

# CANADA *and the* RAMSAR CONVENTION



*The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance*

1995 Edition

Canada

SCT 058  
1995E





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Printed 1995  
Ottawa, Ontario

ISBN 0-662-23423-5  
Cat. No. CW66-141/1995E

This booklet was produced through the cooperation of the:

- Canadian Ramsar Network
- Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada
- Secretariat, North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)

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## WHAT IS THE RAMSAR CONVENTION?

**T**HE *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance*, also known as the *Ramsar Convention*, was named after the city in Iran where the text was first adopted in 1971 through the cooperation of 18 nations. The Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for international cooperation for the conservation of the World's wetland habitats. As of mid-1995, 84 nation states comprise the *Contracting Parties* to the Convention world-wide. Numerous observer organizations and non-contracting nations also play an indirect role in the business of the Convention.

Canada became a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention in 1981. Contracting Parties to the Convention have recognized that wetlands are essential not only for hydrological and ecological processes but also for the rich fauna and flora they support as well as for human activities. The Convention's objectives focus on stemming the loss of wetlands and ensuring their conservation and sustainable wise use for future generations.



## WHY ARE WETLANDS IMPORTANT?

**W**ETLANDS are among the most productive environments in the World, covering about four percent of the planet. They provide tremendous economic benefits to people through their production of fisheries resources, the maintenance of watertables for agriculture, timber production, water storage and reduction of natural impacts such as watershed flooding and shoreline erosion. Wetlands have been estimated to give over \$10 billion a year in benefits to Canadians. Wetlands also provide ecological functions and values such as being sinks for natural contaminants, heavy metals and other pollutants, enhancing water purification and providing popular recreational and hunting areas world-wide. In particular, wetlands include critical habitats for many species of fauna and flora, countless mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish and vertebrate species. Often these species are threatened with extinction.

The productivity of wetlands depends on their proper ecological functioning. However, wetlands are also among the most threatened habitats in the World mainly due to the drainage, land reclamation, pollution and over-use by competing land uses.





## WHAT AREAS ARE COVERED BY THE RAMSAR CONVENTION?

**I**N Canada, the term “wetland” has been defined and used by various national and provincial agencies. The freshwater edges of lakes and rivers, inland marshes, swamps, sloughs and peatlands, the marine waters of estuaries, and the tidal ocean shorezone in Canada may include wetlands. Canadian wetlands meet national or provincial criteria related to the presence of soil and flora adapted to wet environments as well as the occurrence of waters that are generally restricted to a maximum depth of two metres.

The Ramsar Convention adopts a broader definition of the term “wetland”. Wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt and include areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres. In addition, the Convention provides that wetlands may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetland area, estuarine waters, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within these wetlands. The Convention’s definition covers a wide range of ecosystem types from rivers to coastal areas and even coral reefs.

## HOW IS THE CONVENTION RUN?

THE *Conference of the Contracting Parties* is the Convention's governing body. It meets every three years to adopt a program and a budget for the following triennium, reviews the implementation of the Convention, and sets priorities for the activities of the *Ramsar Bureau*. The Bureau is the operational secretariat of the Convention and is located in Gland, Switzerland. The meetings of the Ramsar Convention held to date include: Iran (1971), Italy (1980), France (1982), The Netherlands (1984), Canada (1987), Switzerland (1990), and Japan (1993). The next meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties is scheduled to be held in Australia in 1996. A *Standing Committee* is composed of representatives from regions throughout the World and oversees implementation of the policies and budget and management of programs by the Ramsar Bureau.

The Ramsar Bureau is responsible for the implementation of the programs and decisions taken by the Standing Committee and the meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The Bureau is an independent body which shares headquarters facilities with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Switzerland and is composed of a staff of experts and administrators. The Ramsar Bureau administers the *Wetland Conservation Fund* which provides catalytic funding on an annual basis for projects under the Ramsar Wise Use Principles and assists new countries in entering the Convention.



