

COMMENTS

Problems of Implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in China

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<https://doi.org/10.21684/2412-2343-2024-11-4-168-188>

Received: July 21, 2024

Reviewed: October 3, 2024

Accepted: October 19, 2024

Abstract. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) was signed in February 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, and currently has 172 parties. China acceded to this Convention in 1992, became the 67th party, and was elected a member of the Standing Committee in 2005. Wetlands conservation in China has achieved some positive results, but it still faces serious challenges. China's wetlands level is much lower than the world average (global wetlands level is 8.60%), and the wetlands area per capita is only $\frac{1}{5}$ of the world average.¹ Until 2022, China lacked legislation to protect wetlands; the article's objective is to analyze the recently adopted Chinese legislation in this area. Ultimately, the authors conclude that it is necessary to strengthen legal standards in China to contribute to the conservation and restoration of global wetlands.

¹ National Forestry and Grassland Administration. http://www.forestry.gov.cn/portal/main/govfile/13/govfile_2285.htm

Keywords: Ramsar Convention; Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in China; Problems of implementation of Convention; Countermeasures for China's implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

To cite: Solntsev, A., & Chen, G. (2024). Problems of Implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in China. *BRICS Law Journal*, 11(4), 168–188.

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Introduction

Wetlands are located in the transition zone between aquatic ecosystems and terrestrial ecosystems, known as “kidneys of the earth” and “species gene repository.”² Wetlands are important habitats that are closely linked to the survival and development of mankind. They can provide mankind with unique ecological services such as supplying clean water and aquatic products, maintaining biodiversity, regulating the climate, and mitigating droughts.³ Wetlands are widely distributed around the world in abundant forms. Their quality and area are closely related to human health and production and life. They are precious habitats for the growth and breeding of animals and plants, and also an important part of the land and natural resources of each country.

Over a long period of human history, people have failed to understand the importance of wetlands, and even what wetlands are, so wetland systems around the world have been severely damaged. Since 1900, nearly half of the earth's wetlands

² Erwin, K. L. (2009). Wetlands and Global Climate Change: The Role of Wetland Restoration in a Changing World. *Wetlands Ecology and Management*, 17(1), 71–84.

³ Vymazal, J. (2022). The Historical Development of Constructed Wetlands for Wastewater Treatment. *Land*, 11(2), 174.

have been lost due to unsustainable human development and use.⁴ As research and knowledge of wetlands has spread, people have gradually come to understand the importance of wetland ecosystems to mankind, and governments around the world have begun to take measures to protect and save wetlands.

In February 1971, representatives of 18 countries signed the *Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat* (also known as the Ramsar Convention and “Wetlands Convention”) in Ramsar, Iran. The Ramsar Convention is one of the earliest intergovernmental conservation conventions in the world and the only international convention to protect a single ecosystem in the world.⁵

The main causes of wetland degradation worldwide are anthropogenic and natural factors, i.e. human activities and climate change.⁶ Over the past 300 years, inland wetlands in China, the United States, Europe and other places have been seriously lost and degraded, reaching about 3.4×10^6 (approximately 360.4) square kilometers.⁷

Since joining the Convention on Wetlands in 1992, China has actively fulfilled its national obligations and achieved remarkable results, but there are still a number of problems in the process of implementing the Convention. China should constantly overcome difficulties in the process of wetlands conservation and restoration and make its contribution to global environmental protection.

1. Basic Information on the Ramsar Convention

Wetlands, forests and oceans are known as the three major ecosystems on Earth. Today, the problem of water scarcity has risen from the regional to the global level.⁸ A healthy wetland ecosystem plays an important role in water purification, water resource management, carbon storage, the provision of food and resources, biodiversity conservation, and cultural and recreational value. It has significant ecological, economic, social and cultural functions, so its conservation value cannot be ignored. However, at the same time, the loss of wetlands worldwide is very serious, bringing many negative impacts.

⁴ He, Y., & Xiong, X. (1994). On the Characteristics of the Wetland Ecosystem. *Environmental Protection in Agriculture*, 13(6), 275–278. (In Chinese).

⁵ Kopylov, M. N., & Solntsev, A. M. (2012). Ramsar Convention's 40th Anniversary. *Journal of Russian Law*, 3(183), 105–112. (In Russian).

⁶ Solntsev, A. M. (2018). Climate Change: International Legal Dimension. *Moscow Journal of International Law*, 106(1), 60–78. (In Russian).

⁷ Fluet-Chouinard, E., et al. (2023). Extensive Global Wetland Loss over the Past Three Centuries. *Nature*, 614(7947), 281–286.

