

13th Living Lakes Conference - Adequate management of RAMSAR Wetlands according to the RAMSAR recommendations

Wildsight Presentation Proposal

Round Table 13 – Participation of Stakeholders in the management of RAMSAR sites (structure, processes, resources)

Title: Canada's Columbia Wetlands and the Canadian Ramsar Network

The Columbia Wetlands are located in southeastern British Columbia, Canada, and are a mosaic of diverse wetlands, aquatic and riparian habitats, including open water, river channels, sloughs, marshes, grasslands and shrub and forest communities. They constitute one of the largest contiguous areas of wetland in Canada and North America, and support a spectacular array of wildlife. Because so much of the Columbia River's wetland ecosystems have been lost through damming, draining, dyking and flooding, the Columbia Wetlands' importance for migratory birds and other wildlife is especially critical.

The Columbia Wetlands qualifies under all eight Ramsar Criterion and became a member of the convention in 2005. The Columbia Wetlands support over 250 species of birds, including single day counts of 20,000 migrating waterfowl and 1,200 tundra swans. It is home to the second largest colony of Blue Herons in western Canada, more than 300 pairs. The wetlands maintain a delicate balance of water temperature and flow and provide habitat for indigenous fish species, which spawn and feed here.

Today the Columbia Wetlands still face threats from urban development, inappropriate recreational disturbance, invasive plant species, chemical pollution, and domestic sewage disposal. In a decisive effort to protect this ecosystem, the Columbia Wetlands are designated a Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The guiding principle of the WMA is that all activity taking place in or near the Columbia Wetlands must contribute a neutral or positive effect on wildlife, fish and plant communities. But management challenges still exist.

There are 37 Ramsar sites in Canada. Ensuring efficient and effective management of all sites poses a challenge. In a 2007 national survey conducted by Environment Canada, Canadian Ramsar site managers expressed a need for capacity, knowledge and training to understand and carry out their official responsibilities as managers of Ramsar sites.

In October 2009, a National Training Course for Canadian Ramsar Site Managers will be held in Creston, British Columbia, Canada, which will address some of the management issues. The need for the development of a Canadian Ramsar Network will be discussed, as it is one of the commitments Canada made when joining the Convention in 1981.

Wildsight is pleased to provide a presentation based on the outcomes of the National Training Course, and the direction put in place for the creation of a Canadian Ramsar Network. Wildsight is the NGO that has demonstrated a long-term commitment to the protection and maintenance of the Columbia Wetlands. With out unique perspective, hands on work, experience and as the authors of the Ramsar application, through the living Lakes Network and other involvement, has an important role to play in the management of Canada's newest Ramsar site.