



World Wetlands Day 2013



The 2nd of February each year is designated as World Wetlands Day. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands (known as the Ramsar Convention) on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar. The 2013 World Wetlands Day theme is “Wetlands and Water Management,” reflecting how the wise use of wetlands is essential to sustainable water management, and the slogan is, “Wetlands Take Care of Water.”

World Wetlands Day is an important occasion to raise public awareness about the value of wetlands to society and the role of the Convention in their wise use and conservation, and provides an opportunity for local actions to contribute to U.S. foreign policy goals globally. In 2013 the United States will undertake activities to recognize World Wetlands Day at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad and across the United States, ranging from wetland cleanups to bird watching walks to public awareness raising via social media.



Photo credit: Sarah R. Bowman

What is a Wetland?

The Ramsar Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands, including swamps and marshes, lakes and rivers, wet grasslands and peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, near-shore marine areas, mangroves and coral reefs, as well as human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans. Wetlands exist in every country in the world and in every climatic zone, from the polar regions to the tropics, and on every continent. Even wetlands that are dry for some period of time during the year are important to wildlife, especially for breeding purposes.

Why are Wetlands Important?

- Wetlands are *cradles of biological diversity*, providing water, habitat, and food upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival.
- Wetlands *perform vital ecological functions*, including water purification and storage, storm protection and flood mitigation, shoreline stabilization and erosion control, groundwater recharge and discharge, and retention of nutrients and sediments.
- Wetlands *provide tremendous economic benefits*, including water supply, fisheries, agricultural support through the maintenance of water tables and nutrient retention in floodplains, fuel sources, wildlife resources, transportation, and recreation and tourism.
- Wetlands have *special religious and spiritual value*, serving as a source of aesthetic and artistic inspiration, and supporting local social, economic, and cultural traditions.

What Threats do Wetlands Face?

- *Filling, ditching, or draining* of wetlands for commercial development, houses, ports, highways, airports, waste disposal sites, or agriculture.
- *Pollution* from sediment, fertilizer, human sewage, animal waste, road salts, pesticides, and heavy metals can contaminate or degrade wetlands and the ecosystems they support.
- *Invasive species* displace local aquatic flora and fauna, alter water flow, quantity, and quality, and disrupt overall wetland ecosystem functionality.
- *Climate change* is causing some wetlands to disappear under rising sea levels, while others are severely impacted by changing climatic conditions, including drought.
- *Excessive withdrawals of water* from wetlands for agriculture, residential or commercial use.
- *Construction of dams* impedes water flow and replenishment of wetlands.

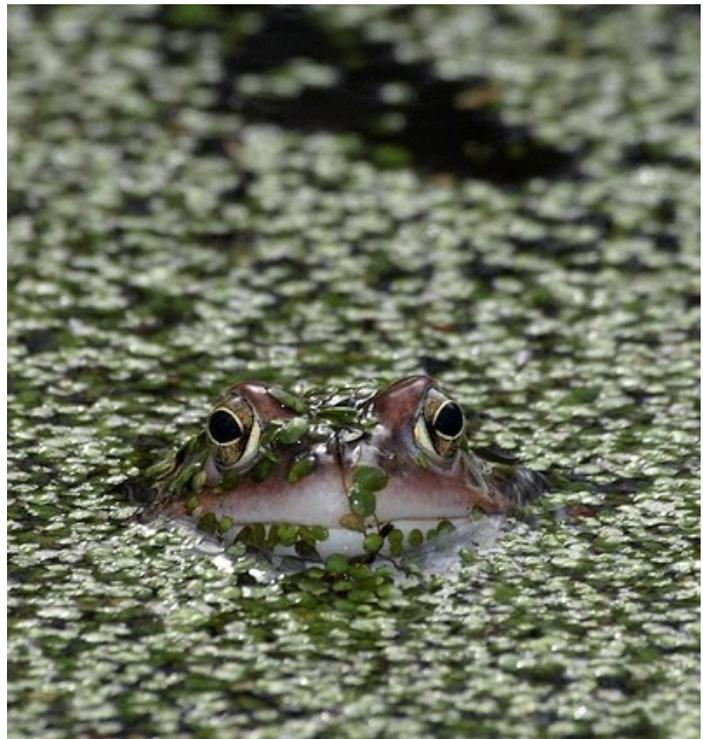


Photo credit: Zbigniew Urbanczyk

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

The Ramsar Convention, one of the oldest environmental treaties, was developed to call international attention to the rate at which wetland habitats were disappearing, in part due to a lack of understanding of their important functions, values, goods, and services. The Convention provides an international framework for action and cooperation to conserve and wisely use wetlands and their resources. Governments that join the Convention commit to reversing wetland loss and degradation.

Today, 163 countries, including the United States, are Parties to the Convention. Over 2,000 wetlands covering nearly 200 million hectares around the world are officially designated as Wetlands of International Importance, indicating that a country has committed to promote the conservation of that wetland. The United States currently has 34 Ramsar sites covering 1,668,485 hectares. The U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service partner to support the Convention.



Information Links

Ramsar Convention www.ramsar.org, http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-activities-wwds-wwd2013index/main/ramsar/1-63-78%5E25913_4000_0

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service www.fws.gov/wetlands/

The Convention has five formally recognized International Organization Partners which provide expert technical advice at global, national, local, and field levels.

BirdLife International www.birdlife.org

International Water Management Institute (IWMI) www.iwmi.cgiar.org

Wetlands International www.wetlands.org

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) www.iucn.org

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) www.wwf.org

Contact

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