

2008 Hanoi Call to Action on Wetlands: Heart of Asia

Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems on the planet. In addition to supporting exceptional levels of biological diversity, the ecosystem services provided by wetlands contribute to natural disaster prevention or mitigation, poverty reduction, socio-economic development, and water and food security; positively contributing to human health and well-being. Wetlands in the Asia region, however, continue to be lost or degraded at an alarming rate. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports, for example, that some 1,900 million hectares of mangroves – or about 25 percent of the 1980 area – have been lost during the last 25 years.

The 187 symposium participants from 20 countries recognized that the greatest challenge in Asia lies in the need for more effective and efficient governance structures and mechanisms at the international, regional, national and local levels to support wetland conservation and wise use. Equally, participants recognized the need to link development initiatives and biodiversity conservation goals in a coordinated and planned manner. Participants expressed particular concern about the threat to wetland ecosystems arising from the negative impacts of climate change, and recognized the need to continue to increase communications, education and public awareness about the value of wetlands, particularly within the development sector.

The Asian Wetland Symposium identified 10 urgent and immediate actions that should be taken to address these challenges, and calls on policy and decision-makers to give priority attention to these, and to ensure that the necessary resources are made available to support their implementation at the local, national and regional levels.

1. Restore degraded marine/coastal, freshwater and human-made wetlands so that they can continue to conserve biodiversity and provide the range of ecosystem services that contribute to human health and well-being such as food and water supply, water purification, climate and flood regulation, coastal protection, and recreational opportunities.
2. Develop and implement best practice approaches to agriculture (including aquaculture) in wetlands through the application of environment-friendly farming practices such as Integrated Pest Management, organic farming, waste treatment systems, and efficient water management.
3. Adopt an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to the development and implementation of tools and methodologies for wetland assessment, monitoring and management, such as wetland valuation, wetland vulnerability assessment, and river basin management.
4. Document, and disseminate information about traditional cultural practices and indigenous knowledge which contribute positively to the conservation and wise use of wetland resources, and where possible, incorporate these into the management of wetlands.

5. Identify integrated approaches for linking development goals and biodiversity conservation in order to achieve both improved local livelihoods and wetland protection. One approach could be to pursue wetland conservation and wise use actions through the Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction Strategies.
6. Undertake further research on the impacts of climate change on wetlands, and make the findings widely available. Priority should be given to research on practical and effective adaptation and mitigation measures that can be taken at wetland sites, for example, with respect to coastal wetlands, identify measures in response to rising sea levels and natural disasters such as typhoons and cyclones. Mainstream climate change adaptation and/or mitigation strategies into wetland planning and decision-making.
7. Establish, review and strengthen institutional structures and mechanisms at the regional, national and local levels to support wetland conservation and wise use, including decentralized structures, public-private sector partnerships, and rights-based approaches.
8. Strengthen existing policy and legal frameworks to enable the meaningful and effective participation of all stakeholders in decision-making related to the conservation and wise use of wetlands; in this regard, priority attention should be paid to enhancing the involvement of marginalized groups such as women, and vulnerable groups such as the poorest of the poor.
9. Develop transboundary wetland agreements, or "twinning" and flyway networking arrangements as a means to enhance cooperation on shared wetland systems and species, and to promote peace.
10. Establish mechanisms to enable the effective transfer of knowledge and sharing of experiences on wetland conservation and wise use tools and approaches among wetland researchers, planners and decision-makers in Asia.

The 2008 Asian Wetland Symposium proposes that prior to the next Asian Wetland Symposium a review be undertaken of the progress with regards implementation of the actions identified above, and that a report on this be made available to advise the deliberations at that time.

The 2008 Asian Wetland Symposium was held in Hanoi from 22 to 25 June 2008, hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Viet Nam with support from the Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan, IUCN and the Ramsar Centre Japan.

The organizers of the 2008 Asian Wetland Symposium seek the assistance of the Government of Viet Nam to convey this "2008 Hanoi Call to Action on Wetlands: Heart of Asia" to the forthcoming 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands to be held in Changwon, Republic of Korea from 28 October to 4 November 2008.

Hanoi, Viet Nam, 25 June 2008