18 cities recognized for safeguarding urban wetlands

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Urbanization is one of the key defining mega-trends of our time. It is transforming where and how people will live in the future. 4 billion people, about half of the world’s population live in urban areas today. By 2050 that number is expected to increase as more people move into cities.

Current trends in human settlement potentially pose a major threat for wetland conservation and wise use. As cities grow and demand for land increases, the tendency is to encroach on wetlands. They are often viewed as wasteland to be converted for other purposes including being used as dumping grounds.

Yet when preserved and sustainably used, urban wetlands can provide cities with multiple economic, social and cultural benefits. During storms, urban wetlands absorb excess rainfall, which reduces flooding in cities and prevents disasters and their subsequent costs. The abundant vegetation found in urban wetlands, acts as a filter for domestic and industrial waste and contribute to improving water quality.

Urban wetlands are prize land not wasteland and therefore should be integrated into the development and management plans of cities.

During COP13 the Ramsar Convention introduces the Wetland City Accreditation, which recognizes 18 cities that have taken exceptional steps to safeguard their urban wetlands. These pioneer cities will serve as examples and inspire deliberate actions for other cities towards sustainable urbanization.

The accredited cities are:
1. Changde, China
2. Changshu, China
3. Dongying, China
4. Haerbin, China
5. Haikou, China
The Wetland City Accreditation scheme will encourage cities in close proximity to and dependent on wetlands, especially Wetlands of International Importance, to highlight and strengthen a positive relationship with these valuable ecosystems, for example through increased public awareness of wetlands and participation in municipal planning and decision-making. The Accreditation scheme should further promote the conservation and wise use of urban and peri-urban wetlands, as well as sustainable socio-economic benefits for local people.

Background and context

The 170 Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands have agreed to the conservation and wise use of wetlands in their territories. Recognising the importance of cities and urban wetlands, the Convention has recently introduced a Wetland City accreditation scheme (Resolution XII.10). This voluntary scheme provides an opportunity for cities that value their natural or human-made wetlands to gain international recognition and positive publicity for their efforts.