⁸ Likhacheva, A., Kalachyhin, H., Abdolova, S., & Kamenkovich, N. (2021). Water Dimension of BRICS Cooperation: National Challenges and Joint Opportunities. *BRICS Law Journal*, 8(2), 41–65.

The Ramsar Convention entered into force on December 21, 1975, and has 172 parties today.⁹ The Convention aims to protect wetland ecosystems by preventing the loss of wetlands as breeding and wintering grounds for many waterfowl, and by encouraging “wise use.”

The Ramsar Convention has become the most important wetlands conservation convention in the world,¹⁰ emphasizing the protection and sustainable use of wetland resources. On January 3, 1992, China decided to accede to the Convention on Wetlands. The Convention entered into force for China on July 31, 1992, and China became the 67th member state of the Convention, shouldering international responsibilities and obligations for wetland protection. In 1996, the 19th Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention decided to celebrate World Wetlands Day on February 2 every year to commemorate the signing of the Convention and raise public awareness of wetland protection.

The Ramsar Convention is short and clear. It consists of 12 articles that define the broad concept of wetlands, the responsibilities and notification obligations of the contracting parties, the procedures for convening the Conference of the Parties and the content of its deliberations, etc. The Conference of the Parties meets every three years to agree on the work plan and budget arrangements for the next work cycle and to consider guidance on environmental issues. Non-member states, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations also attend the meeting as non-voting observers.

Article 1 of the Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as “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, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.” As of 2021, more than 2,400 wetlands around the world have been included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, with a total area of more than 2.5 million square kilometres, which is about 13–18% of the world’s wetlands area.¹¹ Wetlands of international importance are wetlands that meet the evaluation criteria of the Wetlands Convention and are internationally representative in terms of ecology, flora and fauna, landscape, etc.¹²

The parties to the Ramsar Convention are required to fulfil the following obligations: 1) to carry out sustainable management of wetland resources, actively formulate corresponding policies and regulations, balance the relationship between

⁹ Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (February 2, 1971). UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-wetlands-international-importance-especially-waterfowl-habitat?hub=66535#item-3>

¹⁰ Feng, X. (2008). “*Convention on Wetlands*” and *Wetland Protection in China* (Master’s Thesis, p. 14). Ocean University of China.

¹¹ Global Wetland Outlook. <https://www.global-wetland-outlook.ramsar.org>

¹² Kleijn, D., et al. (2014). Waterbirds Increase More Rapidly in Ramsar Designated Wetlands Than in Unprotected Wetlands. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 51(2), 289–298.

economic development and environmental protection, and promote the health and stability of the ecosystem; 2) to identify and protect key wetland ecosystems, designate and take necessary measures to protect wetlands of international importance, and protect the biodiversity of wetland ecosystems; 3) to promote the development of global wetland conservation through international cooperation such as sharing wetland management experience and jointly carrying out research and conservation projects. As noted in its own Global Wetland Outlook,¹³ over the past 50 years approximately 35% of wetlands globally have been lost over the convention's life,¹⁴ with larger numbers reported by other authoritative global assessments.¹⁵ Combating wetlands degradation requires a global effort.

After 10 years of discussion and research, the Ramsar Convention focused on protecting urban wetlands, which was very challenging and quite innovative. In 2008, the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention formally addressed the issue of wetlands and urbanization and adopted a resolution "Wetlands and Urbanization." The 11th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention adopted a resolution "Principles for the Planning and Management of Urban and Peri-urban Wetlands," and then the 12th Conference of the Parties adopted a resolution "Wetland City Accreditation." These resolutions help increase public awareness of wetlands, promote sustainable urban development, and closely link environmental protection to quality urban development and are important milestones in the process of wetlands conservation.

2. Problems of Implementation of the Ramsar Wetlands Convention in China

Wetlands in China are widespread and rich in types, they include all types of Ramsar wetlands and cover a large area of the country. However, the concept of wetlands is relatively unknown in China. Before the 1990s, wetlands conservation activities in China were at the stage of raising awareness and were relatively rare. At that time, there were no laws and regulations specifically addressing wetlands as conservation areas.

In the past, the level of wetlands conservation in China was low, and some wetlands with important ecological functions were not included in the conservation

¹³ Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. (2018). *Global Wetland Outlook: State of the World's Wetlands and Their Services to People 2018*. https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/gwo_e.pdf

¹⁴ Bridgewater, P., & Kim, R. E. (2021). The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands at 50. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 5(3), 268–270.

