

Minutes

US National Ramsar Committee Annual Meeting

May 30, 2008

Meeting Started at 1:30 PM (EST)

Meeting Location: The annual meeting of the U.S. National Ramsar Committee was held on May 30, 2008, hosted by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies at the Hall of States (Room 233), 444 North Capital Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Members In Attendance: Royal Gardner (Stetson University College of Law); Vaughn Collins (Ducks Unlimited); Kim Connolly (USC Law School); Roy Darville (Caddo Lake); John Cecil (Audubon Society); Suzanne Pittenger-Slear (Environmental Concern); Don MacLauchlan (IAFWA), George Furness, Marcia Hanscom, Rick Lowerre (Caddo Lake), Christy Plummer (TNC), Deb Hahn (IAFWA), and Roy Van Hoek.

Members Via Phone: Rick Scudder, Laura England (Wisconsin Wetlands Assoc.)

Observers In Attendance: Herb Raffaele (USFWS), Gil Cintron (USFWS), Jean Schlegel (USFWS)

1. Royal Gardner welcomed the delegation from Francis Beidler Forest and the National Audubon Society, including Audubon President John Flicker. Roy also welcomed guests from the Society of Wetland Scientists. Roy thanked the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies for hosting the meeting.

John Flicker presented Roy Gardner with a plaque in recognition of his three years as Committee Chair of the US National Ramsar Committee. Roy has been an enthusiastic and productive leader. The Committee is appreciative of Roy's commitment to meeting the goals established by the USNRC, and for his continued dedication to the wise use of wetlands.

2. Herb Raffaele presented John Flicker with a certificate formally recognizing Francis Beidler Forest in South Carolina as the 23rd Ramsar site; designating the site as a "wetland of international importance". John Flicker thanked all who supported the process, and commented that "this designation underscores the importance of protecting and preserving our wetlands; when they disappear, so do birds and other wildlife, as well as natural flood protection." He also noted that "the importance of a system like Beidler Forest cannot be overstated."

3. Vaughn Collins presented a plaque to Don MacLauchlan (IAFWA) in recognition of his many years of service to the US National Ramsar Committee. The Committee is grateful for Don's contributions in support of the Committee's goals and accomplishments.

4. Approval of Minutes: Vaughn moved to accept the minutes as presented. The minutes were approved by consensus.

5. Announcements:

a. Roy thanked Maribeth Oakes for organizing the House Wildlife Refuge Caucus Congressional Briefing on behalf of Ramsar. Ms. Oakes thanked Stetson Law Professor and Ramsar Committee Chair, Royal Gardner, and Steve Atzert, Project Leader, Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, for their presentations introducing the audience to the

Ramsar Convention and the benefits associated with designating National Wildlife Refuges as wetlands of international importance. The list of attendees is available upon request.

b. Suzanne Pittenger-Slear, President of Environmental Concern (grant administrator for the Ramsar Small Grant Program) reported that a total of \$89,500 in grant funding provided by the FWS Wildlife Without Borders Program had been dispersed to EC for distribution to the grant awardees. Grant funding in the amount of \$28,700 was awarded to support the designation of new Ramsar sites. Recipients included: Ballona Institute, California; Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, California; and Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Wisconsin. Grant funding in the amount of \$50,700 was awarded to assist existing Ramsar sites with communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to promoting wetland conservation. Recipients included: Ahahui Malama I ka Lokahi, Hawaii; Cache River Wetlands, Illinois; Horicon Marsh, Wisconsin; Grassland Ecological Area, California. Also, the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, MD received funding to educate the public about the importance of the Chesapeake Bay Estuarine Complex. Rutgers University in New Jersey received funding for workshops to educate teachers about the Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. The University of Connecticut's Sea Grant Program received funding to raise awareness of the Connecticut River Estuary.

c. Jean Schlegel reported that the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park will be approved for Ramsar certification on June 13th. The Secretariat will formalize the process by "listing" the Research Park as an official Ramsar site.

d. Jean Schlegel also reported that the Palmyra Atoll NWR package has been received by the FWS office.

e. The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary RIS has been sent back with specific requests for additional information.

f. Laura England commented on Wisconsin Wetlands Association's strategic approach to identifying potential Ramsar sites. Laura discussed the process of creating a "short" list of 'high priority sites for Ramsar designation as key step in process.

g. Roy Von Hoek reported on several potential sites that are currently state owned reserves; Kim Connolly commented that the Congaree National Swamp is in the process of drafting the RIS. Beth Middleton is continuing to gather support for the Lodi Marsh site in Wisconsin.

