

2008 World Wetlands Day Events

The Ramsar Secretariat designated 2 February as “World Wetlands Day” to commemorate the day the Ramsar Convention was signed. It has been celebrated worldwide since 1997. In the Republic of Korea the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MoMAF – recently absorbed into MoE with the new incoming administration) have yearly alternated in convening official ceremonies of World Wetlands Day. This year MoMAF hosted the official ROK Govt. ceremony in Seocheon.

The 2008 official ceremony was designed to encourage the participation of a variety of stakeholders [local residents (including youth) professors, wetland experts, coastal wetland guides, NGOs and local residents]. On 1 February, a workshop was organized to review the activities and discuss how to design an environmentally-friendly coastal wetland experience programme. In addition, there was a poster exhibition illustrating the CEPA (Communication, Education, and Public Awareness) activities of 30 organizations and an academic symposia (e.g., annual meeting of the Korea Wetland Society) convened.

An event, called “Wetland Research Contest for Teenagers”, was organized to show teenagers the importance of wetlands. Oryu Jr. High School team won the MoMAF Minister Prize with their research on the Han River Estuary while the Korea Minjok Leadership Academy team won the KFEM (Korea Federation for Environmental Movement) prize with their research on the Saemangeum wetlands. Prize winners will also have an opportunity for an all expense paid visit to the Hong Kong Wetland Park in April.

The selection of Seocheon as the venue for the official ceremonies is significant in itself. Although Seocheon was designated the first coastal wetland to be reclaimed, the efforts of certain government ministries and offices as well as NGOs and local residents succeeded in reversing the original reclamation plan. Instead, a 16 km² section of the Seocheon foreshore was designated as a “wetland conservation zone” and a ‘Seocheon Declaration’ announced for the protection of this area. The declaration specifies that 20% of the Korean foreshore should be designated as wetland protection zones and reclamation in these special areas is prohibited.

Although the “official” events for the commemoration of “World Wetlands Day” were well organized, far more public activities should have been organized for the millions of Koreans who have no idea of what wetlands are in Korea and why they should be preserved.



Tidal flat event



Ceremony



Eco-guide workshop



CEPA exhibition

2008 World Wetlands Day- Taeon Oil Spill Clean-up activities (1-2 February, 2008)

The UNDP/GEF Korea Wetland Project first organized a Taeon Oil Spill clean-up day on Friday 25 January. The event proved very popular and was well attended by more than 40 Korean nationals and expats from six countries including embassy staff from the Australian, New Zealand (including the Ambassador), and Royal Netherlands Embassies in Seoul.

WWD is an international day to show the value and importance of wetlands to the world and to encourage wetland conservation activities. For those who wanted to do something meaningful to commemorate WWD 2008 in Korea the Ministry of Environment (UNDP/GEF Korea Wetland Project and the Ramsar COP10 Task Force Team (TFT)), organized an additional two (1 and 2 February) oil spill clean-up days on the Taeon Peninsula (Taeon-gun National Park). It was more meaningful as approximately 50 foreigners living in Korea participated in this event and also gave them opportunity to interact with locals. Despite frigid winter temperatures a total of 75 Koreans from all walks of life and more than 50 foreigners resident in Korea and representing different countries sacrificed their Friday or Saturday to collectively be of service.

The first clean-up day (1 Feb) was for Gureumpo Beach,(Chungnam Province), and the second moved to Mojae Beach (also Chungnam Province). Both sites are rocky and remote areas that were overlooked by the tens of thousands of volunteers who initially turned out in early December when the Hebei Spirit Oil Spill occurred

Protective outerwear, boots, gloves, buckets and absorbent material were provided by the Taeon Volunteer Center and a short field training session conducted on how best to remove the remaining oil.

Although it was discouraging seeing the scale of the spill and what still needed to be done, the volunteers were full of enthusiasm and energy to do what they could to clean up this once pristine national park coastline. Their spirit of collective community service is what is needed worldwide to protect these precious coastal wetlands for future generations.

Following the clean-up activities both days, the volunteers were bused to visit the nearby Du-ung Wetland, Korea's 6th and most recently designated Ramsar Site. The Du-ung Wetland is a topographically unique wetland for the area: a freshwater lagoon fed by underground water and separated from the West (Yellow) Sea by a sand dune system. Everybody was glad to see that this wetland of global significance had not been affected by the worst oil spill in Korean history.

These on-the-ground events demonstrated to the participants how connected we all are to nature (including wetlands) and how vulnerable our livelihoods are when are natural habitats are lost or severely damaged. It also reinforced the theme for WWD 2008 and the Ramsar COP 10 “Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People” .