¹⁵ Watson, R., et al. (2019). *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (pp. 22–47). IPBES. https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/inline/files/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers.pdf

system, which resulted in the decline of wetlands bird species and populations and the reduction of wetlands biodiversity. For example, the “Great Northern Wilderness” region of China once had abundant wetland resources. In the mid-20th century, the Chinese government over-developed agriculture in the region in order to solve the “food problem” for the vast population, which caused the wetland water resources to dry up and the ecological environment to deteriorate. According to statistics, 40% of China’s important wetlands are at risk of serious degradation. China’s North China Plain, the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and Yellow River basins, the Sanjiang Plain and Songnen Plain in the northeast, the tidal flats and mangroves along the eastern coast, Poyang Lake, Taihu Lake, Dianchi Lake and other wetlands are facing varying degrees of destruction and degradation. By the mid-1990s, about 50% of coastal wetlands had ceased to exist, and nearly 1,000 natural lakes had disappeared.

After China joined the Ramsar Convention in 1992, awareness of wetlands conservation increased and legislative initiatives for wetlands protection have been taken. China has gone through 4 stages of development in the process of establishing legal protection for wetlands and implementing the convention:

1) 1992–2003, comprehensive study and initial phase. China conducted the first national wetlands resource survey and released the “China Wetlands Conservation Action Plan”;

2) 2004–2015, rescue conservation stage. China has carried out large-scale construction of wetland parks and implemented wetlands conservation projects;

3) 2016–2021, system conservation stage. With the goal of building an “ecological civilization,” China issued and implemented a plan for a wetland’s conservation and restoration system;

4) 2022 – present. China has adopted the Wetlands Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China and continues to actively implement the Ramsar Convention and the decisions of the Conference of the Parties.

The process of wetlands conservation and implementation of the Ramsar Convention in China has been complicated. Wetland protection in China and the implementation process of the Ramsar Convention are quite complicated. According to the results of the first national wetland resources survey (2003), the total area of wetlands in China was 38.4855 million hectares, of which natural wetlands accounted for 36.2005 million hectares. The second national wetland resources survey (2014) showed that the total area of wetlands in the country had increased to 53.6026 million hectares, and the area of natural wetlands was 46.6747 million hectares. Comparing the two surveys using the same criteria, China’s wetland area has decreased by 3.3963 million hectares, a decrease of 8.82%; the area of natural wetlands has decreased by 3.3762 million hectares, a decrease of 9.33%.¹⁶ The frequency of threat factors in

¹⁶ National Forestry and Grassland Administration. (2014). *Results of the Second National Wetland Resources Survey*. <http://www.forestry.gov.cn/main/65/20140128/758154.html>. (In Chinese).

China's wetlands has increased by 38.72%,¹⁷ and there are many factors that have caused a reduction in wetland area, which has placed the ecological conditions of wetlands under severe strain.¹⁸

Firstly, public awareness of wetland protection is relatively weak. In developed countries and regions, wetland research was carried out earlier and environmental awareness is stronger. In contrast, local governments and the public in China attach significantly less importance to wetland protection, fail to fully understand the important role and value of wetlands, and relevant research and publicity efforts are also inadequate.

In many cases, industries and government agencies focus on one element of the wetlands for their own benefit and have even treated wetlands as "barren wastelands." In the past, wetlands were used for agriculture. China has a "cropland redlining" policy. When a development project is supposed to occupy croplands, other land must be reclaimed as compensation. The wetlands were once considered "unused land" and were reclaimed by local governments as compensation for occupied croplands. Therefore, conservation and management measures taken for wetlands are not systematic, scientific, coordinated and comprehensive.

Secondly, China is relatively weak in terms of its scientific and technological foundation and its ability to fulfil its commitments. Scientific research on wetlands is still inadequate, there is a lack of sound monitoring methods and mechanisms, systematic recording of wetland distribution and classification information, and limited financial investment in wetland research.

Wetland conservation and research require cooperation between the relevant fields and departments, such as water resources, land, agriculture and environmental protection. At present, Chinese wetlands conservation authorities need to improve cooperation and coordination mechanisms – they lack the ability to act in a coordinated manner to better promote wetlands conservation and management.

Thirdly, there has long been no legislation on wetlands conservation. The delay in enacting legislation is a major reason for the dramatic decline in wetland areas. Before the Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China was formally implemented in 2022, China lacked wetland protection legislation at the national level. Wetland destruction was serious, and it was difficult to pursue accountability in related cases. Before 2022, China had fewer wetlands conservation regulations scattered in other laws and regulations. These rules were neither systematic nor comprehensive and could not meet the requirements for systematic wetlands conservation. Some regulations even violate current wetlands conservation requirements due to their long duration and differing legislative objectives.

