

REPORT ON 2012 WORLD WETLANDS DAY (WWD) CELEBRATION IN GHANA

Activities marking 2012 WWD in Ghana were preceded with a **press statement** by the Executive Director of the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission and Head of the Ramsar Administrative Authority, Nana Kofi Adu-Nsiah.

The statement highlighted on the over 40 years of existence of the Ramsar Convention and the theme for the occasion, "*Wetlands and tourism*". The statement also emphasised on the importance of how well preserved wetlands, with their natural beauty and biodiversity, provide ideal locations for recreation and tourism and encouraged Ghanaians to use the occasion to appraise the current state of our wetlands regarding their value as locations for leisure and tourism (read the full text of his statement below).

Other activities to mark the occasion over a period include serialise documentary films on wetlands designed to be part of television news broadcast while some major newspapers carry feature articles on the theme and importance of conserving wetlands. The Administrative Authority will soon publish a small hand-book on "*The Ramsar Convention at 40: achievements, challenges and the implications for wetlands conservation in Ghana*".

Friends of Ramsar Sites, a local NGO, will organize over 200 school children to converge at the Sakumo Ramsar Site for educative discussion on the situation of Ghana's wetlands and inter-school live television quiz competition. Competing schools will be presented with copies of the hand-books and other prizes. The competition will be extended to basic schools in the catchments of other Ramsar Sites in the country.

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**PRESS RELEASE BY NANA KOFI ADU-NSIAH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WILDLIFE DIVISION OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION - GHANA**

WORLD WETLAND DAY (02-02-12)

The second day of February each year is celebrated globally as "**World Wetland Day**". The day is marked by countries that are party to the International Treaty on Wetlands, commonly called the *Ramsar Convention* to raise public awareness on wetland values and benefits, and to promote their conservation. This year's celebration marks the 41st anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of *Ramsar*.

The global theme for 2012 World Wetlands Day is "**Wetlands and tourism**" and seeks to highlight on the importance of how well preserved wetlands, with their natural beauty and biodiversity, provide ideal locations for recreation and tourism. As a country, we are encouraged by our ratification of the *Ramsar Convention*, and most importantly by this year's theme, to use the occasion to create public awareness on the importance of wetlands, and to appraise the current state of our wetlands regarding their value as locations for leisure and tourism.

Wetlands are valuable ecosystems that occupy about 6% of the world's surface. They provide numerous goods and services, not only to the local people living around them but also to communities living outside wetland areas. They indirectly provide important services and are prime locations for tourism.

In other parts of the world, especially, in developing countries tourism has expanded relatively recently. In these countries, tourism is increasingly recognized by governments as an opportunity for economic growth, and also as an instrument for poverty reduction. Wetlands provide a whole range of recreational and tourism opportunities that can generate income locally and nationally, from boating and other water sports to hunting, watching wildlife and even art and literature. In Botswana's Okavango Delta, direct non-consumptive use of the Moremi Game Reserve (also a Ramsar Site), by tourists was estimated as being worth up to US\$16 million in 2003.

Ghana has beautiful coastal and inland wetlands with rich biodiversity that make ideal locations for tourism. The income from these wetlands, if well preserved, can be significant and support livelihoods locally and nationally. In fact, there are many wetlands in Ghana with great recreational and tourism value for which monetary figure cannot easily be given because many visitors may use these areas without direct payment. Employing economic valuation techniques to investigate how the public use our coastal wetlands including the Volta river estuary at Ada, Amanzuru wetlands, Ankobra beach, Cape Three Points and Princess Town, and Ankobra River estuary can be revealing. Of course, wetlands also provide other services, such as water, food, water purification, erosion control, carbon sequestration, and many more making their valuation in economic term highly substantial.

What we see of Ghana's wetlands is generally nothing to write home about. They are generally degraded through toxic industrial wastes flowing into waterways and/or through untreated solid and human wastes as it is the case with the Chemu lagoon in Tema; overexploited through unsustainable harvesting of fisheries resources; encroached even if they are under statutory reservations, such as Ramsar Sites or as buffer zones for water impoundments as we are witnessing around the Weija dam in Accra, Owabi dam in Kumasi and many other places in the country. Most of our coastal areas, for example, are dirty, lakes and rivers polluted, mangroves degraded and fisheries and biodiversity over-exploited. These and many more make most of our wetland areas, including the beaches, less attractive for recreation and tourism even if the best tourism infrastructure are developed in such areas. As a country, we have failed to understand, appreciate and respond correctly to the relationship between wetlands, and recreation and tourism.

It is in the light of this that the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission considers this year's World Wetlands Day so important and wishes to use the occasion to appeal to the general public to support conserve our wetlands.

This is because well preserved wetlands provide great opportunity for leisure and tourism that can contribute to Ghana's natural wealth, poverty reduction, economic growth and development.

(Signed)

Nana Kofi Adu-Nisah