



## **Final Minutes**

### **US National Ramsar Committee Meeting May 8, 2014**

**Meeting was conducted via phone and in person between 2:00 pm – 4:30**

**Members Participating:** Chair, Kim Diana Connolly (SUNY Buffalo Law School); Suzanne Pittenger-Slear (Environmental Concern); Vice-Chair, Katie Beilfuss (Wisconsin Wetlands Association); Secretary, Deb Hahn (AFWA); Dawn Orsak and Rick Lowerre (Caddo Lake Institute); Boze Hancock (TNC); Ralph Tiner (University of Massachusetts); Bill Mitch (FL Gulf Coast University)

**Observers Participating:** Tracy O'Toole, Gil Cintron, and Krishna Roy (USFWS); Jeanne Christie (Assn of State Wetland Managers); Barbara De Rosa Joynt (State Department); Tom Dahl (retired USFWS, National Wetlands Inventory); Mike McDavitt and Kathleen Kutschenreuter (EPA)

**Call the meeting to Order:** Suzanne Pittenger-Slear, on behalf of the Chair called the meeting to order.

**Meeting minutes:** Minutes from the last meeting were approved unanimously.

- 1. New Ramsar Sites (Tracy O'Toole)** – On February 2, 2013 the San Francisco Bay Estuary in California was designated. On November 20, 2013 the Missisquoi Delta and Bay Wetlands in Vermont were designated. The latest designation was Chassahowitzka national Wildlife Refuge, FL. USFWS hopes to have it added to the official Ramsar site list by the Secretariat in the coming months. That brings the number of US sites to 37. USFWS does not have any pending applications.
- 2. New Sites (All)** – Kim Connolly is working on a new designation. It will be the first transboundary Ramsar site. Bose Hamilton and Katie Beilfuss are working on a number of new site designations.
- 3. New RIS Form (Krishna Roy)** - The Convention will be making the move in the coming nine months to the new Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS), which was approved through Resolution XI.8 at COP11. The Parties approved a model of the new RIS form in English, French and Spanish. As the Parties requested in Resolution XI.8, the Secretariat has also worked on redeveloping the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) to enable them to submit Ramsar Site information online using an internet-based form, rather than a form in Microsoft Word format. Use of the new RIS will be mandatory from January 2015. By 31 January a version will also be available for offline use, so Parties can compile and submit information without continuous internet connection. However we will encourage Parties to use the online system, so they can profit from the system's species catalogues, help functions and other automated support as they proceed.

The following information explains the sequence of events through the period of transition until January, for Parties working in English.

The online version of the new form will be launched with the new RSIS during 2014, first in English by 31 August and then in French and Spanish by 30 November. This period between the release of the English version and the other versions will allow the Parties and the Secretariat to use the new RSIS system and identify any necessary adjustments before the RSIS is launched in French and Spanish.

For designation of a new Site, the Secretariat respectfully asks Parties not to use the old (2009-2014) format RIS after 1 June 2014. If you have almost completed the process of compiling information for a new Site in the old format RIS, please try to submit it before this date.

If you plan to update the information on an existing Ramsar Site, we also strongly encourage you to use the new RIS format, uploading your information directly on the new RSIS from August. The Secretariat will continue to support Parties who have already prepared and submitted updates in the old format; if you have almost completed the process of updating and submitting information using the old format, please try to submit it before 1 June.

As soon as the new RSIS is launched in August, Parties are strongly encouraged to start inputting information online directly. This applies to those designating a new Site and those updating information on an existing Site. It is important that Parties start using the new RSIS as soon as possible, so that any necessary adjustments can be identified before the French and Spanish versions are launched.