¹⁷ National Forestry and Grassland Administration, 2014.

¹⁸ Liu, L. (2021). *Research on the Controversial Issues of Wetlands Conservation Law*. Beijing Jiaotong University. (In Chinese).

In 2014, amendments regarding wetlands were made to the Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China. Article 2 of this Law states:

"Environment" as used in this Law refers to the total body of all natural elements and artificially transformed natural elements affecting human existence and development, which includes the atmosphere, water, seas, land, minerals, forests, grasslands, wildlife, natural and human remains, nature reserves, historic sites and scenic spots, and urban and rural areas.¹⁹

Although wetlands are listed as independent natural elements along with other elements, there have been no specific regulations to protect wetlands.

In some laws in China, wetlands are only considered as a means of environmental protection and are not classified as protected areas. For example, Article 68 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Atmospheric Pollution states:

Local people's governments at all levels shall strengthen the management of construction and transportation, keep roads clean, control the stacking of materials and debris, expand the area of green spaces, water surfaces, wetlands and paved ground, and prevent and control dust pollution.²⁰

This section of the Law addresses the expansion of wetlands as a means of preventing and controlling dust pollution, notes the ecological value of wetlands, but does not propose measures to protect wetlands.

Some of China's laws have been amended to conserve wetlands, but they are limited in content and application, and do not create a consistent system of protection. For example, Article 29 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Water Pollution states:

The local people's government at or above the county level shall, according to the requirements for the ecological environment functions of valleys, organize the protection and recovery of lakes, rivers and wet land, construct ecological environment treatment and protection projects such as artificial wetland, water source cultivation forest, buffer belts and isolation belts of plants along rivers and lakes, rectify black and smelly waters according to the actual local circumstances, and enhance the bearing capacity of environmental resources in valleys.²¹

¹⁹ Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (adopted at the 11th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 7th National People's Congress on April 24, 1989; as amended on April 24, 2014). National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. <http://www.npc.gov.cn>. (In Chinese).

²⁰ Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Atmospheric Pollution (adopted at the 22nd Meeting of the 6th Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on September 5, 1987; as amended on October 26, 2018). Ministry of Ecology and Environment of People's Republic of China. https://www.mee.gov.cn/ywgz/fgbz/fl/201811/t20181113_673567.shtml. (In Chinese).

²¹ Law of the People's Republic of China on the Prevention and Control of Water Pollution (adopted at the 5th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 6th National People's Congress on May 11, 1984;

Although the law mentions that wetlands must be protected and restored, it does not indicate specific methods of protection.

Articles 20 and 22 of the Marine Environment Protection Law of the People's Republic of China mention the conservation of coastal wetlands, emphasizing that the State Council and coastal local people's governments at all levels should take effective measures to protect typical and representative marine ecosystems such as mangroves bushland and coastal wetlands. Marine nature reserves should be established in areas of seas, coasts, islands, coastal wetlands, estuaries and bays that have special conservation value.²² These articles only cover coastal wetlands and mangroves, which do not present all types of wetlands.

In the absence of specific legislation on the conservation of wetlands, local governments at all levels have formulated relevant local regulations, such as: "Regulations on the Conservation of Wetlands in Heilongjiang Province,"²³ "Regulations on the Conservation of Wetlands in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,"²⁴ "Regulations on the Conservation of Lake Poyang Wetlands in Jiangxi Province,"²⁵ and others.²⁶ In different local settings, some important systems are not harmonized with each other, so they cannot systematically protect wetlands. Local legislation is at a lower level and the protection it provides is not strong enough to replace state-level wetlands conservation legislation. These facts affect the image of China as a participant in the Ramsar Convention.²⁷

With the rapid development of China's social economy and urbanization, the pressure on wetland resources is increasing day by day. In the pursuit of economic interests, wetland resources are often overexploited or used irrationally, and the conflict between wetland ecological protection and resource utilization is

as amended on June 27, 2017). Ministry of Ecology and Environment of People's Republic of China. https://www.mee.gov.cn/ywgz/fgbz/fl/200802/t20080229_118802.shtml. (In Chinese).

²² Marine Environment Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (adopted at the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 5th National People's Congress on November 4, 1982; as amended on November 4, 2017). Ministry of Ecology and Environment of People's Republic of China. https://www.mee.gov.cn/ywgz/fgbz/fl/201805/t20180517_440477.shtml. (In Chinese).

²³ Regulations on the Conservation of Wetlands in Heilongjiang Province (adopted at the 22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th People's Congress of Heilongjiang Province on October 22, 2015; as amended on June 28, 2018). Legal Library. <http://m.law-lib.com/>. (In Chinese).

