50% of the land is communally grazed, 19% is under commercial ranching. Plantation forestry covers about 8 % and parks and nature reserves cover 4 % of the total land area. (Mwendera 2003).

## **Wetlands**

Swaziland has various types of wetlands:

1. Riverine systems refer to freshwater channels, riverbanks, floodplains, and swamps.
2. Lacustrine systems are typically situated in topographic depressions or dammed river channels. They include freshwater lakes, alkaline lakes, volcanic or crater lakes, and man-made impoundments.
3. Palustrine systems include all non-tidal wetlands dominated by trees, shrubs, and persistent emergents, vleis, and all freshwater habitats occurring around pools, springs or headwaters.

The vleis are well developed in the Highveld, Middleveld, and Lumombo regions. These “montane” wetlands have characteristics of “swamps” due to the high rainfall and constant

flow of exfiltrating groundwater. They are dominated by grasses and sedges and are generally devoid of woody species. (Mwendera 2003).

### **Peatlands**

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols nor gley soils exist in Swaziland. According to P.-L. Grundling (pers. comm. 2002) there is potential for peatlands in Swaziland.

### **Mire and peatland losses**

Some palustrine wetlands are exploited as sources of water for domestic and animal uses in rural areas. Many wetlands are used for arable land and livestock grazing (Mwendera 2003).

#### Still to be checked:

**Breen**, C.M., Quinn, N.W. & Mander, J.J. (eds.) 1997. Wetland conservation and management in southern Africa: challenges and opportunities. IUCN, Harare, XXVII + 164 p.

**Mwendera**, E.J. 2001. Wetland development and management in Swaziland. Report for Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, regional Office for Southern Africa (FAO\_ROSA), Harare, 55 p.

**Sutcliffe**, P.P. 1975. A field guide to the soils of Swaziland. Swaziland Farming Guide section 6. Ministry of Agriculture, Mbabane, 88 p.