



Final Minutes

US National Ramsar Committee Conference Call November 18, 2014

Meeting was conducted via phone and in person between 10:00 am – 12 noon

Members Participating in Person at Everglades Wetland Research Park, Naples, FL: Chair, Bill Mitsch (FL Gulf Coast University); Vice-Chair, Suzanne Pittenger-Slear (Environmental Concern); Treasurer, Ralph Tiner (Association of State of Wetland Managers); Alberto Chavez (Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve); Li Zhang, (FL Gulf Coast University); Anne Birch (TNC); Jaime Boswell (TNC); Kathryn Campbell (ELI), Maran Hilgendorf (Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program)

Members Participating via Phone: Boze Hancock (TNC), Caitlin Lustic (TNC); Jeanne Christie (ASWM); Secretary, Deb Hahn (AFWA); Ray Stewart (Ohio Wetlands Association); Roy Gardner (Stetson University College of Law); Gene Slear (Environmental Concern), Dawn Orsak (Caddo Lake Institute)

Observers Participating: Krishna Roy (USFWS); Barbara DeRosa-Joynt (State Department); Brendan Tate (USFWS); Austin Scherer (Marketing consultant USFWS); Maria Rivera (Ramsar Secretariat)

Call the meeting to Order: Bill Mitsch, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Meeting minutes: Minutes from the last meeting, August 6, 2014 were approved at the November 18, 2014 meeting.

Procedures for Applying for Wetlands of International Importance (Maria Rivera/Krishna Roy) – Maria thanked the Committee for the invitation to participate. The Secretariat requires a letter of request from USFWS with the additional documentation including the RIS. Once the Secretariat receives this information they conduct a review. All comments on the application are sent through Krishna Roy (National Focal Point). Krishna then interacts with the person/people who developed the RIS. Until January 1, 2015, proponents can use the old RIS and send that along with other documentation to the USFWS. However, after January 1, 2015 the Secretariat has asked to receive everything online.

Krishna Roy, National Focal Point, will input the information into the online system. The old RIS (2009-2014) does not have exactly the same fields as the online system. The Secretariat is aware that currently there is no template for proponents to use. They hope to develop one soon.

Until that is done, Krishna asks that proponents use the old RIS form and submit that to the USFWS. She will share a new form template when it is available from the Secretariat. She will send that to the US Committee Chair.

The USFWS sends each application to the USNRC Chair after the internal review. The internal review does not include a site visit typically. However, it can be helpful. Depending on the location Committee members could be involved in site visits.

Threats to Sites (Maria Rivera) – The National Focal point is required to submit information on threats to Ramsar sites to the Secretariat. The Secretariat submits the name of sites under threat to the Ramsar Standing Committee. They are also improving the information in their site database so they know whom to contact at a particular site for more information.

USNRC Threats Task Force (Suzanne Pittenger-Slear) – The Committee can prepare a letter for sites under threat if that is deemed useful. The letter does not weigh in on the threat itself but clarifies the importance of the site as a Ramsar site.

New contact information and address for USNRC in Washington DC (Suzanne Pittenger-Slear) – The USNRC now has a mail box in DC. Any mail you will be sending to the USNRC will go to this address. It is 1220 L Street, NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20005.

Mailing Lists/Payment of Dues (Bill Mitsch/Ralph Tiner/Suzanne Pittenger-Slear) – Today, the officers in Florida will work on updating the mailing list. After this, they will contact organizations and people on the list to ensure they have the correct information and then also request due payments for potential members. NGOs, private entity, university, and state members can be voting members. Federal agencies are observers. Sites cannot be members according to the Bylaws.

Kakagon and Bad River Sloughs Ramsar Site letter (Suzanne Pittenger-Slear/Bill Mitsch) - A draft letter for Bill signature has been prepared by Suzanne. The Committee will share the letter with Krishna Roy and Maria Rivera for review before it is sent to the site. In 2011, a company leased the mineral rights across a ridge line that is above the site. They are going to extract iron ore. The extent of the impacts from this project requires a more rigorous investigation and additional transparency.

Krishna raised the issue that the Florida Everglades continue to be under threat. The Committee will consider with a letter would be useful for the Florida Everglades.

Presentation of Progress of Current/Pending Ramsar Site Proposals

Charlotte Harbor, Florida (Anne Birch and Jaime Boswell, TNC) – In total it comprises 31 different management areas over a total of 102,000 hectares. Aquatic preserves have already been designated in this area. They used those as the starting point to determine the area for the Ramsar site. It includes county, state and federal lands. Most of the land is state owned (90%). The partners want to include that land around the preserves in the Ramsar sites. The area includes Ding Darling NWR. They have letters of support from the NWR and other organizations. The Senator has said he will provide a letter also. See the fact sheet for more information.

It was reported that Kevin Erwin, a Ft. Myers, FL, environmental consultant, is nominating Little Pine Islands, a site that is within the Charlotte Harbor site, as a Ramsar site directly with Krishna. TNC agreed

to make contact with Kevin Erwin and to discuss whether he would like to incorporate his site into the much larger Charlotte Harbor site application. Krishna and Bill will join the call if convenient.

Mosquito Lagoon, FL (Boze Hancock and Caitlin Lusic, TNC) – It is on the eastern side of Florida. They looked at the watershed to determine what lands to include in the Ramsar site application. The total area is almost 21,000 hectares. There are 4 different management agencies. They have received numerous letters of support including letters from NASA, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Canaveral National Seashore, and the Marine Resources Council. They have confirmed that they meet 5 of the Ramsar criteria. For example, the site regularly supports over 20,000 waterbirds and 1% of individuals in populations of glossy ibis, roseate spoonbill and dunlin. This is a critical bivalve reef.

Progress Report, State of Ohio (Ray Stewart, OWA) – The Ohio Wetlands Association (OWA) has developed a list of 20 wetlands that are potential Ramsar sites and needs to narrow that down for initial nominations. Many of the sites are in the state protected system. There may be some political challenges to getting sites nominated because few resource managers in Ohio are familiar with Ramsar. The Central Ohio Watershed Council is interested in nominating some central Ohio wetlands for Ramsar status. The OWA is looking into partnering with them. Mentor Marsh, a coastal marsh along Lake Erie near Cleveland may be one of OWA's top priorities. It receives a lot of visitors during bird migration.

Other Business:

Roy Gardner – Stetson University, Gulfport, FL, is offering a one-week short course on Ramsar law and policy on January 5-9, 2015. It is an open course.

Environmental Law Institute – They are accepting nominations for the National Wetlands Awards. There is a ceremony in DC each year. The deadline is December 1, 2014. www.nationalwetlandsaward.org.

Kathryn Campbell also edits the National Wetlands Newsletter. We could use that venue to submit articles on Ramsar. They also do special issues. The next issue comes out in January/February. They like to have articles a month in advance.

Jeanne Christie – They would be happy to have a webinar on February 2 on Ramsar. They are interested in using American Wetlands Month (May) to get the word out.

Dawn Orsak – Caddo Lake Institute – They will have a public meeting on February 2. There is also photo exhibit of Caddo Lake that they are going to try and capitalize on to raise more awareness.

Review of Minutes from August 6 quarterly phone meeting (Bill Mitsch) – Two edits were made to the draft minutes. With those edits the August 6, 2014, quarterly meeting minutes were approved by those in attendance.

Meeting adjourned at 11:55 pm (ET).

Respectfully submitted by Deb Hahn, Secretary