Ramsar's mission is
“the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”.

To find out more about the Ramsar Convention and its work, visit the Ramsar Web site, managed by the Ramsar Bureau and updated daily:
www.ramsar.org

Note: All Ramsar guidelines and Resolutions referred to in this leaflet can be viewed at:
www.ramsar.org/key_guidelines_index.htm or
www.ramsar.org/index_key_docs.htm#res

Ramsar Convention Bureau
Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland
Tel.: +41 22 999 0170/Fax: +41 22 999 0169
E-mail: ramsar@ramsar.org

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Working for Wetlands

The Wetlands at Work for Us poster produced for Ramsar’s World Wetlands Day 2004 illustrates the diversity of wetlands from the mountaintops to the sea. It also demonstrates the multiple functions that wetlands can perform for us and the varied wetland products that we make use of on a daily basis.

Working for Wetlands takes a contrasting look at our wetlands. How do we manage our wetlands to maintain a healthy ecosystem so that they continue to perform vital functions such as flood control, water purification, etc. and continue to produce the many products such as fish, fodder, timber, upon which we depend? Safeguarding mountain wetlands – water allocation – river basin management – invasive species – wetland communication, education and public awareness – are just some of the key areas that are essential for the sustainable management of wetlands: this leaflet looks briefly at these and highlights a few success stories from within the Ramsar Convention.

Mountain wetlands – Safeguarding the world’s water towers

Many of the world's major rivers have their origins in mountain wetlands, and more than half the freshwater used by human populations – for drinking, irrigation, agriculture, industry, hydropower – depends upon mountain sources. Capturing, storing and progressively releasing rainwater, snow and ice melt, mountain wetlands are the suppliers and regulators of water for entire river basins – they are the world’s ‘water towers’. Managing these fragile ecosystems wisely becomes even more of an imperative as the effects of climate change focus the world’s attention on retreating glaciers and unpredictable rainfall patterns - and demand that we manage our mountain wetlands to take account of the uncertainty of the future.

High Andean wetlands – serving more than 100 million people

Páramos, jijas and putus – high Andean ecosystems that support a diversity of wetlands such as lakes, wet grasslands, complex peat bog systems, and salt pans. Most Andean cities depend upon these ecosystems for water supply, Andean agriculture depends on them for irrigation water, and there’s a rich cultural heritage associated with the Andes region as well, so managing high Andean wetlands well is not really an option – it’s a necessity.

Since 1994, the Ramsar Bureau has been financially supporting the management of High Andean wetlands through a number of grants from the Wetlands For the Future Initiative and the Ramsar Small Grants Fund. Thanks to the establishment of a Contact Group, catalysed by the Ramsar Bureau at its regional meeting in Ecuador in 2002, there’s now an effective network for information exchange and a coordination body for strategically managing initiatives on these critical ecosystems. With representatives of the seven Andean countries and an impressive mix of NGOs (see boxed text), this Contact Group is already assisting with several initiatives in the region, such as an inventory and monitoring system for Colombian high altitude wetlands; an inventory of high Andean peatlands and an assessment of the relationship between these peatlands and rural livelihoods; and work towards the designation as Ramsar sites of six strategic páramos areas, covering four countries.

Himalayan Water Towers

The highest mountain range in the world, the Hindu Kush-Himalaya mountain system, is the source of the Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers – rivers that sustain the livelihoods of more than a billion people downstream. Small wonder then that the Ramsar Bureau, in its partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature and its Living Waters Programme, has spearheaded collaborative work on high altitude wetlands in this region. Following a preliminary meeting in August 2002, Ramsar, WWF and ICIMOD, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, organized a meeting in 2003, jointly sponsored by WWF and Danone, that they hope will see Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Myanmar, Pakistan and Tajikistan progress work on a ‘Himalayan Initiative’ to designate 200 new mountain Ramsar sites in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan range over the next five years. An awesome task, no doubt, but when implemented it will be good news for wetlands and for the 140 million people living in this region - not to mention the one billion who will benefit downstream from the safeguarding of their mountain wetlands.