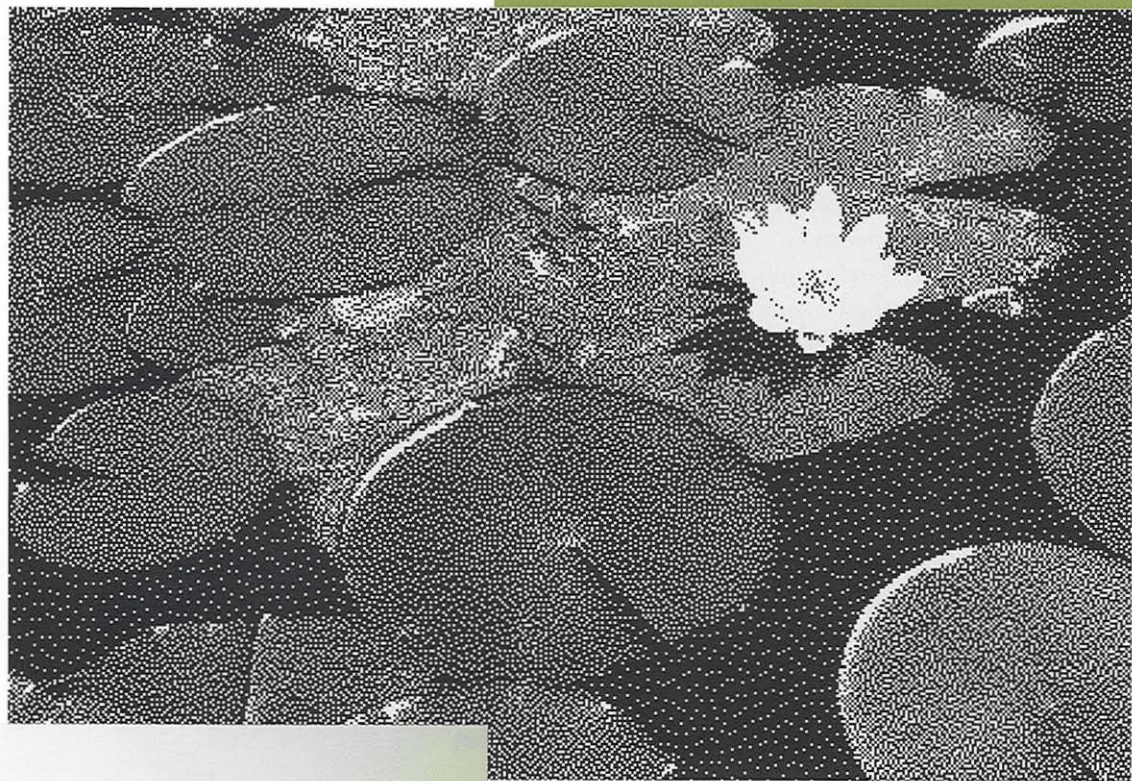


## WHAT ARE CANADA'S OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE CONVENTION?

THE Ramsar Convention operates on several levels. The Convention promotes cooperation among countries to promote wetland conservation recognizing that many wetland systems either cross or are affected by water systems shared between nations. It also recognizes that, in many cases, fauna dependent on wetland systems are of a migratory nature requiring international cooperation.

Hence, sound wetland management and international action are required to promote the establishment and maintenance of an international network of protected wetland areas ensuring the conservation of the functions and values of these systems. In addition to the general applications, including wetland conservation considerations in national land use planning, Canada and the other Contracting Parties to the Convention undertake to respect four main obligations. These are:

- Designation of at least one wetland for inclusion in the *List of Wetlands of International Importance*;
- Promotion of the wise use of wetlands within their nation particularly through the implementation of wetland conservation and management policies;
- Consultation with other Contracting Parties about implementing the obligations arising under the Convention particularly for those wetlands shared between nations; and
- Establishment of protected wetland areas throughout their nation.



## THE WISE USE PRINCIPLES OF THE CONVENTION

ONE of the tenets of the Convention was the establishment in 1990 of the *Ramsar Wise Use Principles* which complement global sustainable development goals. In industrialized and developing countries, wetlands are the scene of activities that are not always compatible with the balance of nature. The very existence of protected wetland sites, the widespread recognition of the value of wetlands, and public awareness of these systems has been greatly promoted by the existence and implementation of the Convention in Canada.

These Wise Use Principles call for Contracting Parties to:

- Establish and implement national wetland conservation policies;
- Undertake review and revision of legislation and governmental infrastructure to promote wetland conservation;
- Undertake wetland inventories and management planning for wetlands;
- Promote wetland research;
- Establish protected wetland reserves; and
- Promote public education and awareness of wetland values and conservation.

