



Side Event 1 November 2008

Himalayan Waters and Communities: Living with Change

A series of regional meetings and workshops have been organised to promote regional cooperation for the conservation and wise use of Himalayan wetlands (Urumqi 2002, Kathmandu 2003, Sanya 2004, Evian 2004, New Delhi 2006, Changwon 2007, and Kathmandu 2008). These activities promoted a regional dialogue that involved all governments in the region (except Afghanistan), intergovernmental organisations, international environmental organisations, and universities, academic institutions, and corporate partners*. In the most recent workshop in 2008, a draft 'Himalayan Wetlands Initiative' strategy document was finalised and is now awaiting approval by the governments concerned.

The side event is being held to showcase the efforts by the various governments in the region for the conservation and the wise use of Himalayan wetlands and to discuss the 'Himalayan Wetlands Initiative'. The side event is being organised jointly by WWF, ICIMOD, and Wetlands International, supported by the Governments of India and Nepal.

* (the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Tajikistan; Ramsar Convention Secretariat; International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development; Worldwide Fund for Nature; Wetlands International; International Union for Conservation of Nature)

Himalayan wetlands are unique ecosystems that fulfil important functions in the overall water cycle of the large Himalayan river basins, (the Amu Darya, Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Kabul, Konar, Mekong, Salween, Yangtze, and Yellow) that serve close to 20% of the world's population. They also provide habitat for many rare and endangered wildlife species including many migratory birds. As in the mountains themselves, there is a tremendous variation in the areas considered to be 'Himalayan wetlands'. Of these, the high altitude wetlands are of particular interest as a result of their remoteness, relatively pristine state, and provision of favourable habitat in otherwise harsh areas. Many of the high altitude wetlands are revered as sacred places, another indication of their special role.

There is evidence that climate change is already causing severe direct impacts on high altitude wetlands and glaciers. Studies suggest that warming in the Himalayan region has been much greater than the global average of 0.74°C over the last 100 years. In recent years, there has been a rapid rise in the melting rate of the Himalayan glaciers. The loss of glaciers will lead to a significant decrease in the availability of freshwater in the region, and will have an adverse effect on the wetland ecosystems and the people who depend on them. Himalayan wetlands and their local communities are vulnerable. They require sound management plans to maintain their ecological health and enhance their resilience and thereby increase their adaptive capacity to meet the challenges of global climate change.

Side Event: Himalayan Waters and Communities – Living with Change

1 November 2008; Conference Venue Room 605;
Time: 13:15-14:45 h

Organised jointly by WWF, ICIMOD, and Wetlands International supported by the Governments of India and Nepal, during the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP10) to the Convention on Wetlands at Changwon in the Republic of Korea.

Objective: to highlight the urgent need for action by the governments of the countries of the greater Himalayan region to put in place strategies and policies on a fast track aimed towards

- a efforts towards supporting the adaptation of local communities and biodiversity to the climate variability that this region is already experiencing;
- b conservation and management of the high altitude wetlands in the Himalayan region; and
- c highlighting the importance of, and promoting, a regional approach in sharing and learning from one another



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Agenda

Introduction and Background 30 mins

(Facilitation by WWF)

- Welcome by WWF
- Introduction to the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative (HWI)
– Dr. Eklabya Sharma, ICIMOD
- WWF film on Climate Change – Living with Change
Promo of the film and film release

Announcements by the Governments on the HWI (Ramsar focal points) 10 mins

(Facilitation by Dr. Lew Young, Ramsar Convention Secretariat)

Panel Discussion 60 mins

(Facilitation by Dr. Hua Ouyang, ICIMOD)

Panelists (Head of the Delegation of the)

- Government of China
- Government of India
- Government of Myanmar
- Government of Nepal
- Government of Pakistan
- Five minutes presentation each by the Heads of Delegation on wetland-related activities focussing on mountain areas in their countries
- Questions and responses
- Vote of thanks by Wetlands International

Followed by Lunch

Photos: overleaf – Wetland in China, Xu Jianchu
left – Karumbar, a Hidden Lake in Pakistan [2006], Kashif Nazir Qureshi, entry from the digital photo contest 'Mountains and People' organised by ICIMOD and APMN/Mountain Forum in 2008. Details of the competition can be found at www.icimod.org/photocontest2008

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