Enhancing the wise use and conservation of mountain wetlands, Ramsar Resolution VIII.12, was adopted in 2002 to encourage countries to play a more active role nationally and internationally to safeguard mountain wetlands – recognition of their critical role in water supply and regulation.

High Andean wetlands as strategic ecosystems, Ramsar’s Resolution VIII.39, was developed by a Contact Group catalysed by the Ramsar Bureau, bringing together representatives from the seven Andean countries as well as several major players in wetland conservation including IUCN, BirdLife International, Conservation International, the International Working Group on Páramos, and the High Andes Flamingo Conservation Group.
Fixing the plumbing - Water allocation for wetlands

Experts have long recognized that wetlands are critical components of the water cycle that delivers our freshwater. Wetlands are thus "water providers". But wetlands are also "water users": they need a certain amount of water input if they are to continue to supply the water output, not to mention the many other services and products they provide for humans. Allocating water to maintain wetland ecosystem health is every bit as important as apportioning water carefully for agricultural, industrial, and domestic uses. And sometimes, when current practices have adversely affected the health of a wetland, managers need to fix the plumbing!

Reforming the water sector

Get the basics right and the rest is easy. Or at least easier. South Africa did just this when it embarked on water sector reform in 1994, beginning with a set of Water Law Principles that guided the drafting of a National Water Policy in 1997. An essential piece of legislation followed, the National Water Act of 1998, which today still leads the way within the Ramsar Convention in recognizing, in national law, the critical role that wetland ecosystems play in maintaining the full range of goods and services associated with water. It recognizes too that all people should have equitable access to water and the many benefits it provides.

The law defines the 'Reserve' - the quantity and quality of water needed to protect both basic human needs and aquatic ecosystems to secure ecologically sustainable development and utilization. The water required to meet the Reserve is the only right remaining under South African law, and this must be determined and taken into account before any other water use can be considered for authorization.

The South African National Water Act is recognized within the Convention as an immensely valuable tool that complements environmental and conservation policy - it's a giant step forward for wetlands.

Ramsar's Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands were adopted in 2002. A background paper on water allocation offers further detailed information for wetland and water managers.

Too much or too little – finding the water balance for Australian wetlands

A wide range of human impacts on wetlands - water regulation, extraction of water for agricultural, domestic and industrial uses, use of wetlands as areas for water storage, changes in land use - have frequently had negative effects on the water regimes of Australia's wetlands. Alloting too little water to a wetland, or, sometimes, too much, can profoundly affect the way such ecosystems function. Australia now has many Ramsar sites where environmental water allocations have been used with some success to offset the detrimental effects of water regulation. This requires the fine-tuning of allocations over a long period of time to reproduce as closely as possible the original hydrology of the area.

At the Barmah-Millewa flooded forest Ramsar site in southeast Australia, for example, adaptive management experiences have successfully offset the effects of river regulation to supply downstream users - a practice that had changed the natural water regime with negative effects on the Ramsar site, including changes in species composition of rushlands, grasslands and forests, diminished tree health and growth rates, and reduced waterbird breeding. After ad hoc attempts to manage the water regime to reverse these effects, a Barmah-Millewa Forum, with broad stakeholder representation, developed a more formal management system that has been adjusted over the years to meet the ecosystem needs at the site.

With similar historical knowledge to hand for a number of Ramsar sites (Macquarie Marshes, Lower Gwydir Basin, Kerang Lakes, Lachlan River Valley, Lake Merreti, and Lake Woorooloo), the Australian Government embarked upon a project to determine the Environmental Water Requirements to Maintain Wetlands of National and International Importance, to provide wetland managers with a practical framework for managing the water needs of wetlands threatened by human impacts.

Maintaining appropriate water regimes is a critical management issue for many Australian wetlands. Read more about the Australia story here:
River Basin Management - the ultimate challenge?

A river is but one part of a complex life support system defined by the river itself, its riparian wetlands, its floodplain and catchment area (the area of land that drains into the river) and, of course, its human inhabitants. In total, this is the river basin (sometimes called the catchment or the watershed).

