

19/11/1999

Celebrating our Wetlands of International Importance

Following the adoption of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11) by the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties in Costa Rica earlier this year, the Convention's Standing Committee has decided that a good theme for World Wetlands Day in the year 2000 would be Celebrating our Wetlands of International Importance. A range of actions which could be taken by Contracting Parties under this theme are described below. Above all, World Wetlands Day should be the occasion to CELEBRATE wetlands, and in particular Ramsar sites, with emphasis being placed on their values, functions and attributes, and, of course, their scenic beauty.

1. **Raising community awareness of the importance of wetlands, and especially Ramsar sites.** Contracting Parties are urged to consider taking actions which will serve to generate public attention to their wetlands, and in particular to those sites which have already been included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Some suggested actions include:
 - i. **Publish and distribute illustrated descriptions of your Ramsar sites** and other significant wetlands as some Contracting Parties have already done. World Wetlands Day 2000 could provide the occasion to generate such materials if they do not yet exist and to make them available to the public at large. Primary and secondary schools, zoos, botanic gardens and aquaria, and NGOs could be appropriate channels for disseminating these materials.
 - ii. **Prepare and distribute appropriate materials** for the press, television and radio as part of a general awareness-raising effort.
 - iii. **Promote viewings of the new Ramsar Convention video** as premiered at COP7. The Bureau can provide copies of this 18-minute video in English, French or Spanish. Some Contracting Parties may wish to consider having the commentary on the video dubbed into their national language to increase the film's appeal and value. The Bureau can provide the script in hard or electronic copy in any of the three languages mentioned above for this purpose.
 - iv. **Prepare and unveil information and education signage at Ramsar sites.** The Ramsar Convention encourages Contracting Parties to erect information and education signs at suitable locations around their Ramsar sites in order to raise community awareness of the Convention and its work, as well as to improve the understanding of wetlands as community assets. In 1996 the Standing Committee recommended that Contracting Parties endeavour to install such signage at all of their sites, and even recommended an appropriate text to be included (Decision SC19.18). For World Wetlands Day 2000, Contracting Parties may wish to consider taking this opportunity to install and unveil at public ceremonies signs relating to the Ramsar status of their sites, as well as to their importance to community well-being and the conservation of biological diversity.
2. **Designation of new Ramsar sites.** In Resolution VII.11 (*Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*), COP7 set for the Convention the target of reaching 2000 Ramsar sites by

the time of COP9 in the year 2005. Given that site number 1000 was designated by Honduras in July 1999, achieving this target will require the designation of approximately 170 sites per year from now until COP9. With this target in mind, it is proposed that for World Wetland Day celebrations in 2000 the Convention aim to see designated on that day at least 200 new Ramsar sites. This will represent about half the number of designations pledged by Contracting Parties at COP7 and recorded through Resolution VII.12 (in which 56 Contracting Parties were noted as pledging a total of 398 new site designations). In pursuing this target of 200 site designations on World Wetlands Day 2000, Contracting Parties are urged to take into consideration the long-term vision and strategic objectives of the List and in particular to seek opportunities to designate under-represented wetland types such as seagrass and coral communities, mangrove areas and tidal flats (Resolution VII.21), and peatlands (both forested and non-forested).

3. **Actions to improve the management of Ramsar sites.** For World Wetlands Day 2000, under the theme of Celebrating our Wetlands of International Importance, Contracting Parties may also wish to consider announcing actions designed to ensure appropriate management of Ramsar designated areas. Some suggestions for possible actions are:
 - i) **Adopt or commission management plans for Ramsar sites.** At COP7 it was noted that good progress had been made by the Contracting Parties in the development of management plans for Ramsar sites. In fact, the progress was so good that through Resolution VII.12 the Contracting Parties agreed to increase the target in this area by urging that, by COP8 in 2002, management plans be in preparation or in place for at least three-quarters of their Ramsar sites. Noting that at COP7 this was the case with over 400 sites, the Contracting Parties have now committed themselves to taking action to commence management planning for at least 350 further sites in the next triennium (without considering the targets for the expansion of the List referred to under paragraph 2, above). Accordingly, Contracting Parties may wish to consider announcing on the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2000 those cases where a management planning process has been initiated for a Ramsar site, or where a management plan has now been finalised and adopted for implementation.
 - ii) **Organise a national workshop** involving those people with direct management responsibility for Ramsar sites in order to share experiences and develop more broadly-based and participatory management approaches. These could be site managers, local authorities with jurisdiction over the Ramsar site and other key stakeholders.