



Launch of the *Handbook on Best Practices for the Design and Operation of Wetland Education Centres*

Press Release – embargoed to 5 June 2014

On the occasion of World Environment Day (2014), the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Environmental Ecosystem Research Foundation (Republic of Korea), are delighted to announce the launch of the *Handbook on Best Practices for the Design and Operation of Wetland Education Centres*.

Wetland education centres, as their name implies, are often located nearby wetlands and are wonderful places for both children and adults to experience the beauty of wetlands and at the same time to learn about the many values and benefits that wetlands provide for people and the environment. The first wetland education centre was established in the mid-1940s in the UK and since then, their number has increased around the world.

“Wetlands such as lakes, rivers and coastal tidal flats provide a wide range of benefits and values for people and the environment,” said Dr. Christopher Briggs, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. “The Ramsar Convention works to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and the Convention strongly encourages the Contracting Parties to set up education centres at their Ramsar Sites and other important wetlands.”

Wetland education centres may be managed by governments, non-governmental organizations, private individuals and companies, or by partnerships between such groups. They may be small centres dependent on volunteers or ‘high-tech’ centres with permanent staff and interactive exhibitions requiring significant funding.

The newly released *Handbook* presents a range of lessons on the design and operation of wetland education centres based on experiences of centre managers from around the world. It is hoped that these lessons will inform people involved in the planning and development of new centres, and assist others in the redevelopment or management of existing centres. Topics covered in the handbook include:

- Planning or redeveloping a wetland education centre
- Ensuring the financial sustainability of a wetland education centre
- Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) programmes and learning content at wetland education centres
- The sustainable design of wetland education centres

The Handbook is aimed at a diverse and extensive audience, reflecting the breadth of skills and interests involved in the design, planning and operation of wetland education centres. These include government

agencies, architects, conservation organizations and consultants. However, it is not meant to be a step-by-step guide to the development and management of wetland education centres since individuals with specialist skills will also be needed.

Ms. Sunyoung BAK (Director, North-East Asia Ecological Network Centre of ERF) explained that “The information and case studies in the Handbook were collected during an international workshop in Seosan City (R.O. Korea) in November 2013, funded by Seosan City and organized by the Environmental Ecosystem Research Foundation (ERF). The workshop was very successful in being a truly collaborative effort with input from multi-level and multilateral organizations including national and international NGOs, national and local governments, and intergovernmental conventions.”

A number of organizations around the world are now translating the Handbook into their local language and these versions will then be published on the website of the Ramsar Convention. The new *Handbook* can be downloaded at: www.ramsar.org/wetland-centres-handbook.

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Note to Editors:

The Handbook has been prepared in collaboration with the Environmental Ecosystem Research Foundation (ERF), Republic of Korea with financial support from the Ministry of Environment. ERF is an independent not-for-profit organization. Based in Seoul, ERF’s major areas of focus are research, conservation and education for sustainable land use, with an emphasis on the North-East Asia region.

www.erf.or.kr

The Convention on Wetlands (‘Ramsar Convention’) is the global intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. One of the pillars of the Convention is the listing of Wetlands of International Importance or ‘Ramsar Sites’. As of 2 June 2014, the Convention’s 168 Contracting Parties have designated 2,182 such Ramsar Sites, making up the largest network of protected areas worldwide.

www.ramsar.org