Effective management has been the exception rather than the rule in river basins. The problem lies not just in the large areas involved or the huge demands human populations make upon their wetlands, but most significantly through the sectoral approach to management. All too often hydrological management - for water supply for industry, agriculture including irrigation, and domestic use, flood control, navigation – is controlled by national agencies that are quite separate from those responsible for ecological/ habitat management – the management of forests, wetlands, and other habitats that play a role in the water regime of the river basin. Such a fragmented approach naturally leads to conflicting policies, laws and practice. The solution? Integrated River Basin Management (RBM or IRBM), where the basin is managed as an integrated unit that must balance economic, social, and ecological needs in a sustainable manner. A mighty challenge within any country but an even more daunting task when you realize just how many river basins span one or more political boundaries.

The Danube - an RBM success story

Crossing 10 European borders, home to 83 million people living in its 800,000 square kilometre basin, the mighty Danube performs many vital functions along its 2,840 km length - it irrigates the fields along its course, feeds the surrounding populations on fish, directly supplies 20 million people with drinking water, and carries people and goods throughout the region. Despite these obvious values, mismanagement over the past 150 years has seen a steady degradation of the ecosystem through ill-conceived engineering solutions to control flooding; pollution of water from industry, agriculture, shipping, and inadequately treated domestic waste; over-extraction of water for irrigation, etc.

The solution? The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). With members from 13 main basin States and the European Commission, it was established in 1998 as the main decision-making body to develop an integrated river basin management approach and work towards equitable and sustainable use of the basin’s resources. Through a whole range of expert groups, the ICPDR guides the governments of the States in managing their sections of the basin – covering economic analysis, transboundary issues, assessing surface and groundwater bodies, developing a sustainable flood management strategy, reducing pollution, amongst many other issues. The ICPDR has been crucial in the development and implementation of the River Basin Management Plan.

Although not formally a part of the ICPDR, non-government organizations have played a critical role all along in working with their governments in implementing the management plan. And with the Danube Environmental Forum, a network of NGOs from all the Danube Basin countries, they have an effective, coordinated international communication programme to raise public and government awareness about the Danube Basin.

RBM is not a "quick fix" – but it is producing credible improvements in the health of the Danube. A success story? Without doubt. Read more here: www.icpdr.org.

Lake Chad Basin Commission - an African model

Located at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert, Lake Chad is a vital natural resource for the millions of people living near its shores, providing them with secure livelihoods from fishing, livestock grazing, hunting, agriculture, etc. While four countries, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria share the lake itself, the Lake Chad Basin, a massive 1,035,953 square kilometres, also includes territory of the Central African Republic and Sudan.

Created in 1964, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) now includes all six basin States, and it has worked effectively on a number of projects in partnership with national and local stakeholders and international organizations aimed at integrated management of the Lake Chad Basin. Another major step began in 2003 with a US$18 million GEF project on the Reversal of Land and Water Degradation Trends in the Lake Chad Basin Ecosystem, in the development of which the Ramsar Bureau, along with WWF, has played a catalytic role. The Memorandum of Cooperation between Ramsar and the LCBC, signed in 2002, reinforces their close working relationship and paves the way for the development of a coherent national and regional network of Ramsar sites at the basin level as the basis for their sustainable management.

A new basin commission in the making?

Covering 130,000 square kilometres, Lake Malawi-Niassa-Nyassa (LMNN) and its drainage basin falls within the territories of Malawi (Lake Malawi), Mozambique (Lake Niassa), and Tanzania (Lake Nyassa). With assistance and funding from the Ramsar Bureau, WWF’s Living Waters Programme, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Governments of Switzerland and The Netherlands, efforts are currently underway to develop a similar basin commission for the sustainable development of LMNN and its surroundings.