- 4. World Wetlands Day 2014 Reports (All)** – Environmental Concern took 167 students from St. Michael's Elementary School out to clean up the 2 mile nature trail. It was a good educational experience for the kids. The Wisconsin Wetlands Association held their annual wetlands science conference. More 300 people attended the meeting. State department did a social media push through 25 Embassies. EPA put out a marketing piece that highlighted World Wetlands Day. Corkscrew Swamp, FL (our 26<sup>th</sup> Ramsar site) engaged thousands of people on World Wetlands Day. The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge had 2,200 middle and high school students at their indoor wetlands fair.

Ideas to maximize the impact of World Wetlands Day - It would be useful to get the Committee discuss World Wetlands Day in December. We could develop common messages and have a more unified approach. American wetlands month is May. In more northern climates, February is a more difficult time to get people out to celebrate wetlands. Could we put out a piece from the US Committee to recognize World Wetlands Day?

- 5. Website Status (Krishna Roy)** – The site has been moved to a new domain (<http://www.usnrc.net/>). We can update the site. Li Zhang will manage the new website. **ACTION:** Please go to the link provided and send comments and suggestions on updates to the website to Bill Mitch ([wmitsch@fgcu.edu](mailto:wmitsch@fgcu.edu)) by June 8, 2014.
- 6. Facebook Page (Suzanne/Katie)** – They are trying to keep the Facebook page active. We need to use the contact information for site contacts and Ramsar Committee members in order to broaden the reach of the page.
- 7. Twitter account** – Kim created a Twitter account that was mostly used during the Ramsar CoP in 2012. **ACTION:** Kim will send account information to Deb to include in the minutes.
- 8. Bylaws and Strategic Plan** – We need volunteers to review the bylaws and update them. Kim had the bylaws reviewed a couple years ago in relation to non-profit status. **ACTION:** Suzanne will

send the Bylaws out. **ACTION:** The new officers will take a look at the Bylaws and make recommendations. Committee members and observers can review and send comments to the new officers also.

9. **Emails – ACTION:** Send an email to Deb ([dhahn@fishwildlife.org](mailto:dhahn@fishwildlife.org)) if you have not received correspondence from Suzanne and others about this meeting.
10. **Puerto Rican Site Designation** – USFWS was interested in promoting new site designations. With mangroves and coral reefs underrepresented in the current list of sites, they identified 6 potential sites in Puerto Rico. One is in the SW corner and is a WHSRN site. The USFWS gathered all the necessary information for the designation. They need a partner in Puerto Rico to finalize fill out the RIS form. Possible partners include USFWS field office, the Department of Natural Resources or TNC. Other potential Ramsar sites include a NOAA reserve on the NE tip of Puerto Rico, the western side of the island of Vieques (one of the largest sea grass beds in the Caribbean) and the island of St. Croix, which has a national park called Buck Island.
11. **Wetlands for the Future Projects (Krishna Roy/Barbara DeRosa Joynt)** – State Department provided \$200,000 to fund these projects. The Secretariat receives and reviews proposals. Most recently, they funded projects in Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Chili, Ecuador, and Suriname. There are projects in 4 others countries that are being reviewed.
12. **Committee Reports –**
  - a. **Threats Task Force** – See number 15 below
  - b. **Finance Committee** – The new officers will discuss finances and develop a way forward.
  - c. **Governance Committee** – No updates
  - d. **Nominating Committee** – The Nominations Committee (Roy Gardner, Jeanne Christie, and Siobhan Fennessy) provided the following slate of officers for nomination - Bill Mitch, Chair; Suzanne Pittinger-Slear, Vice-Chair, Deb Hahn, Secretary; Ralph Tiner, Treasurer. The motion to accept the slate was made and seconded. See reolution at the end of the minutes.
13. **Upcoming SWC wetland meeting** – The USFWS can ship Ramsar displays for the annual meeting. Bill will look into getting help from a couple of graduate students to put up the display.
14. **Committee communication** – The Committee would like to have two meetings a year and bi monthly conference calls.
15. **Threats to Kakagon and Bad River Sloughs Ramsar Site (Cyrus Hester)** – In 2011, a company leased the mineral rights across a ridge line that is above the site. They are going to extract iron ore. Permits have been provided for assays etc. The permit to operate the mine may come in the next couple of years. The first phase would be the construction of a 4.5 mile long open pit. Operations in other states show impacts such as loading of sediments, elevated sulfite, which impairs the growth of rice, and a number of other metals in ground water. The extent of the impacts from this project requires a more rigorous investigation and additional transparency. The Secretariat will be in DC in June. The USFWS will be setting up meetings with Wisconsin delegations to discuss the site. **ACTION:** The Committee discussed writing a letter in support of the site. Suzanne will look at previous draft letters. For more information on the issues see the NY Times article ([http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/opinion/sunday/the-fight-for-wisconsins-soul.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/opinion/sunday/the-fight-for-wisconsins-soul.html?_r=0))
16. **Prairie Potholes Regional Report from the National Wetlands Inventor (NWI) (Tom Dahl)** – The Prairie Pothole region is extremely important to migratory birds and other wildlife. They also reduce sedimentation, store floodwaters, protect water quality, etc. Sixty to 65% of the wetlands have been lost and although it has slowed the losses continue at an estimated rate of 6,200 acres. The NWI regional report points to the loss of wetland basins which are critical for waterfowl. The report should be released by the end of the month. Copies will be shared with the US Ramsar Committee. For more information on NWI see their website (<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/NWI/Overview.html>).