## THE LIST OF WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

**W**ETLANDS are selected for the *List of Wetlands of International Importance* due to their international importance established on the basis of ecological, botanical, zoological, hydrological, fisheries and human use criteria. Sites can be nominated based on their representativeness of rare or unusual wetland types in a biogeographical region or of sites that are particularly good examples of wetlands in such a region.

The size of Ramsar sites varies significantly. In Canada's case, Ramsar sites range from 244 hectares to over six million hectares in size. Canadian Ramsar sites include many wetland types – from coastal salt marshes to freshwater riverine and island systems, inland peatland bogs and fens, prairie sloughs and marshes, temperate swamps and Arctic lowland ponds.

The Convention has established the *Ramsar Monitoring Procedure* for these sites. This is a mechanism to help Contracting Parties in taking rapid and effective action to identify and restore degraded wetlands on the sites listed under the Convention. The Procedure facilitates development of site restoration plans and funding of projects to this end. To date, no sites in Canada have been the subject of this monitoring procedure. However, there are sites in Canada where external factors such as water and air pollution and land use practices may have negative impacts in the future.



## HOW MANY RAMSAR SITES ARE THERE IN CANADA?

CANADA has gone well beyond the minimum requirements of the Convention. As of mid-1995, 33 Ramsar sites have been designated under the Ramsar Convention in Canada. These sites are found in all of Canada's provinces and territories and cover a surface area, in total, of over 13 million hectares of designated wetlands and associated uplands. Most of these sites are described in the publication *Wetlands for the World: Canada's Ramsar Sites*. Canada's 33 sites represent close to 30% of the wetland area designated world-wide under the Convention to date.

Procedures for the recognition and establishment of Canadian Ramsar sites are outlined in the report entitled *Nomination and Listing of Wetlands of International Importance in Canada. Procedures Manual*.

Canada was the first nation in the World to formalize wetland conservation policy at a national level through the adoption of *The Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation* in 1991. In addition, seven of Canada's ten provinces are currently developing or implementing provincially-based wetland conservation and management policies which complement the federal policy initiative.

## WHERE ARE CANADA'S RAMSAR SITES?



LEGEND

*Atlantic Canada:*

- 1 Grand Codroy Estuary
- 2 Malpeque Bay
- 3 Chignecto
- 4 Musquodoboit Harbour Outer Estuary
- 5 Southern Bight, Minas Basin
- 6 Mary's Point
- 7 Shepody Bay
- 8 Tabusintac River Estuary and Lagoon

*Central Canada:*

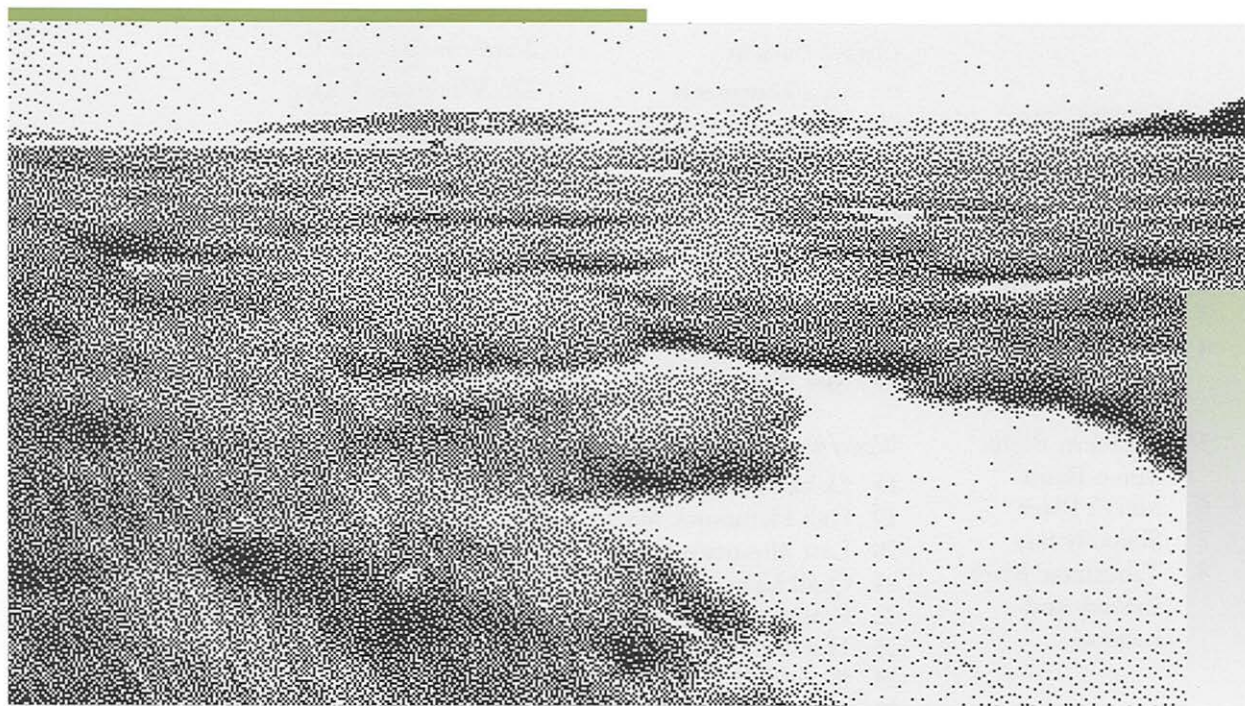
- 9 Cap Tourmente
- 10 Baie de L'Isle-Verte
- 11 Lake St. Francis
- 12 Long Point
- 13 St. Clair
- 14 Point Pelee
- 15 Southern James Bay
- 16 Polar Bear Provincial Park
- 17 Mer Bleue