The Water Resources and Wetlands e-Atlas, launched at the Kyoto Water Forum in March 2003, links, integrates, and communicates relevant information on freshwater resources to promote and support integrated water resources management. Now available on-line at http://www.iucn.org/themes/wani/eatlas/html/about.html.
Wetland invaders

One of the greatest threats to the ecological and economic well-being of our planet, invasive alien species (IAS) have been hitting the headlines for decades as the enormity of their effects are better understood and the cost of their control or eradication assessed. Recent estimated annual economic losses from these invasive aliens in just five countries illustrate the scale of the problem: Brazil - US$ 50 billion; India - US$117 billion; South Africa - US$ 7 billion; United Kingdom - US$ 12 billion; USA - US$137 billion. That they have far-reaching impacts on ecosystem function and species diversity is not in dispute – more contentious is the struggle to find effective, affordable management solutions.

An aquatic super-weed

Widespread naturally in the neotropics, water hyacinth (Eichhornia crassipes) was transported all over the world for its ornamental value by 19th century horticulturists. Now a 21st century super-weed in some tropical countries, it forms dense floating mats, clogging waterways, affecting large and small-scale transport, increasing water losses through evapotranspiration, increasing water acidity, increasing siltation, preventing human access to water from the land. Super-weed indeed. In Africa it is found throughout most of the major water systems and, where it becomes invasive, costs millions of dollars to control. Herbicides and mechanical control can bring some relief but biological control has worked well in some places.

Benin's answer to water hyacinth control relies upon two beetle species and a moth, all natural enemies of the plant and collectively credited with potentially saving Benin $260 million dollars in lost revenue over twenty years. Focused in southern Benin, the biological control programme took place in 1991-1993, when the annual income of the population of the area (around 200,000) was estimated to have been reduced by US$ 84 million through lost revenues in fishing and food crops. A recent survey of people in 24 villages in the target area (which includes two Ramsar sites) allowed the researchers to report that, as result of the programme, villagers felt that impact of the weed had been reduced from a serious pest to one of minor to moderate importance. With the total cost of the control programme estimated at only US$ 2 million and a resulting annual increase of income of $30.5 million, researchers believe that the programme has enjoyed a benefit cost ratio of 124:1 over the next 20 years. Moreover, this impressive result is based only upon direct benefits and does not take into account indirect benefits such as improved health and water quality.

Kakadu's No. 1 threat

Kakadu National Park, a spectacular Ramsar site within a World Heritage Site in northern Australia, with floodplains, rocky gorges, waterfalls, and freshwater mangroves, is rising to the challenge of controlling its most serious wetland invader – mimosa (Mimosa pigra). Introduced from South America in the late 1800s as a curiosity because of its touch-sensitive leaves, mimosa ‘escaped’ from the Darwin Botanic Gardens, became widespread in the north by the 1970s and today is Kakadu's number one invasive alien threat. The mimosa forms impenetrable stands at the water's edge, crowding out local wetland species and even preventing animals from gaining access to the water, and its control requires a team of four people working year-round on a ‘search and destroy’ mission. And the cost for mimosa control within the park? – about US$350,000 per year. The future? All depends upon the final outcome of decades of research in Australia to identify a biological control agent. The most likely contender is a tiny insect from Mexico, Syphphera, that feeds on the plant, but more tests are needed to be sure that the insect itself does not become another wetland invader!

Alien invasive species in Africa’s wetlands: some threats and solutions, by Geetl Howard and Susan Malind, introduces Africa’s seven worst wetland invaders, providing information on the threat they pose and offering some solutions for control. Available from: mail@u concess.org. Wetland managers need updated and detailed information about alien invasive species in wetlands, the impacts they are having and the measures required to deal with them.

Ramsar’s COP8 adopted Resolution VIII.18 on invasive species and wetlands, highlighting the problem for wetland managers. Recognizing the need for both global and national approaches to invasive control, the Resolution, rather than ‘re-inventing the wheel’, directs Contracting Parties to the existing strategies, reviews of legislation, toolkits, and case studies for addressing problems of invasive alien species prepared by CBD, GSPF and UNEP, as valuable sources of assistance.
Spreading the word - wetland CEPA

How can the Ramsar implementing authorities in each country improve their interactions with the water sector to ensure that their decisions on water allocation help maintain the health of all wetlands?

How can local stakeholders who depend on wetland resources for their livelihood become effectively engaged in the sustainable management of these resources?