²⁴ Regulations on Wetlands Conservation in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (adopted at the 13th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th People's Congress of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on November 28, 2014). Legal Library. <http://m.law-lib.com/>. (In Chinese).

²⁵ Regulations on the Conservation of Poyang Lake Wetlands in Jiangxi Province (adopted at the 6th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 10th People's Congress of Jiangxi Province on November 27, 2003). Legal Library. <http://m.law-lib.com/>. (In Chinese).

²⁶ Chen, G. (2022). China as a Party to the Ramsar Convention. *Eurasian Journal of International Law*, 2(2), 92–107. (In Russian).

²⁷ Liu, 2021.

becoming increasingly prominent.²⁸ Consistent expansion of anthropogenic land covers occurred within 43 Ramsar sites, and anthropogenic threats from land cover change were particularly notable in eastern China.²⁹ Indiscriminate development and destruction of wetlands in the Yangtze River and coastal areas continues. The destruction of the ecological environment has weakened the ability of wetlands to store floodwaters, increasing the risk of natural disasters and posing a serious threat to people's lives and property.³⁰

With the improvement of laws and the awakening of public consciousness with regard to environmental protection, the conservation of wetlands has become a concern of the entire society. China actively implements the Convention on Wetlands and has established a "baseline of 800 million mu." It is the only member country in the world to have completed three consecutive national wetland resource surveys. Central government documents such as the "Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Ecological Civilization" and the "Overall Plan for the Reform of the Ecological Civilization System" reflect the Chinese government's great emphasis on wetland protection. Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly directed wetland protection work and delivered an important speech at the opening ceremony of the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP14). By the end of 2023, China's wetland area ranks fourth in the world and first in Asia, with more than 56 million hectares.³¹

As of 2024, there are 82 Ramsar sites in China, covering a total area of more than 7.6 million hectares.³² China has greatly increased its focus on wetlands protection, but the road to wetlands conservation is still long. China should make continuous efforts to improve its ability to implement the Ramsar Convention.

3. China's Recent Achievements in Wetlands Protection

1) China adopted the Wetlands Protection Law of the People's Republic of China. The development of the Wetlands Protection Law of the PRC took more than three years from drafting to promulgation. It is one of the fastest tracks in the field of environmental protection legislation. With the deepening of the concept of "ecological civilization," the PRC Central Committee attaches great importance

²⁸ Kou, J. (2022). The Rule of Law Protects the Beauty of Wetland. *People's Daily*. (In Chinese).

²⁹ Mao, D., et al. (2021). Remote Observations in China's Ramsar Sites: Wetland Dynamics, Anthropogenic Threats, and Implications for Sustainable Development Goals. *Journal of Remote Sensing*, 2021, 1–13.

³⁰ National Forestry and Grassland Administration. <http://www.forestry.gov.cn/main/72/content-1046971.html>

³¹ Siyu, D. (2023, November 8). *The Current Wetland Area in China Exceeds 56 Million Hectares*. Central People's Government Portal. https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202311/content_6914115.htm. (In Chinese).

³² Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. <https://www.ramsar.org>

to the protection and development of wetlands. The promulgation of the Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China marks an important step for China in wetland protection, reflecting the fact that Chinese legislation has responded to the people's ardent hope for a beautiful ecological environment. At the same time, "Chinese wisdom" and "Chinese solutions" have also become part of the international wetland protection system, making important contributions to global wetland ecological protection.

The Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China provides both a legal basis and safeguards for wetland protection, clarifying the responsibilities and obligations of governments at all levels and relevant departments for wetland protection. It requires the establishment of wetland monitoring and assessment mechanisms and the provision of scientific research support. It encourages public participation in wetland protection work and raises the awareness of all sectors of society regarding their responsibility to protect wetlands. It calls for the integration of wetland protection and reasonable utilization, which aims to achieve a win-win situation for ecological and environmental protection as well as economic and social development. It promotes the building of an ecological civilization and the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. It demonstrates China's proactive attitude towards global environmental governance, provides a Chinese solution for international wetland protection, and enhances the country's image. Wetlands are ecosystems as important as forests, grasslands, and water bodies. The introduction of this law has specialized wetland protection efforts, further enriching and improving China's ecological civilization system.³³

In view of China's food security and the actual demand for aquatic products, the definition of wetlands in Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Wetlands Protection Law has been changed from the Ramsar Convention by adding the expression "except for rice fields and artificial waters and muddy areas, used for aquaculture," which not only meets the needs of building an ecological civilization in China, but is also in line with the current situation of wetlands conservation and management in China, and promotes the development of comprehensive wetlands conservation in China.