*Western/Pacific Canada:*

- 18 Delta Marsh
- 19 Oak Hammock Marsh
- 20 Last Mountain Lake
- 21 Quill Lakes
- 22 Peace-Athabasca Delta
- 23 Hay-Zama Lakes
- 24 Beaverhill Lake
- 25 Alaksen
- 26 Creston Valley

*Northern Canada:*

- 27 Whooping Crane Summer Range
- 28 Queen Maud Gulf
- 29 Rasmussen Lowlands
- 30 McConnell River
- 31 Dewey Soper
- 32 Polar Bear Pass
- 33 Old Crow Flats

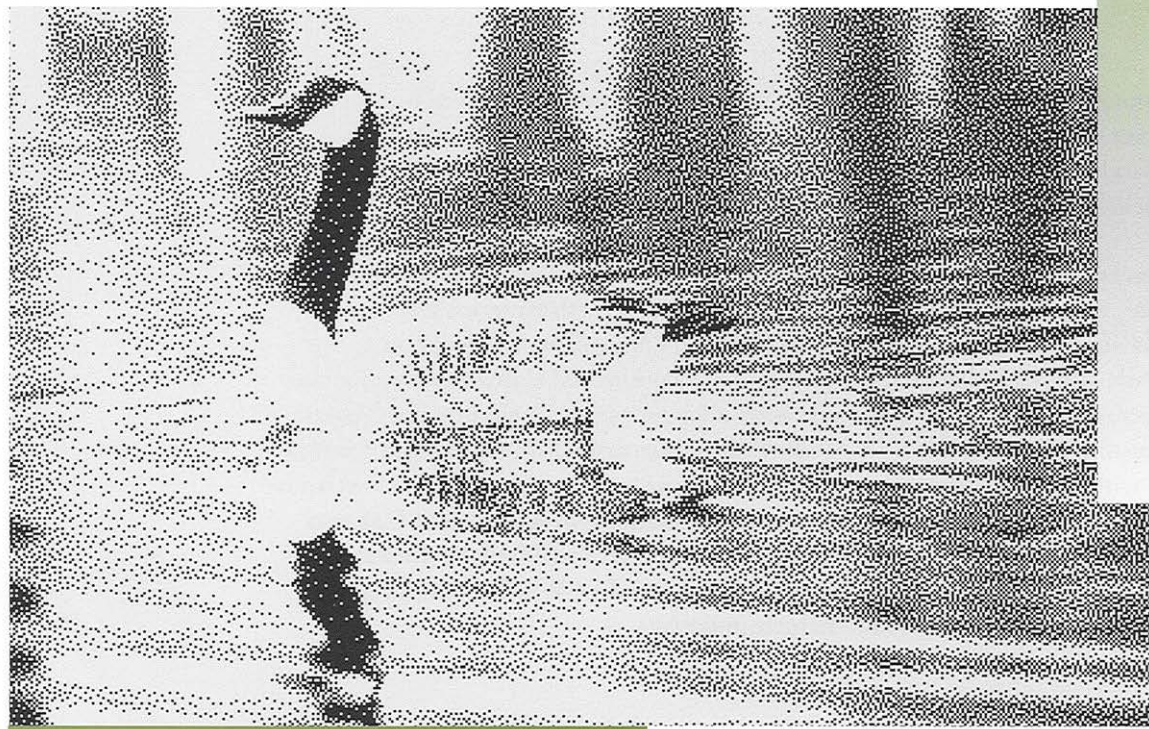




## PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

**C**ONTRACTING Parties to the Ramsar Convention recognize the need to cooperate in their activities and to promote compatible conservation and wise use of wetlands. Individual actions by nations are sometimes insufficient for the conservation and sustainable management of wetland resources.