How might the Ramsar wetland community increase public knowledge and understanding about the functions and values of wetlands so that people begin to take social responsibility for wetland health?

The answer? An effective communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) programme which motivates and mobilises individual and collective action at all levels of society – planners, decision makers, schoolchildren, the public – to maintain the functions and values of wetlands.

Wetland Ambassadors in action 2001-2004

WWF-China’s Wetland Ambassadors initiative has become a recipe for success, training students to investigate the problems facing wetland conservation at specific sites, develop their own message about wetland values and sustainable use, and make it known to their local communities.

“Bring Knowledge Back Home!” in 2001 trained 100 university students at WWF’s Yangtze pilot sites who delivered their wetland conservation message to 10,000 people in their local communities. More than 200 university students working in 15 Ramsar wetlands in China carried out their proposals on “Realizing Ramsar Wetlands” from April to September 2002, delivering information about the Ramsar Convention, Ramsar sites, and wetland conservation to more than 10,000 people in their local communities.

In 2003 the focus moved back to the Yangtze, with “Tracing Lakes to the Yangtze”, a project with university groups to target the local communities around 60 lakes that were once linked to the middle reaches of the Yangtze. The ultimate goal? To encourage the re-linking of some of the lakes to the river as part of WWF’s Living Yangtze programme. With such a winning formula, Wetland Ambassadors will go international in 2004, with an ambitious project that targets the Mekong River from its source in the Tibetan plateau through its journey to the sea, crossing the borders of Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

A summer camp organized by WWF offices in China, Indochina, and Thailand, in cooperation with the Ramsar Bureau and Mekong River Commission, will bring together university students, correspondents, wetland specialists, and people from local NGOs. They will be surveying along the river to see the management challenges at first hand, and each group will then use its particular skills to further effective conservation of the river from its mountain source to the sea. In doing so, they will be working to encourage more interaction and cooperation between China’s officials and the Mekong River Commission, using the media to highlight the issues and the possible solutions, and working with local communities along the river on sustainable use of the river and its resources. Ambitious, yes, but an effective CEPA project? Undoubtedly.

The Ramsar Convention’s Programme on communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) 2003-2008 is based on the premise that CEPA tools underpin the effective delivery of the more “technical” wetland management activities such as river basin management, coastal management, etc.
EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS SELLDOM LEAD TO SUSTAINABILITY

Ramsar: Protecting Wetlands for the Long Term
Conservation and sustainable use of
1179 Ramsar sites: over

La Encrucijada:
144,868 ha
Mexico
Also a UNESCO MAB Reserve, with coastal lagoons and marshes and the largest mangrove forest in the region. Provides habitat for threatened, endemic, and rare species and natural resources for local communities. Economic activities include commercial fishing, cattle ranching, agriculture, and increasingly ecotourism.

Laguna de la Cocha:
39,000 ha
Colombia
Lake and rivers, streams, bogs and flooded forests in the Andes at 2,700m. Important socio-economic role for local people who farm, raise livestock, and culture fish. Local community has been involved in the designation process and management planning for the site.

Reentrancias Maranhenses:
2,680,911 ha
Brazil
Complex estuarine system with mangroves, bays, dunes, sandy beaches, and off-shore islands, supporting many species of fish, shellfish and migratory birds. Growth of invasive species, in this case water hyacinth, threatens local communities’ use of natural resources in many parts of the world.

Everglades:
566,143 ha
USA
Freshwater marshes and pools, saltmarshes, mangroves, estuaries, beach and dune complexes. Also a World Heritage site and a UNESCO MAB Reserve. Visited by over 750,000 people annually. Water abstraction and drainage for domestic, industrial and agricultural use require a multimillion restoration programme, currently underway.

