

Minutes

Annual US National Ramsar Committee Meeting

May 22, 2006

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (Ramsar Site), Cambridge, MD

Members Attending: Royal Gardner (Stetson University College of Law): Kim Connolly (USC Law School), Vaughn Collins (Ducks Unlimited), Bronwyn Mitchell (Environmental Concern), Suzanne Pittenger-Slear (Environmental Concern), Roy Darville (Caddo Lake), Don MacLauchlan (IAFWA), George Furness (Conservation Treaty Support Fund). **By conference phone:** Mike Caron (Save the Wakarusa Wetlands), Bruce and Corinne Monroe (Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge), Rick Lowere (Caddo Lake Institute).

Observers: Patricia Delgado (NOAA), Eleanore Fox (US Department of State), Carol Lively (US Forest Service). **By conference phone:** Marina Ratchford (US Fish & Wildlife Service), Gil Cintron (US Fish & Wildlife Service).

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes for the January, 13, 2006 meeting were presented for approval. The minutes were approved by consensus. The minutes will be posted on the website for members to review and make comments.

Announcements:

a. Three Conferences with Ramsar Panels:

- The Association of State Wetland Managers International Symposium, Michigan August 2006. Royal and Kim will be attending. Kim, Clayton Rubec (Canada Environment), and Bill Volkert (Wisconsin DNR) will speak on the first panel. There will be a second panel there that will discuss international Ramsar issues, where Clayton Rubec will speak about the Mesopotamian marshlands.
- Restore America's Estuaries, New Orleans, December 2006. Royal and Mike McCoy (Tijuana Estuary) will be attending and presenting.
- International Wildlife Conference, Stetson University, January 2007. Dave Pritchard of Birdlife International, Svitlana Kravchenko (University of Oregon), and Joseph Dellapenna (Villanova) will be presenting.

b. STRP Meeting: Switzerland, May 29th. Royal Gardner will be there as STRP North American representative. Ducks Unlimited and SWS will also be present at the meeting.

c. Migratory Bird and Wetland NewsLink: The next issue will be coming out shortly.

Note: Bill Howard with the Wildlife Habitat Council passed away in March. A memorial service was held in his honor in the DC area.

Treasurer's Report: Currently there is \$4700 in the account. Dues of \$1150 have been received to date. The USNRC received \$5000 from the IAFWA (which received a grant from

the US Fish and Wildlife Service) to reimburse Royal's travel expenses to COP9. The reimbursement to Caddo Lake was to fund website work. The website is currently managed by Stetson University. There is no charge associated with that. Roy asked for any additional contacts who may be interested in becoming members to be sent to him. Vaughn Collins moved to accept the treasurer's report. The motion was seconded and approved.

Old Business

World Wetlands Day: Kim Connolly wrote an excellent op-ed piece for South Carolina newspapers. Bronwyn mailed to sites marketing materials with a letter on behalf of the USNRC. Bronwyn will contact everyone who requested materials and ask them to send a paragraph or two stating what they did with the materials. Suzanne volunteered to do a follow up with all sites that received materials. The USNRC will analyze the information to see if there is a group that may be approached for membership in the committee. Marina has WWD 2006 materials left; half will be mailed to EC.

Benefits Survey: Seventeen of 22 sites replied to date. Kim discussed formatting of the survey. A general discussion regarding the responses followed. Once the final report is received, Kim and Royal will be publishing two articles. In so doing they will be making a report that can be provided to various audiences to increase awareness about Ramsar and explain the benefits associated with Ramsar designation. Committee members have agreed to contact sites that have not returned the survey. Marina asked for all information received from surveys and contact person from each site.

New Business:

Framework for Designating New Sites:

Vaughn suggested best course of action is to wait for results of survey, then proceed with outreach effort.

Possible Sites for Designation:

- **Coastal Louisiana;** Suzanne and Vaughn attended New Orleans Symposium sponsored by BP – planted seed to seek Ramsar designation as good thing for coast. This made it into the outreach plan and Governor's task force report.
- **Panther Island Mitigation Bank, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary** run by Audubon, both in Florida; both are enthusiastic about possibility of applying for designated Ramsar sites. Royal has scheduled a site visit on July 20th to discuss Ramsar designation.
- **San Francisco Estuary;** Molly Martindale expressed interest in learning more about Ramsar.
- **Northwestern Hawaiian Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve;** They are considering seeking World Heritage Status. Royal contacted them regarding Ramsar designation. They are interested in both, but no action is scheduled before fall.

Vaughn asked Marina about the time frame from making application until designation. It can take approximately 6 months to several years, depending on site. There are no pending applications. We should look into any dormant applicants.

