



Ramsar Convention on Wetlands



Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working group of the Arctic Council

Resolution on Cooperation (RoC) between the Secretariats of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group

Background

Status – the Arctic

The Arctic plays host to a globally significant array of biodiversity. The size and nature of Arctic ecosystems make them of critical importance to the biological, chemical and physical balance of the globe. Dramatic changes (e.g. habitat fragmentation, climate change) now ongoing and underway are threatening the resiliency and sustainability of the Arctic's biodiversity and the overall balance of its ecosystems. Continued rapid change in the Arctic will have global repercussions affecting the planet's biodiversity as a whole.

Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF):

The Arctic Council (AC) is an international, intergovernmental circumpolar forum with eight member states (Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States) and six Indigenous Peoples' organizations, which are known as Permanent Participants (The Aleut International Association (AIA), The Athabaskan Arctic Council (AAC), the Gwich'in Council International (GCI), the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), and the Saami Council (SC)).

The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) program is the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council. Its mandate is to address the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, and communicate its findings to the governments and residents of the Arctic, helping to promote practices which ensure the sustainability of the Arctic's living resources. In order to successfully conserve the natural environment and allow for economic development, baseline data on long-term status and trends of Arctic biodiversity, habitats and ecosystem health is required. CAFF's projects provide data for informed decision making on biodiversity issues. Possible joint activities in the future could include such key CAFF activities as the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA), the Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program (CBMP), nature conservation and work under the present CAFF expert groups on Seabirds (CBIRD) and on Arctic Flora (CFG).

The core objectives of CAFF are:

- To monitor Arctic biodiversity;
- To conserve Arctic species and their habitats;
- To consider the establishment of protected areas;
- To conserve nature outside of protected areas; and
- To integrate both conservation objectives and measures into the economic sectors of society.



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Status – wetlands

Wetlands are among the world's most important environmental assets, containing a disproportionately high number of plant and animal species compared to other areas of the world. Throughout history they have been integral to human survival and development. However, today wetlands, inland, coastal and marine, are globally the most rapidly degrading of all ecosystems. The rate of loss and deterioration of wetlands is accelerating in many regions of the world. The pressure on wetlands is likely to intensify in the coming decades due to increased global demand for land and water, as well as climate change.

The Ramsar Convention:

The Convention on Wetlands is the first of the modern intergovernmental environmental treaties. It provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise (sustainable) use of wetlands, or water-related ecosystems, their resources and services. It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and is the only global treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem.

Conserving and providing water, wetlands are at the heart of sustainable development. Wetlands include swamps and marshes, lakes and rivers, wet grasslands and peatlands, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, near-shore marine areas, coral reefs and human-made sites such as aquaculture ponds, reservoirs and others.

A significant part of the Arctic falls under the wetland definition and scope of the Convention. These ecosystems are valuable, sometimes even critical to, local populations and economies in the Arctic, as well as with regard to global environmental concerns, such as climate change, sea level rise, carbon cycling, mining resources, and others.

The Ramsar Convention facilitates and coordinates state-of-the-art ecosystem-based approaches for the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world. All Arctic Council member states are also Ramsar contracting Parties, who have committed themselves to act upon the Convention's three pillars of implementation:

- to work towards the wise (sustainable) use of all their wetlands through national land-use planning, appropriate policies and legislation, management actions, and public education,
- designate suitable wetlands for the List of Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar Sites") and ensure their effective management, and
- cooperate internationally concerning transboundary wetlands, shared water catchments, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands.

Both the Ramsar and CAFF objectives and activities complement one another, in that CAFF as a Working Group of the Arctic Council provides a vehicle for knowledge and action in the Arctic region while Ramsar provides an important global framework for water and biodiversity efforts as related to wetland ecosystems.



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Ramsar can help place Arctic wetlands within a global framework while CAFF can help inform Ramsar on the status and trends of water and biodiversity in this globally significant region. The Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet), which includes six out of the eight Arctic nations and operates as a regional initiative under the framework of the Ramsar Convention, could become an operational mechanism for cooperative projects and programmes.

Areas of cooperation

In the face of increasing threats to Arctic water quality biodiversity, cooperation with regards to understanding biodiversity changes within this fragile and unique ecosystem is extremely important. A Resolution on cooperation between the Secretariats of Ramsar and CAFF can contribute to building and sharing knowledge, creating awareness and enhancing capacity for understanding change. This cooperation can help focus more attention on trends in wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services in this period of a rapidly changing Arctic climate. Governments and other stakeholders may see the activities of CAFF and Ramsar as mutually supportive.

The Ramsar Secretariat intends to use relevant and available opportunities to promote the importance of Arctic biodiversity and ecosystem services, including status, trends and threats, including the co-organising of Arctic side-events at Ramsar meetings and the dissemination of CAFF assessments and other materials where appropriate.

CAFF intends to seek opportunities to raise awareness of Arctic wetlands and to use relevant and available opportunities to promote the importance of Arctic wetlands. CAFF's Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA) and Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program (CBMP) provide concrete opportunities to include wetland-related information, and to contribute wetland-relevant information from Arctic assessments into Ramsar's planned Global Wetland Reporting System (GWOS) and periodic reporting on the state of the world's wetlands.

Other areas where Ramsar and CAFF can potentially cooperate are through the Expert Monitoring Groups which are being formed under CAFF's Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme. These cover freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems and an Arctic Protected Areas monitoring framework, which could include monitoring of designated Ramsar Sites in the Arctic region.

CAFF Chair

The RAMSAR Secretariat

Date: 12-07-2012
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Date: 12-07-2012
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