



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

The Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance

The text of the Convention (Article 2.2) states that:

“Wetlands should be selected for the List on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology” and indicates that “in the first instance, wetlands of international importance to waterfowl at any season should be included”.

The process of adopting specific criteria for the identification of internationally important wetlands began in 1974, but the first official Criteria were agreed at COP1 in 1980. In 1987 and 1990, the Conference of the Parties revised the Criteria further, and at COP6 in 1996 the Parties added new Criteria based on fish and fisheries. The Criteria were reorganized into two groups – based upon representativeness/uniqueness and upon biodiversity – by the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List* (adopted by Resolution VII.11, 1999), and at COP9 (2005) a ninth Criterion was added to cover wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.

Recognizing that cases may arise where a Ramsar site was designated for the List prior to the adoption of the latest version of Criteria and may no longer meet any of those current Criteria, or where a Ramsar site has subsequently lost the ecological values for which it was originally designated, the practice has been that the Secretariat, in consultation with the Contracting Party concerned, evaluates what measures might be necessary to extend, enhance or restore the wetland’s functions and values to the degree that it would qualify for inclusion in the List. Where there is no possibility of extension or enhancement/restoration of its functions or values, the Contracting Party concerned instructs the Secretariat to remove the site from the List, and the Party then applies the provisions for compensation, as provided in Article 4.2 of the Convention. This has only occurred in a very few cases. The Parties adopted *Guidance for the consideration of the deletion or restriction of the boundaries of a listed Ramsar site* annexed to Resolution IX.6 (2005), which includes an analysis of scenarios in which the need to delete or restrict a Ramsar site might arise and a careful eight-step process that Parties should undertake if that should ever become necessary.

Guidelines for interpretation and application of the Criteria can be found in the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, which is available on the Ramsar Web site at www.ramsar.org/key_guide_list2006_e.htm and in Handbook 14 of the Ramsar Toolkit at www.ramsar.org/lib/lib_handbooks2006_e.htm.

The latest Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance can be found on the verso page.

Criteria for the designation of Wetlands of International Importance

<p>Group A of the criteria</p> <p>Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types</p>		<p>Criterion 1: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.</p>
<p>Group B of the criteria</p> <p>Sites of international importance for conserving biodiversity</p>	<p>Criteria based on species and ecological communities</p>	<p>Criterion 2: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.</p>
		<p>Criterion 3: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.</p>
		<p>Criterion 4: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.</p>
	<p>Specific criteria based on waterbirds</p>	<p>Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.</p>
		<p>Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.</p>
	<p>Specific criteria based on fish</p>	<p>Criterion 7: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.</p>
		<p>Criterion 8: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.</p>
	<p>Specific criteria based on other taxa</p>	<p>Criterion 9: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.</p>

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