There are many examples where concerted international and cooperative partnerships have proved to be valuable to the sound management of wetland resources and species. This certainly is the case in North America with the establishment of the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* among Canada, the United States and Mexico. On a continental scale, the three nations cooperate in many other aspects of wetland conservation including the *Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserves Network* and other actions undertaken in cooperation with non-government organizations. These organizations include Wetlands for the Americas, Ducks Unlimited, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau. The Latin America Program of the Canadian Wildlife Service also promotes hemispheric wetland habitat initiatives.



## HOW ARE CANADIAN RAMSAR SITES MANAGED?

CANADA'S 33 Ramsar sites, located in all of our provinces and territories, are owned and managed by a range of agencies reflecting the jurisdictions responsible for wetland conservation in the nation. Some 78% of the area designated under the Convention in Canada lies on federal lands and is managed by federal agencies such as the Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada, National Capital Commission and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. An additional 20% of the Ramsar area designated to date in Canada lies on provincial lands and about one percent lies on privately-held lands. As of mid-1995, 28 of Canada's 33 Ramsar sites have a management plan or program in place, under revision, being renewed or scheduled under legislative requirements.

Over 90% of Canada's total designated Ramsar area lies within national or provincial parks, national wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries or provincial wildlife management areas. About 10% of Canada's Ramsar area lies on sites secured for conservation by non-government, native or other agencies. Further information on the management of Canadian Ramsar sites is available in the report entitled *Management of Canadian Ramsar Sites*.

## THE CANADIAN RAMSAR NETWORK

**T**HE Government of Canada has assigned the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Ramsar Convention to Environment Canada. Within this federal department, the lead agency with respect to the Convention is the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). The CWS represents the interests of the numerous federal, provincial, territorial and non-government agencies involved in Ramsar site management and activities across the nation.

Coordination of Ramsar activities and communication with Canadian Ramsar site managers and interested agencies is undertaken through the *Canadian Ramsar Network*. This network has been established and supported by the Canadian Wildlife Service in cooperation with the Secretariat to the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (NAWCC) (Canada). Distribution of Ramsar publications and information reports as well as maintenance of a national mailing list of contacts is managed by the Secretariat of the NAWCC (Canada). Information on the Canadian Ramsar Network is available from:

Secretariat  
North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada)  
Suite 200, 1750 Courtwood Crescent  
Ottawa, Ontario K2C 2B5

**T**HE following reports on the Canadian Ramsar program are available from the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada (see address on the back cover).

Gillespie, D. I., H. Boyd, and P. Logan. 1991. *Wetlands for the World: Canada's Ramsar Sites*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. 40 p.

Government of Canada. 1993. *Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. 1993 National Report for Canada*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. 9 p.

Government of Canada. 1994. *Nomination and Listing of Wetlands of International Importance in Canada. Procedures Manual*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. 16 p.

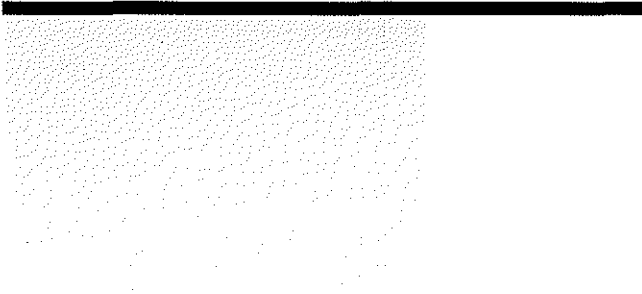
Rubec, C. D. A. 1994. *Management of Canadian Ramsar Sites*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada and North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada). Ottawa, Ontario. 92 p.

FOR MORE  
INFORMATION

FOR more information on the Ramsar Convention or Ramsar sites in Canada please contact:

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