

**CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**  
**34th Meeting of the Standing Committee**  
**Gland, Switzerland, 10-13 April 2006**

**DOC. SC34-16**

Agenda item 10.4

**Regional Ramsar Center for Training and Research on Wetlands  
in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO)**

**Action requested:** The Standing Committee is requested to note the report from CREHO and provide advice as appropriate.

1. At the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC), held in Gland, Switzerland, in 1997, a proposal was submitted to create a Regional Ramsar Center for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO). The SC endorsed the proposal for the establishment of the Center in Panama City taking advantage of the benefits and facilities offered by the Panamanian Government and the City of Knowledge (Ciudad del Saber).
2. Subsequently, the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD), formed by the Ministers for the Environment of Central America, in its XXIV regular session, held in Belize in 1998, also endorsed the creation of the referred Center.
3. The governments of the region endorsed the proposal for establishing the Center at the first Pan-American meeting of the Ramsar Convention, held in Costa Rica in June 1998, which was subsequently approved by the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, held in San José, Costa Rica, from 10 to 18 May 1999, through Resolution VII.26.
4. The Government of Panama and the Ramsar Secretariat signed the Memorandum of Understanding for establishing the Center during the SC's 29<sup>th</sup> meeting, in 2003. The Panamanian Government committed US\$510,000 in cash for the Center over a period of 10 years. During the first two years of activities, the Panamanian Government allocated US\$138,000 in cash as seed capital for the Center's operation.
5. The Government of Panama, through Law No. 33 of July 7, 2004, granted status as International Mission to the Center providing recognition and a legal framework to operate at local and international level.
6. After a public process of several months, CREHO's Executive Director was selected to lead the initiation of the Center's activities in January 2004. The Executive Director works under a Board of Directors composed of nine members representing each of the subregions of the Western Hemisphere, the host country, the research and donor communities, and one of the Ramsar Convention's International Organization Partners. During its first phase (years 2004-2005), the Center's priorities focused on positioning itself in the region and on developing programs on a regional basis defining its niche and target groups.

7. Since the beginning, CREHO fostered and participated in training activities to promote wetlands management and the use of Ramsar guidelines. As a result, during the last two years over 800 persons were direct or indirect beneficiaries of CREHO's work through information exchange, awareness and training activities.
8. CREHO has carried out training courses since the first year of activities. One of the courses on Management of Wetlands was held in Merida, Mexico, where Ramsar Focal Points from 12 countries participated.
9. To increase its scope of work, CREHO has had a permanent participation on subregional initiatives, such as the High Andean Wetlands Strategy as well as the Central American Wetlands Policy, collaborating on topics related to capacity building.
10. During 2004 and 2005, CREHO focused its efforts upon carrying out a regional and subregional strengthening needs assessment, which was finalized in 2005. Based on the results of this assessment, a Strategic Plan to Strengthen Capabilities for Integrated Wetlands Management and a Regional Training Program on Wetlands were prepared and approved by CREHO's Board of Directors.
11. Based on the needs and priorities identified in the Strategic Plan, two training courses have been planned for the immediate future. The first course will be held for the English-speaking Caribbean countries on wetland management next July.
12. The second course, organized jointly with the Convention on Migratory Species, is intended to increase the knowledge of decision-makers at governmental level on issues related to both Conventions (Ramsar and CMS), and how both are linked on conservation processes, policies, strategies and national actions. This workshop is directed to Spanish-speaking countries and will be held in Panama.
13. In addition, the workplan continues to be executed in the main areas: training and information exchange. The Wetlands Documentation Center, established this year in CREHO with an in-kind donation from IUCN Meso-America, will be opened to the public for consultation in-situ and on-line. In order to create awareness, CREHO will develop a website and a newsletter, as tools available for all government officials and other stakeholders in the region to acquire information on-line and as support to CEPA development in Spanish.
14. At the beginning of 2006, CREHO started a second phase, directed to accomplishing the Strategic Plan and Training Program. The process to strengthen its internal structure, which will help increase its technical presence in the region, has already started. Also, with the financial support of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, an Institutional Development Officer has been recruited to assist the Center in the implementation of the fundraising strategy. During the next months, a Technical Officer will be recruited in order to make available permanent technical advice to beneficiary countries in the region based on CREHO's scope of work.