Oasis de Tamantit et Sid Ahmed Timmi:
95,700 ha
Algeria
7th century system (fouggara) for capturing underground water and distributing it in the oases. Sustainable management by local people, who cultivate 23 different varieties of date palm, has contributed to an interesting biological diversity.
resources: the List of Wetlands of Inter
100,000,000 hectares of prime wetlands in 133 countries

Třeboň Fishponds:
10,165 ha
Czech Republic
Includes 159 human-made fishponds from 1 to 490 ha, interconnected by drains, canals, and streams. Created during the 14th to 16th centuries, now part of the "natural" landscape. Part of a UNESCO MAB Reserve - MAB's and Ramsar's management requirements are convergent.

Škocjan Caves:
305 ha
Slovenia
Includes an underground river and cave pools, providing habitat for endemic and endangered species. A significant tourist attraction with an important educational role. Also a World Heritage Site because of its exceptional natural values.

Lake Chad:
1,988,591 ha
Chad, Niger
Open lake, with significant fish species diversity and important hydrological functions for the region. The Lake Chad Basin Commission, assisted by WWF's Living Waters Programme, is completing Ramsar designations in the four riparian nations in a GEF project on management planning for the entire 2.5 million-hectare transboundary site.

Gwydir Wetlands:
823 ha
Australia
Inland delta with seasonal lakes and streams. Owned by 4 farming families that have forged an agreement with the state and national governments, facilitated by WWF-Australia and the National Parks Association, to add the site to the Ramsar List.
What is a wetland?

Under the Convention on Wetlands, it can be:

- static water, like a lake, or fast-flowing, like a river
- on the coast or inland, in the mountains or on the plains
- natural or human-made
- freshwater or marine or brackish, acidic or alkaline
- a saltmarsh, a lake, a river, an oasis, a floodplain, a mangrove forest, a swamp forest, a peatland, a sandy beach, a coral reef, a marsh, a reservoir, an estuary, a cave pool, a wadi – and more!

What is a Ramsar site?

- 'Ramsar sites' are those included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance maintained by the Ramsar Convention. In July 2002 there were 1,179 Ramsar sites in 133 countries, covering 102,126,760 hectares.
- To qualify as a Ramsar site a wetland has to meet strict criteria – it must be:

  - A wetland that is a representative, rare or unique wetland type
  - A wetland that is particularly important for conserving biological diversity. For example, if it
    - has animals or plants that are under threat of extinction or important for the region
    - regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds or 1% of a population of a species
    - supports a significant number of indigenous or economically important fish species
    - is an important source of food or a nursery or spawning area for fishes.

- Size doesn’t matter - Hosnie’s Spring on Christmas Island (Australia) is the smallest Ramsar site at a mere 0.33 ha; the Okavango Delta in Botswana is the largest, covering an immense 6,864,000 ha.

Photo credits (clockwise from top left): Javier Jiménez • Fritz Pölkling • Jan Ševčík • Marco Simić • Najam Khursheed, Ramsar Bureau • Jürgen Freund • W.J. Cooper • Howard Blackburn • Denis Landenbergue, WWF – Living Waters Programme • Denis Landenbergue, WWF – Living Waters Programme • Margarita Astúlaga, Ramsar Bureau • © WWF Colombia / Photographer: D.M. García
Who designates Ramsar sites?
- Only countries that are Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention. Frequently governments are assisted in the preparation of site designations by national and international NGOs and the Ramsar secretariat.
- Each Party must designate at least one wetland for the Ramsar List. Under the Convention’s Vision for the List, Parties are expected to designate a coherent and comprehensive national network of sites.

Why designate?
- Elevates the importance of the site at the national level, encouraging appreciation of its values and generating national and local pride.
- Encourages a strategic approach to wetland conservation at the national level.
- Promotes recognition of the site by the international community and may assist in securing international resources for sustainable management.
- Represents a contribution to global environmental protection and maintenance of global biodiversity.
- Facilitates development of management plans with the involvement of all stakeholders.
- Assists government to justify allocation of resources for appropriate management.

What does designation mean?
- The designating country must promote the conservation and wise use of the site through a management plan, developed and implemented with the participation of all stakeholders.
- The designating country must inform the Convention if the site is under threat from human interference or faces any problems likely to change its ecological character.
- People can make use of the wetland – in many Ramsar sites people sustainably harvest their resources or use the wetland for recreation or tourism.
- The site benefits from protection provided under the obligations of the Convention and its status as internationally important. In many countries, full legal protection requires other form(s) of protected area status as well.
- Countries still maintain full sovereign rights over the site.