2) China hosted the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, at which the Wuhan Declaration was adopted. On November 5, 2022, the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP14) was held simultaneously in Wuhan (China) and Geneva (Switzerland), marking the first time the conference was held in China. The Wuhan Declaration was officially adopted at the Conference. As one of the main outcomes of the Conference, the Wuhan Declaration calls for the mobilization of additional resources from various sources to strengthen the implementation of the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan and the development of a stronger 5th Ramsar Strategic Plan with more impactful actions by 2030. At the same time, the Wuhan Declaration put

³³ Ministry of Natural Resources. https://www.mnr.gov.cn/dt/ywbb/202206/t20220601_2738038.html

forward 12 initiatives aimed at strengthening legislation and law enforcement for the protection, restoration, management and rational and sustainable use of wetlands on a global scale. These initiatives call for close cooperation among governments, all sectors of society and relevant institutions to work together to assess and maintain the ecosystem services of wetlands and to promote the sustainable use of wetland resources. The Declaration also emphasizes the importance of scientific assessment and economic accounting of the natural capital of wetlands and their ecosystem services, which helps people better understand the ecological and economic benefits of wetlands through accurate value assessment, and then take practical actions to protect and restore wetlands.

The Declaration encourages appropriate priority conservation and management of vulnerable ecosystems such as peatlands, coral reefs and seagrass beds, mangroves, highland wetlands and subterranean wetlands; enhances technical cooperation and knowledge exchange among wetlands conservation professionals worldwide; calls for the establishment of wetland parks or wetland education centers as needed; strengthens the prevention of water pollution in wetlands; calls on Parties to ensure the full participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, women, youth, people with disabilities, academia, civil society and private institutions in the conservation, restoration, management and wise and sustainable use of all types of wetlands. These initiatives will not only help to enhance the positive role of wetlands in addressing climate change, biodiversity conservation, and freshwater resource management, but also effectively address the increasingly prominent social, economic, and environmental issues, and achieve a harmonious symbiosis between human society and the natural ecology.³⁴

3) China ranks first in the world in terms of the number of “International Wetland Cities.” On November 10, 2022, the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands issued certificates to seven Chinese cities, including Wuhan in Hubei, Liangping in Chongqing, Hefei in Anhui. With six cities in 2018 including Harbin, Haikou, Dongying, China now has 13 International Wetland Cities, the largest number in the world. This clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of wetlands conservation and restoration in China. In the 30 years since joining the Ramsar Convention, China has not only taken decisive measures to protect its wetlands, but also established a relatively comprehensive wetlands protection system. Many Chinese cities, such as Wuhan, have integrated urban development with wetlands conservation, leading to significant improvements in the city’s environmental conditions.

Wetlands are a precious asset for China and for all of humanity. In his opening speech at COP14, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed three initiatives: “building

³⁴ Shan, H., Zeyang, L., & Hui, Z. (2022, November 7). *The Wuhan Declaration was adopted at the high-level ministerial meeting of the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands*. National Forestry and Grassland Administration. <http://www.forestry.gov.cn/c/www/COP14dh/30970.jhtml>. (In Chinese).

a global consensus on wetland protection, promoting the global wetland protection process, and improving the well-being of people living in wetlands around the world.” These initiatives provide scientific guidance for global wetland protection efforts and point to a direction for development. In the future, China will further support global ecological collaboration in the field of wetlands, promote the selection of more cities as “International Wetland Cities,” actively promote close cooperation with the international community, work together to maintain the ecological value of wetlands and world natural heritage, and make new contributions to building a community of shared future for mankind.

4) The area of mangroves in China is steadily increasing. Mangroves around the world provide humanity with a variety of ecosystem services,³⁵ but the current global mangrove situation is worrying, with a continuous decline in area, at a rate of 1% per year. China’s wetland protection model provides valuable experience and examples for the global cause of environmental protection. China has gradually established a collaborative mechanism involving multiple levels and multiple departments, and has formulated and implemented a series of special plans for the protection, restoration and rational use of wetland resources, actively promoting mangrove protection and restoration projects.

China is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of wetland types, thanks to its vast territory and diverse climate types. In recent years, China has continued to increase its scientific research and innovation in the protection and restoration of mangroves, forming a unique protection and management model. It has become one of the few countries in the world to achieve an increase in mangrove area, effectively maintaining the ecological security of coastal areas and making a positive contribution to addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity. Currently, China’s mangrove forest area has reached 27,100 hectares. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Secretariat has decided to establish the International Mangrove Centre in China. In the future, the International Mangrove Centre will be dedicated to promoting the protection and restoration of mangrove resources worldwide, helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and further strengthening the pace of global ecological civilization construction.