Kim asked about **Congaree Swamp** in South Carolina – an application was submitted several years ago, but no action was taken. Marina will look into the situation.

The USNRC should act as facilitators, not allowing any communication gaps, to support the application process.

Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs): Ramsar sites must update their RISs every 6 years. The updated RISs for ten sites are due or overdue. The USNRC can assist with this process, perhaps by having interns create draft RISs for sites.

CEPA: Suzanne Pittenger-Slear has accepted the position as USNRC NGO Focal Point.

Wetlands International: The USNRC will not be joining WI as a member, but Kim will serve as the USNRC's liaison to WI. She provided comments to WI on a piece of US legislation.

WHMSI Proposal Update: Marina reported on the status of the WHMSI proposal, which will not be updated until December. She explained that there is a need for an extensive lobbying campaign to fund WHMSI. The WHMSI committee will need to persuade other countries to endorse project. Once Costa Rica, Uruguay, Colombia, St. Lucia and the United States have responded to the grant application, we will have a better idea of how others will respond.

National Outreach Relative to Committee Membership: The Nature Conservancy needs to designate a new representative to work with the USNRC. National Wildlife Federation (NWF) does not have the staff to commit for budgetary reasons, but NWF has promised that when it fills out its full staff contingent, it will try to assign somebody to it. It was also noted that the Wildlife Habitat Council may re-engage, as it reorganizes.

Ramsar International Organizational Partners: The Ramsar Standing Committee suggested that it may be useful for Ramsar's International Organizational Partners to be part of the various National Committees. The IOPs are the International Water Management Institute, BirdLife International, IUCN, WWF, and Wetlands International. IUCN and WWF are the only organizations with a US presence, and Royal will send an invitation for the organizations to attend the next meeting. [John Cecil noted that BirdLife also has a staff member based in the US, Gary Allport (Senior Conservation Policy Advisor for BirdLife), who is based in Audubon's DC office. We will invite Gary to our next meeting.]

Co-sponsorship of Lectures and Web Casts: Wetland-related events at schools would be a good way to publicize Ramsar and the Committee. Royal questioned who should decide committee co-sponsorship. Vaughn suggested common practice would be the Executive Committee.

Transboundary Sites: Mike McCoy is currently working on border issues at the Tijuana site. There is no formal system of designating transboundary sites at this time, as the Ramsar parties decided to defer this issue to COP 10. Marina suggested that Mike could get in touch with IUCN. IUCN is currently compiling a list of case studies of transboundary cooperation

in wetlands management, which can serve as the basis to establish guidelines for designation of transboundary Ramsar sites in the future.

Purchase of Traveling Display Board: Bronwyn described the four display options, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The display materials would be circulated and available for travel. Vaughn suggests that one of the universities come up with a sketch design for the display board to be discussed at a future meeting. A mock-up sketch will be forwarded to Committee.

Implementation of Strategic Plan:

- **Promote the designation of US Ramsar sites.** We have talked about some specific sites – on way to meeting goal.
- **Foster different linkages among sectors of the domestic and international wetland communities.** E-mail updates sent monthly, and we are continuing to support the Migratory Bird and Wetlands NewsLink.
- **Encourage linkages with US and other Ramsar sites.** We are exploring collaboration between US and Canadian Ramsar sites, and Panama.
- **Promoting linkages between the US Ramsar sites and the Secretariat.** There are additional opportunities through the STRP. Royal and representative from DU will be there. The USNRC sent a representative to a meeting of the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative. We now have a liaison with Wetlands International.
- **Participating in Fish Habitat Initiative.** We have not made any progress on this goal. Patti suggested that we need to reach out to fish communities – this is missing link. Vaughn commented on subgroups advocating for own concerns. Committee needs to act as *honest brokers*, for fish *and* bird habitat. Patti will get more information and explore how the committee can add value to initiative.
- **CEPA** – We support education and public awareness of wetlands. We are helping to coordinate events for World Wetlands Day. Bronwyn sent out materials to sites. We are planning to establish a speaker’s bureau. We held this meeting at a Ramsar site. We are publishing articles on Ramsar sites in newsletters and journals.

Election of Officers:

Don contacted the current officers, and all are willing to serve another term. Larry and Don moved that we reelect officers for second term. Motion carried unanimously.

Dates for Next Meeting:

Vaughn suggested co-location to meet some of our criteria – at Ramsar site or similar location. Kim suggested Congaree Swamp in South Carolina as show of support for its desire to become a Ramsar site. A decision was made to have a conference call in August time frame, and a fall meeting in person.