At a future meeting, we will discuss the NWI and its current and future needs so that it is able meet update imagery and provide the best mapping possible.

17. **Wetlands mapper** – The USFWS has mapped the wetlands in the lower 48 states. The website has a tool on the left hand side that is called sites of importance, which includes Ramsar sites. <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/Data/index.html>
18. **Bivalve reef presentation (Dr. Boze Hancock)** – TNC is concerned about the loss of oyster reefs. Loss of the reefs impacts shore line stabilization, water quality, recruitment of some fish, subsistence and commercial fisheries, and tourism to name a few. There has been some successful restoration of damaged sites. TNC has identified some bivalve sites that might be good Ramsar sites. There are 4 in the US in Pamlico Sound, NC; Canaveral National Seashore and Charlotte Harbor, FL; and North Bay, Puget Sound, WA. They may develop RISs for these sites this summer. He will bring the state proponents together and the Ramsar Committee can be involved as needed.
19. **Wetlands Link International (Jeanne Christie)** – A webinar was held in November to engage wetland centers and interpretive centers in North America. They discussed renaming America Wetlands month, North American Wetlands month. EPA and other partners started it but it does not necessarily belong to anyone. Another option would be to make it more tri-lateral or tri-national in nature without changing the name. EPA maintains a website (<http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/outreach/>) and a Twitter account and developed a widget. Can the US Ramsar Committee members work together to promote Americas Wetlands Month. **ACTION:** Conduct a national webinar about American Wetlands Month next year. The timing would be great as it is before the CoP and it is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Americas Wetlands Month.
20. **Next meeting date** – Bill Mitsch proposed the next meeting be in Florida in November 2014. More information to follow.

**Meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm (ET).**

**Respectfully submitted by Deb Hahn, Secretary**

## **Resolution - Election of Officers**

US Ramsar Committee officers are subject to re-election for a one-year term at the Annual Meeting. The following names were offered for nomination. Being no further nominations, the Chair declared the nominations closed. Upon motion and second, the officers were elected as follows:

William Mitsch	Chair
Suzanne Pittenger-Slear	Vice-Chair
Deb Hahn	Secretary
Ralph Tiner	Treasurer

RESOLVED, that the following persons are and each of them hereby elected an officer of this Committee to serve effective immediately in the office below set opposite their respective names until the next Annual Meeting and until their respective successors shall have been duly elected and shall have qualified.

William Mitsch	Chair
Suzanne Pittenger-Slear	Vice-Chair
Deb Hahn	Secretary
Ralph Tiner	Treasurer

The above were unanimously elected to their respective positions.