5) China has greatly improved its comprehensive capabilities in wetlands conservation and restoration. Currently, China’s urbanization rate has exceeded 60%, which means that the continuous increase in the urban population and changes in land use pose unprecedented challenges to wetland protection. Against this background, it is particularly important to explore new models of wetland protection and management that are suitable for urban environments and to find a balance between urbanization and wetland protection. To address these challenges, China

³⁵ Padonou, E. A., et al. (2021). How Far Are Mangrove Ecosystems in Benin (West Africa) Conserved by the Ramsar Convention? *Land Use Policy*, 108, Article 105583.

has taken a series of measures to strengthen wetland protection. For example, in March 2020, in order to promote the construction of an ecological civilization and create a beautiful future of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Xixi National Wetland Park, emphasizing the coordinated development of urban development and wetland protection, and pointing out that the principle of giving priority to protection should be adhered to. President Xi Jinping has set a direction for wetland protection work, calling on governments at all levels and relevant departments to pay attention to the protection and restoration of the ecological environment while promoting the urbanization process.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China has attached great importance to ecological civilization construction, focusing on wetland protection and restoration.³⁶ Under this policy direction, China's wetland protection work has set a positive example for the world in the following aspects: Firstly, China has included various important wetlands in the ecological red line, clarifying the principle of protection priority. At present, the country has added and restored more than 800,000 hectares of wetlands, and implemented more than 3,400 wetland protection and restoration projects, which provides a solid foundation for the sustainable development of wetland ecosystems. Secondly, the implementation of the Wetland Protection Law has marked a further advance in the rule of law for wetland protection in China. Since the implementation of the law, various localities have formulated specific protection measures based on local conditions. More than 20 provinces have successively and actively introduced wetland protection regulations tailored to local conditions to enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of wetland protection. Thirdly, there has been increased investment in scientific research on wetland protection. Local governments have actively built wetland monitoring, research and management platforms to provide a scientific basis for policy formulation, making wetland protection more scientific and systematic. Finally, China is actively promoting pollution prevention and control work, and continuously improving the diversity, stability and resilience of the ecosystem. The country is committed to restoring the ecological functions of wetlands, enhancing the self-healing capacity of the ecosystem, and contributing to the goal of "beautiful China." Through a series of measures, China has demonstrated its firm determination and actions in the field of wetland protection and restoration, providing valuable experience for global wetland ecological protection.

³⁶ Chen, G. (2024). The Concept of Ecological Civilization in the Constitution of the PRC. *Russian Judge*, 9, 51–55. (In Russian).

4. Countermeasures for China's Implementation of the Ramsar Convention

In 2022, China's wetlands conservation activities have entered a new stage. On June 1, 2022, the Wetlands Protection Law of the People's Republic of China officially came into force, aimed at strengthening the protection of wetlands, preserving the ecological functions and biodiversity of wetlands, ensuring environmental safety, promoting the construction of ecological civilization and realizing harmonious coexistence of man and nature. From November 5 to 13, 2022, China successfully held the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention and adopted the "Wuhan Declaration" and the "Global Strategic Framework for Wetlands Conservation 2025–2030".³⁷ The Conference set the direction for current and future global wetlands protection and restoration and put forward China's projects to promote global action on wetlands conservation.

Through long-term attention and investment in wetland protection and restoration, the quality and area of China's wetlands have been improved, and the Chinese government has also been committed to finding a balance between wetland protection and economic development. China's achievements in wetland protection have also received the attention and recognition of the international community. However, compared to the developed countries, China still has some problems in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. In order to better implement the Ramsar Convention, China needs to constantly introduce new measures and new policies to fulfill its responsibilities as a world power:

1) Fully implement the Wetlands Protection Law of the People's Republic of China.

The Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China is divided into 7 chapters and 65 articles. Its promulgation marks an important step for China in wetland protection and establishes the highest level of wetland protection and management structure. This is China's first wetland ecosystem protection law, which will bring China's wetland protection work to the rule of law and usher in a new stage of protection work.³⁸ China should strictly enforce the law, strengthen the construction of systems and mechanisms and institutional innovation, ensure full and systematic protection of wetland resources in China, and encourage citizens, social groups, especially residents around wetlands, to participate in the management of wetlands and policy formulation to provide the legal basis for meeting the obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

2) Promote the accreditation of international wetland cities.