6. OLD BUSINESS

a. World Wetlands Day (WWD) 2008 activities: Roy commented that the Shallow Water Nature Center opened a library corner; Kim Connolly traveled to Hawaii for the WWD celebration at the Kawainui-Hamakua Marsh Complex; Environmental Concern Inc., on behalf of the U.S. National Ramsar Committee, in celebration of World Wetlands Day announced the recipients of the "Promotion of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands" grant awards. These grants are funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife Without Borders Global Programs; Curriculum Coordinator, Bonnie T. Ervin, from the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring, Murfreesboro, Tennessee enjoyed the opportunity to share wetlands activities with the public, and thanked FWS for the supplies and materials; Seattle Pacific University's Geography of Natural Resources class visited the Union Bay Natural Area along Lake Washington today to mark World Wetlands Day; Mike Caron (Wakarusa reported from Kansas that on the eve of World Wetlands Day, the first of ten weekly benefit concerts was held in the student union of

Haskell Indian Nations University. These concerts will raise money for the impending legal battle to keep the South Lawrence Trafficway out of the Wakarusa Wetlands; the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park in Columbus Ohio celebrated WWD by naming their new symbol of World Wetlands Day - a muskrat named Olentangy Olga. The Wisconsin Wetlands Association held their 13th annual conference on January 31 and February 1 in honor of World Wetlands Day; Environmental Concern introduced a creative writing competition with a twist. Students in grades 8 -12 in the U.S. and its territories were challenged to write a creative wetland recipe written for a specific wetland organism living in one of the twenty-two U.S. Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance. The winning recipes will be compiled into electronic recipe cards and posted on Environmental Concern's website at www.wetland.org.; In celebration of WWD 2008, the Caddo Lake Clearinghouse sponsored the World Wetlands Day meeting at the Karnack Community Center, which included lectures on the history and future of oil and gas exploration in the Caddo Lake area of Texas and the threat posed by an invasive tree, the Chinese Tallow.

b. Report on Ramsar signage - Rick Lowerre reported that sets of Ramsar signs had been sent to all sites per their request. If any sites still want to order signs, they should contact Rick at the Caddo Lake Institute. The banners are available for all to use. Contact Rick if you would like to take the banners to a conference, meeting, etc.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. Discussion followed regarding U.S. implementing legislation for the Ramsar Convention. Herb Raffaele commented that guidelines are in order; members should bring issues to the table; the Council will then discuss and present policy. Kim Connolly agreed that we need guidelines. Discussion continued. A motion was made by Kim Connolly that the Committee should explore, and if deemed appropriate draft guidelines regarding implementation of legislation. After vote, the motion was approved by consensus.

b. Suzanne Pittenger-Slear updated the Committee on the progress of the National CEPA Action Plan. The FWS Wildlife Without Borders Small Grant Program is also funding this project. The first phase of the creation of the plan is underway. A database of stakeholders and interested parties is in the development stage. Once the database is complete, the parties will be asked to participate in the creation of the National CEPA Action Plan.

c. U.S. Ramsar Threats Task Force

i. Delaware Estuary update – Roy reported that Charles Duncan, the Executive Director of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, alerted the Ramsar community to the sharp decline of Red Knots and the species' dependence on horseshoe crab eggs at Delaware Bay. Roy requested information on commitments and decisions of Ramsar Parties on migratory waterbirds and intertidal systems from the Ramsar Secretariat, as well as members of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel. Based on that information, and after conferring with the Threats Task Force and USNRC officers, Roy sent a letter to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission on behalf of Ramsar in support of a moratorium on horseshoe crabbing in the Delaware Bay Estuary. New Jersey adopted a moratorium on horseshoe crab harvests in May.

ii. The Committee decided not to take a stand on future issues at this time. The Committee will comment on issues by writing letters of support on behalf of the Ramsar sites, and taking other actions that focus on the importance of the Ramsar designation as a wetland of international importance, and the significance of any changes that occur at the sites.

d. Society of Wetland scientists Ramsar SubCommittee reported on current activities.

e. USNRC Collaboration with EPA on Eco System Services research- discussion regarding improving wetlands protection followed.

f. International Cooperation

i. COP-10 Planning and US National report- Marina Ratchford sent the US National Report to the Ramsar Secretariat. Jean Schlegel will send information relating to the COP 10 by e-mail as soon as it is available.

ii. Roy reported on the COP-10 side event: This joint side event will discuss and highlight the benefits that flow from Ramsar designation, even when the sites are already protected to some degree under domestic laws. The panel will report on the findings of surveys conducted on 22 U.S. Ramsar sites and 37 Canadian Ramsar sites. The presentations and discussions will be highly relevant to one of the main pillars of the Ramsar Convention. We envision that other countries may wish to conduct similar surveys, which can lead to a strengthening of the Ramsar site network as well as encouraging interest in additional designations (as has been the case in the United States)

iii. Kim Connolly and Roy Gardner reported that the African Ramsar Sites are conducting a survey based on the US model.

g. Roy Gardner distributed the draft 2008-2009 Strategic Plan for review by the Committee. Members were asked to comment by e-mail to Suzanne Pittenger-Slear.

h. Roy Darville presented the Treasurer's Report. Upon motion and second, the report was approved by consensus. Roy will distribute the updated list of members as soon as he has received the balance of the membership dues.

i. The Nominating Committee presented the proposed slate of Officers for the next term:

Chair: Suzanne Pittenger-Slear

Vice Chair: Vaughn Collins

Treasurer: Roy Darville

Secretary: Deb Hahn

There were no additional nominations from the floor. The slate of Officers was elected by unanimous vote.

j. After a brief discussion, it was decided that it would be beneficial to continue to hold the meetings at Ramsar sites. The exact date and location will be announced as soon as the arrangements are made.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Pittenger-Slear
Secretary, USNRC
05/30/2008