

High Altitude Wetlands as Ramsar Sites in Nepal: Status after Declaration

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Of the eight Ramsar sites declared in Nepal, four are located in high altitude areas. Significant achievements have been made within less than a year of its declaration (23rd Sep. 2007) of high altitude wetlands as Ramsar sites. The high altitude wetlands declared as Ramsar sites are Rara (Rara National Park, Mugu District), Phoksundo (Shey Phoksundo NP, Dolpa District), Gokyo and Associated Wetlands (Sagarmatha NP, Solukhumbu District) and Gosaikunda and Associated Wetlands (Langtang NP, Rasuwa District). The plant endemism, endemic fish and frog (Rara), biogeographic location supplemented by religio-cultural values and endangered mammals are the main criteria that contributed for declaration of Ramsar sites.

One of the commitments of the government after declaration of Ramsar sites is to strengthen the conservation and wise- use of the wetlands. Preparation of site management plans is underway for the Gosainkunda and Associated Wetlands whereas it is under process of approval for Gokyo and Associated Wetlands. These plans will help streamline and consolidate the conservation and wise-use of the wetlands. The implementation of the project in Gokyo and Associated Wetlands supported by WWF Nepal has resulted in the awareness amongst the residents of the buffer zone of Sagarmatha. They have formed the Gokyo Cho wetland user group with the responsibility of mainstreaming wetland conservation, minimizing the pollution and garbage and further working to link coordinated tourism activities for the improved livelihood of the hotels lying along the banks of wetland.

WWF supported Langtang NP and Buffer Zone Support Program under Sacred Himalayan Landscape Initiative is being implemented in Gosainkunda and Associated Wetlands. In both sites, study of the adaptation and mitigation of climate change has been instituted. Awareness raising informative materials were produced and distributed both in English and Nepali vernacular language. Coordinated wetland day celebration and publication of proceedings are also taking place. The fact sheets of these sites were published. Cultural significances of the sites were studied and published.

Nepal is preparing to attend the forthcoming CoP 10 to be held in Republic of Korea from 28 October to 4 November 2008. In the process, Nepal's national report has been submitted on 31st March 2008 to Ramsar Secretariat (can be seen in www.ramsar.org). Mapping of the Gokyo and associated wetlands has been completed by ICIMOD, data base preparation has been started through the support of WWF Nepal and ICIMOD.

Strengthened implementation of the ongoing site management plans and preparation and implementation of the site management plans of rest of the two sites, Rara and Phoksundo, is the need of the time. Declaration of one Ramsar site in each of the remaining high altitude protected areas (Khaptad and Makalu Barun NPs, Dhorpatan HR, Annapurna, Manaslu and Kangchanjungha CAs) as Ramsar site is the long term aim of the government.