Who cares about wetlands?
Everybody should care because wetlands perform for free important goods and services. All that is required to maintain these services is to look after your wetlands and use them wisely.

Some economists believe that wetlands are the most valuable ecosystem on Earth and estimate their services to be worth more than US$14.9 trillion. Just consider this list of goods and services:

- Wetland services we take for granted:
  - water storage and purification
  - flood water control

- Wetland products:
  - fish, shellfish, fruits, fodder, fuelwood, medicines, timber and other building materials such as reeds and palms
  - groundwater replenishment
  - nurseries for freshwater and marine fish
  - shoreline stabilisation and protection against storms
  - nutrient and sediment retention
  - carbon storage
  - support for biological diversity
  - climate change mitigation
  - place for recreation and tourism
  - transport
Key questions about the Ramsar Convention and Ramsar sites

Is your country a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention?

Want to find out where your nearest Ramsar site is or how many Ramsar sites your country has?

Want to know more about designating Ramsar sites or about how the Convention works?

You can find answers to all these questions here:

- For an introduction to the Convention and its work visit the Web at http://ramsar.org/index_about_ramsar.htm#intro, or contact the secretariat of the Convention, the Ramsar Bureau, at ramsar@ramsar.org or at the address below for a hard copy of the Ramsar Information Pack.

- For a quick look at which countries are Contracting Parties and what wetland sites are on the Ramsar list go to http://ramsar.org/key_sitelist.htm#list.

- For more detailed information on Ramsar sites and maps showing site locations, visit the Wetlands International (WI) Web site. WI maintains the Ramsar Sites Database for the Convention. A good place to start browsing is right here: http://www.wetlands.org/RDB/quick.html.

- To learn more about the Convention's "vision" for the Ramsar list of sites, you need the Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance, available in hard copy or on CD-ROM from the Bureau as Handbook 7 of the Ramsar Handbooks for the wise use of wetlands. Also available as Resolution VII.11 in HTML at http://ramsar.org/key_res_vii.11e.htm.

- To acquire your own CD-ROM detailing all Ramsar sites as well as distribution maps, along with a 28-page booklet with everything you need to know about Ramsar sites - the criteria that define them, the process for designating sites - you should contact Wetlands International. WI is launching the CD and booklet at Ramsar’s 8th Conference of the Parties in November 2002. Contact Ellen Dième (Dieme@wetlands.agro.nl) for further information.

The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) is an intergovernmental treaty whose mission is "the conservation and wise use of wetlands by national action and international cooperation as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world". In July 2002, 133 nations were Contracting Parties to the Convention. As part of their commitments under the Convention, they have designated 1,179 wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Contracting Parties are also committed to ensuring wise use of ALL the wetlands within their territories.

This brochure is part of a series of communication activities funded through the Danone/Evian Project.
From the Secretary General

Gland, 15 October 2004

Dear World Wetlands Day promoter!

Thank you for your interest in promoting World Wetlands Day, a day designed to draw attention to the need for wise management of the world’s wetlands.

This year we are featuring the critical link between cultural and biological diversities: many of the world’s wetlands owe their existence and continued vitality to cultural practices, or are conserved because of cultural needs. Thus maintenance of biological diversity in wetlands is often closely linked with the lives and beliefs of people. Of course, the other side of the coin is that people can misuse wetlands and cause loss and damage to the biological diversity - and at the same time to cultural diversity!

We have designed a poster and stickers to reflect this conundrum, and hope you can take this message to local communities to reinforce good practices, and help change bad ones.

This World Wetlands Day is also important, as it marks the start of a year in which we hold our 9th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and which starts an International Decade of Water, to be launched on World Water Day, the 23 of March.

2005 therefore is a big year for Ramsar, for wetlands and for water - please continue to play your part in raising and maintaining awareness of these critical issues.

With thanks, and Happy WWD!

[Signature]

Peter Bridgewater