

Minutes

U.S. National Ramsar Committee Regular Meeting

September 6, 2006

Meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Conference call hosted by Ducks Unlimited. The Committee extends a note of thanks to Ducks Unlimited for volunteering to sponsor the conference call.

Members Calling In: Royal Gardner (Stetson University College of Law), Kim Connolly (USC Law School), Neil Shader (Ducks Unlimited), Vaughn Collins (Ducks Unlimited), Suzanne Pittenger-Slear (Environmental Concern), Rick Lowerre (Caddo Lake), Mike Caron (Save the Wakarusa Wetlands), Don McLaughlin (AFWA).

Observers: Laurie Wenzel (NOAA), Patricia Delgado (NOAA), Carol Lively (Forest Service), Marina Ratchford (FWS), Gil Cintron (FWS).

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes for the May 22, 2006 meeting were presented for approval. The Minutes were approved by consensus. The Minutes will be posted on the website for members to review.

Announcements:

- 1. Caddo Lake:** The Caddo Lake Institute will hold its Second Flow Ecology Workshop and first meeting of Caddo Lake Watershed Protection Plan on October 2-4, 2006. All are welcome to come.
- 2. Ramsar Intern Opening:** The Ramsar Secretariat has interns from all regions. There is currently one opening for an intern from the Americas; terms of reference are available on the website.
- 3. International Wildlife Conference:** Stetson University will be hosting the Ninth International Wildlife Conference on January 26-27, 2007. On the morning of January 27, there will be a Ramsar panel with Dave Pritchard of BirdLife International, Svitlana Kravchenko of University of Oregon Law School, and Joe Dellapenna of Villanova Law School.

Old Business:

Ramsar Benefits Survey: Eighteen of twenty-two sites have returned survey results to date. The Environmental Law Reporter is interested in publishing the results of the survey. Kim and Royal committed to giving a draft of the survey by mid-October, with a publication date scheduled for February. It would be beneficial to the Committee to have a published article focusing on the benefits of U.S. Ramsar designation.

Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) Updates: Data provided to the Secretariat must be current and updated every 6 years. There are a number of sites that are overdue or have obligations coming due. This is an area where the U.S. National Ramsar Committee can provide assistance. Research assistants from Stetson University prepared initial drafts of several updated RISs and then forwarded them on to the site managers. Marina added all but six sites need updates; the Stetson University students have been very helpful in drafting and communicating with the site managers. There are still sites that we have not heard from. Ramsar members will encourage sites to send in their data.

Signage: Conference call scheduled to talk about signage; Bronwyn, Rick, Kim and Roy discussed funding opportunities – Caddo Lake offered partial funding for traveling display board and signage for Ramsar sites. A uniform banner has been suggested as a format for the signage for each site in order to further promote the Ramsar designation. Signage is an ongoing project.

Association of State Wetlands Conference: There were two Ramsar panels at the ASWM conference in Michigan. The first panel consisted of Kim Connolly of South Carolina Law School, Clay Rubec of Canada, and Bill Volkert of Horicon Marsh, Wisconsin. The panel helped increase general awareness about Ramsar among attendees. There was a second panel that focused more on international issues such as the Mesopotamian Marshlands in Iraq and a Ramsar site in India. Royal also spoke about wetlands in the global context in the closing plenary session. There were four items that came out of our participation in the conference:

1. Wisconsin Wetlands Association: They have been very active with World Wetlands Day. Its outreach program director attended the conference. Royal and Kim spoke with her about the WWA joining the Committee, and she expressed interest in doing so.
2. Bill Volkert expressed a sentiment we have heard before. The sites may feel little to no connection to Ramsar. They receive a designation and then that's it; there is not larger connection to the U.S. Ramsar community. Royal suggested employing some technology that would let us have conference calls and be connected by the web where someone could provide a presentation in PowerPoint. The sites can take turns doing presentations about their sites, creating more of a sense of community among the U.S. Ramsar sites.
3. Increased interest in seeking site designation, with possible sites in Minnesota (USFWS), Michigan (no designated sites), and Wisconsin (Wisconsin Wetlands Association is considering potential sites).
4. We have been invited to have another Ramsar panel in next year's conference. It was a very successful event.

Visiting Candidate Sites: Royal visited the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and the adjoining Panther Island Mitigation Bank (property will be turned over to the Sanctuary when mitigation credits sold). Both are very interested in seeking designation. Data has been collected from the sites, and Royal has a research assistant who is putting that together. Hopefully we will have a completed application this academic year. Kim is working with potential sites in South Carolina. Marina commented on a request from a potential South Carolina site for advice on designation with respect to boundary changes and private land. Ramsar designation needs local political support, which includes support from adjoining land owners.

World Wetlands Day: This year the planning for WWD will begin far in advance to be sure that the sites receive materials timely. Suzanne suggested having the sites use that day as an outreach effort/community event. This would be an opportunity to educate people about the site and the designation, and tie that in with the unveiling of the signage. We are trying to get information from the sites about who would like World Wetlands Day materials ahead of time in an effort to get the information to them sooner than we did last year. The theme this year will be Wetlands and Fisheries. Marina's office will be the focal point for distributing the information. Media coverage for the event would also offer additional exposure. Suzanne will draft a press release and email it to all the members, and then to site managers. Members and NGOs can help with publicity for the event. Royal will send out an email to the sites about the signs.

Increasing Awareness: Earth Caches and Geo Coins were suggested as possibilities for increasing exposure for Ramsar sites. Connecticut is looking at possibility of minting a coin that has the Connecticut Geological Survey on one side, with the Connecticut River and the Ramsar logo on the other side. This could be something we might expand to the other sites. Other suggestions included Ramsar bumper stickers, pins, and decals.

Report on the Scientific and Technical Review Panel Meeting: The STRP meeting was held at the end of May and June. The primary point of that meeting was to agree on the work plan for the STRP for next three years, and establish priorities. Royal volunteered for a number of different projects, such as research on identifying wetlands projects that have a component of poverty alleviation. He is also committed to giving a summary of wetland mitigation policies in the U.S. If there is an STRP project that you are particularly interested in, Royal can direct you to the right person for more information.

Transboundary Sites: Gil updated the group on the discussion of the issue of transboundary sites that took place at COP9 in Uganda. Royal will review Gil's e-mail related to same.

Dates for Next Meeting:

Discussion followed regarding the possibility of holding the next meeting at one of the Ramsar sites, and to invite Ramsar site managers from all sites to attend, if possible.

Next Meeting:

Conference Call: November 17th 2:00 p.m. [Note: This was later rescheduled to Friday, December 1, at 1:00 p.m. EST.]
