

Mauritania (Islamic Republic of)

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Location and area

Mauritania is a republic in northwestern Africa, bordered on the north by Western Sahara and Algeria, on the east by Mali, on the south by Mali and Senegal, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The country has a total area of 1,031,000 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

With the exception of a narrow strip in the south along the River Sénégal, the country lies entirely within the Sahara; some 40 % of the country is covered by sand. The elevation varies from about 150 m in the southwest to about 450 m in the north-east. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

Daytime temperatures in much of the country reach 38° C for more than six months of the year, but the nights are cool. Annual rainfall is less than 130 mm over about two thirds of the country; in the Senegal Valley it reaches about 650 mm. There are indications of climatic change, including a reduction in precipitation, a southward extension of the desert area, and a decline in the area of seasonally inundated land along the Senegal.

Oases are of great importance in the desert area, supporting some agricultural production. Upper Mauritania has little plant life. In the south, a belt of steppe is found.

The economy is predominantly pastoral and is regularly threatened by droughts (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Peatlands

Delibrias et al. (1965) report “black levels” in “boggy palaeosols with *Phragmites* and *Typha*, separated by calcareous tufas and sand layers”, dated 1520 ± 150 BP and recent.

Possible peatland areas might be included in the floodplain (4,560 km² in the wet season, 500 km² in the dry season) and delta (7,970 km²) of the Senegal River, and in Lake Rkiz, a shallow lake of 120 km² (cf. Howard-Williams & Thompson 1985).

Mauritania has been subject of relatively exploration and survey works. In recent years, the government's Office Mauritanien de Recherche Géologique (OMRG) has carried out investigations on occurrences of peat (www.mines98.com/country/mr/3.htm). In the south, modest amounts of peat have been discovered in a 30 km-wide forested band adjacent to the Senegal River. These deposits are still in the process of being delineated and estimates of resources are still very conservative at around 400,000 t. (www.mining-journal.com/MAURITANIA/file3.htm).

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 0 km² of histosols exist in Mauretania and 1,698 km² of gley soils.

Mire and peatland losses

Benneh et al. (1996) report open peat mining in littoral zones of Mauritania.

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www.snrcp.mr/cid/catalogue/catgeologie.htm - 86k -

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