

Draft Resolution on wetlands in polar and subpolar regions

Submitted by Sweden

Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to review the attached Draft Resolution for consideration by the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Introduction

Information for the Standing Committee

Already at the European pre-COP meeting in Austria 2014 the participants concluded that there are gaps in our knowledge on Arctic wetlands and their values. Among other things they agreed upon a recommendation to prepare a Draft Resolution for COP12 as a next substantial step focusing on an inventory of polar and circumpolar wetlands.

As chair for the Ramsar Regional Initiative NorBalWet 2016-2017, Sweden has taken over the lead to produce and submit a draft resolution on polar and subpolar wetlands. Sweden has also recently started a project in the Arctic Council about wetlands. Sweden would like this project to continue and develop further and ensure similar measures are taken in the southern hemisphere, when applicable. Such measures have been included in the resolution.

Financial implications of implementation

The draft resolution mostly addresses the Contracting Parties so costs for the Secretariat should be limited. We believe that the cost for the Secretariat could come from the core budget, especially since there is already some funds allocated for the co-operation with the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF).

The draft resolution does not include establishment of centers etc. that demand investments and long-term management costs.

Paragraph (number and key part of text)	Action	Cost (CHF/year)
The entire resolution	Support Contracting Parties to implement the Resolution (if accepted at the COP) / Staff at the Secretariat	15 working days
	Travel budget for meetings 1-2 per year (Lower figure with one meeting, higher figure with two meetings.)	3 000-6 000 (Lower figure with one meeting, higher figure with two meetings.)

Draft Resolution XIII.xx

Wetlands in polar and subpolar regions

The area and the Contracting Parties this resolution addresses

1. HAVING CONSIDERED the area this resolution addresses. This resolution addresses the Arctic and subarctic as delineated by Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group, and the Antarctic as delineated by the Antarctic Treaty area (the area south of 60° South Latitude) and the subantarctic as areas with tundra climate (ET) according to Köppen climate classification¹ between the 45° and 60° South Latitudes, except mountain areas without adjacent lowland tundra.
2. ALSO, HAVING CONSIDERED that some measures to mitigate impacts on polar and subpolar areas can take place *ex situ*, for example mitigating climate change, much can be done for the polar and subpolar areas *ex situ*. In that aspect the resolution also addresses all the Contracting Parties. RECALLING the Ramsar resolutions X.25 and X1.14, that restoration of peatland can be such one measure,

Polar and subpolar wetlands biodiversity, ecosystem services and vulnerability

3. NOTING that various types of wetlands occur in the polar and subpolar regions, many of them having subtypes and biodiversity that exists only in these regions, and are of global importance. Several of these are frozen permanently or during most of the year.
4. AWARE of the diversity and value of wetland ecosystems in polar and subpolar regions and their global connections via the flyways of migratory birds and migration routes of marine mammals,
5. RECOGNIZING the importance of wetlands for their biodiversity, their ecosystem services for indigenous peoples and local communities, and their function as carbon sinks and storage is of importance in the global context of climate change are of global significance, and therefore are of global concern,
6. RECOGNIZING that polar and subpolar wetland ecosystems are very sensitive and vulnerable, for example to oil spills that are unusually long-lived and difficult to address in dark midwinters and extremely low temperatures, and that these regions are also among those where climate change will continue to have a large impact: also RECOGNIZING that land areas adjacent to wetlands also are vulnerable in these regions, for example to long-term vegetation damage recovery that can lead to problems with severe erosion and following deposition, that can damage wetlands.
7. CONSCIOUS that climate change contributes to permafrost and ice thaw that can permanently alter polar wetlands, for example palsa mires, as well as raised sea levels will be affecting intertidal and coastal wetlands, resulting in impact on feeding habitats for migratory waterbirds, important sites for reproduction of fishes, marine mammals and other aquatic life,

¹ According to Peel, M. C.; Finlayson, B. L.; McMahon, T. A. (2007). "Updated world map of the Köppen–Geiger climate classification". *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.* 11: 1633–1644. doi:10.5194/hess-11-1633-2007. ISSN 1027-5606.

Knowledge and awareness

8. CONSCIOUS that much scientific data is still needed about wetland ecosystems in the polar and subpolar regions, and that knowledge remains relatively poorly assessed including with respect to different wetlands types historical evolution, geographic distribution and area coverage, and their biodiversity, ecological functions, ecosystem services and other important values as well as their vulnerability;
9. ALSO, CONSCIOUS of the urgent need for increased knowledge of polar and subpolar wetlands, for effective conservation and wise use,

Protected areas and areas of high conservation value

10. RECOGNIZING that there are protected areas in the polar and subpolar regions and that their total area has increased in the last 25 years and nearly doubled in Arctic and subarctic regions: That there is a wide range of management categories, from nature reserves to protection with sustainable use: That the level of protection and governance varies throughout these regions; And at the end of 2017, there were approximately 80 designated Ramsar sites in the Arctic and subarctic, and 5 sites in the subantarctic,
11. CONCERNED that while progress has been made, there is no analysis of how well the network of protected areas that include wetlands fulfill the criterion of being an “ecologically connected, representative, and effectively managed network of protected and specially managed areas that protects and promotes the resilience of the biological diversity, ecological processes and cultural heritage”,
12. RECOGNIZING that even if the Antarctic is not part of any territory of the Contracting Parties, international agreements protecting certain areas in the Antarctic are in place; for example, the Antarctic Treaty and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.
13. ALSO RECOGNIZING that CAFF has recognized 97 areas of marine heightened ecological and cultural significance in the Arctic/subarctic², regions where impact from shipping should be avoided or mitigated. Several of these areas included coastal wetlands,

Threats to wetlands

14. RECOGNISING the potential threats against wetlands generated by current and possible future development, for example a possible increase of shipping and increased demand for extraction of natural resources, in the polar and subpolar region,
15. RECALLING that the polar and subpolar regions are significantly affected by climate change, especially in the northern hemisphere, and are among the most rapidly changing ecosystems in the world,
16. RECALLING that wild fires have increased in the Arctic and subarctic, even in the dried up upper layer of peatlands,

² AMAP/CAFF/SDGW. Identification of Arctic marine areas of heightened ecological and cultural significance. Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) IIc.

17. RECOGNIZING that the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment notes several changes in the Arctic ecosystems, for example rapid northward shifts of northern tree lines as a result of recent rises in summer temperatures, marine species changing their food habits due to lack of prey and breakdowns in food webs, resulting in specimens in bad condition due to lack of food or having to excessively consume energy by increased foraging,
18. ALSO RECOGNIZING that some red-listed species for example Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Siberian Crane and Arctic Fox may be affected by competition from more southern species that establish them on higher latitudes and that Invasive Alien Species also may be establishing and spreading in the regions.
19. RECOGNIZING that the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment of the Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora working group of the Arctic Council (CAFF) notes declines in some wetland types in the Arctic, and that the Global Assessment on Peatlands Biodiversity and Climate Change adopted by Decision IX/16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity on Biodiversity and climate change states that Arctic peatlands are vulnerable.

International co-operation

20. RECALLING the Memorandum of Cooperation signed at the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11, Bucharest, 2012) between the Ramsar Secretariat and the CAFF Secretariat,
21. Recognizing that CAFF is undertaking an initiative on enhancing engagement in relation to role and functions of Arctic wetlands as a resource to support sustainable development and resilience in the Arctic.

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Knowledge and awareness

22. ENCOURAGE the concerned Contracting Parties to have sufficient data about polar and subpolar wetlands and to undertake needed complementary inventories, research and assessment of polar and subpolar wetlands;
23. ENCOURAGE that Contracting Parties make sure that assessment(s) of polar and subpolar wetlands are made; the assessments may include the state of wetlands, hot-spot analysis for wetland biodiversity, gaps in the network of protected areas – their representation and connectivity for different scenarios for climate change in these regions and how this may affect the wetlands;
24. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to work with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat to raise awareness of the value of polar and subpolar wetlands and to consolidate existing knowledge for decision-making for their conservation and (sustainable and) wise use; not forgetting the importance of each individual's behavior to prevent wild fires and off-road-driving that may cause damage;

Protected areas and areas of high conservation value

25. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to designate new protected areas in polar and subpolar regions where protected areas with certain wetland types are underrepresented in the network of protected areas;
26. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to designate new Ramsar sites in polar and subpolar regions, except for the Antarctica, where certain wetland types are underrepresented in the network of Ramsar sites;
27. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to designate more protected areas through international agreements in the area covered by the Antarctic Treaty, where there are unprotected wetland hotspots for biodiversity;

Wise use and mitigation of impact on wetlands and restoration

28. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to ensure that restoration measures in wetlands are prioritized and taken to improve the connectivity between suitable habitats, especially for sites of importance for migrating wetland species and sites with available fresh water in sub regions where fresh water may become scarce with continuing climate change; -.
29. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to ensure that physical planning, development projects and tourism activities take proper care of wetlands in polar and subpolar regions. For example, may off-road driving be forbidden in areas with sensitive habitats;
30. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties with domestic or semi-domestic grazing animals to ensure that the population size of these herds is kept at a level that does not risk wetland populations of wild grazing animals and that the combined grazing pressure of domestic and wild animals does not risk overgrazing of the wetlands.
31. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to mitigate large scale erosion problems that may arise or already exist because of different kinds of exploitation, for example roads, off-road driving and areas where natural resources are extracted.. Measures may include both wetlands and terrestrial habitats;
32. ENCOURAGE that Contracting Parties ensure that measures to eradicate existing and future possible invasive alien species are put into place;
33. ENCOURAGE that Contracting Parties restore peatlands with large carbon storage, regardless of their climate zone, to mitigate climate change in the polar and subpolar regions;

International co-operation

34. CALLS on the Ramsar Secretariat to consider synergies with UNFCCC to identify mechanisms and incentives for the conservation and wise use of polar and subpolar wetlands; and further CALLS on the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions to mobilize relevant frameworks, such as the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), to improve the conservation and wise use of polar and subpolar wetlands;

35. INVITES the Ramsar Secretariat, to make informal contacts with the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat and the Member States in the purpose to find ways of exchanging information about wetlands in the region and possible ways to improve the status for wetland habitat and species. ;
36. INVITES the Ramsar Secretariat to create an ad hoc working group with Ramsar, UNFCCC, CBD, IPBES, CMS/AEWA, Arctic Council and CAFF and the Berne Convention to work on polar and subpolar wetlands;

Follow-up

37. URGE concerned Contracting Parties, with the support of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel and the Ramsar Secretariat in cooperation with relevant other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Regional Organizations, Regional Initiatives, IOPs, etc, to establish an assessment of the polar wetlands and to present reports of the results (one for each hemisphere may also be acceptable) at Ramsar COP15 in 2024. Short progress reports can be presented at the COP14 in 2021.