³⁷ Chen, G. (2023). Analysis of the Results of the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP14). *Eurasian Law Journal*, 3(178), 48–51. (In Russian).

³⁸ National Development and Reform Commission. https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fggz/dqjj/qt/202207/t20220701_1329877_ext.html

In 2017, the Ramsar Convention began a process of accreditation of international wetland cities, which aims to promote the harmonious development of cities, wetlands and human well-being. Wetland protection and restoration provide urban residents with a healthier and more livable ecological environment. China actively promotes the scientific assessment of international wetland cities, and has issued the Interim Measures for the Nomination and Certification of International Wetland Cities and the Nomination Indicators for the Certification of International Wetland Cities, providing systematic and scientific guiding standards for the creation of international wetland cities. Through these efforts, China has not only taken new steps in promoting wetland protection, but has also set an example for wetland protection and sustainable urban development on a global scale.

In the future, China should use international standards to focus the wetlands conservation and management activities on the establishment of international wetland cities, promote the certification process of international wetland cities, clarify laws, regulations, standards and policies related to protection of wetlands. China should give full play to the core role of local governments in wetlands protection and management, and guide local governments to fully implement and strengthen relevant policies and systems for the protection and management of wetlands. When the number of cities applying for certification as “international wetland cities” is large, international wetland city certification standards should be consulted to create national wetland cities. When the number of places is limited, but there are many cities that meet the conditions, they can first be awarded the title of National Wetland City to increase enthusiasm for the city’s quality development.

3) Promote the construction of national parks.

At the opening ceremony of the COP14 Ramsar Convention, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech emphasizing China’s firm determination and practical actions in wetland protection. President Xi Jinping pointed out that China has formulated the National Park Spatial Layout Plan, with the core objectives of protecting the natural ecosystem and promoting the construction of an ecological civilization. According to this plan, China will gradually establish a number of national parks and strive to include about 11 million hectares of wetland resources in the national park system. At the same time, China will also fully implement the National Wetland Conservation Plan and promote a series of major wetland protection projects to strengthen the restoration and protection of wetland ecosystems.³⁹ As of the end of 2021, China has established 5 national parks, 602 wetland reserves, 899 national wetland parks (a total of more than 1,600 wetland parks), and a large number of wetland protection communities with a level of wetland protection of 52.65%. In the future, China should improve relevant laws, regulations, systems and

³⁹ Xueren, L. (2022, November 5). *Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands*. National Forestry and Grassland Administration. <http://www.forestry.gov.cn/main/6225/20221105/181905927807795.html>. (In Chinese).

mechanisms, gradually establish a wetland protection system based on national parks, nature reserves and wetland parks, and make practical efforts to implement the Ramsar Convention.

4) Conduct awareness-raising activities on wetlands conservation.

The Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China encourages local governments to promote publicity and popularization of wetland protection, to disseminate knowledge of wetland protection to the public through newspapers, television, the internet and other media, to actively guide public opinion, and to create a favourable social atmosphere for wetland protection; encourages local mass organizations, social groups and volunteer organizations to reach out to communities and schools to extensively carry out publicity activities for wetland protection; and requires education departments and schools to pay attention to raising students' awareness of wetland protection in teaching activities, so that students will gain a deep understanding of the ecological value of wetlands as they grow up.⁴⁰

5) Focus on research and training of personnel.

Article 4, paragraph 5 of the Ramsar Convention states that "The Contracting Parties shall promote the training of personnel competent in the fields of wetland research, management and wardening." Regarding research and training, Article 9 of the Wetlands Protection Law of the PRC suggests that "The State shall support the research, development, application and promotion of science and technology for wetland protection, strengthen the training of professional technical personnel for wetland protection, and improve the level of science and technology for wetland protection."

Article 7 of the Ramsar Convention clearly states that wetland or waterfowl experts should play an important role in strengthening the ecological protection of wetlands of international importance. Article 17 of the Wetlands Protection Law of the PRC clearly states that it is necessary "to establish a consultation mechanism of wetland protection experts to provide evaluation and demonstration services for the preparation of wetland protection plans, the compilation of wetland lists and the development of relevant standards."

In the future, China should strictly follow the requirements of the Ramsar Convention and its own Wetlands Protection Law to develop research and training of personnel for wetlands protection.

6) Promote global cooperation on wetlands conservation and learn from the excellent experiences of BRICS countries.

The preamble to the Convention on Wetlands states: "Waterfowl migrate seasonally across national borders and should be regarded as an international resource. Combining national policies with international action can effectively protect wetlands

⁴⁰ Wetlands Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (adopted at the 32nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress on September 24, 2021). National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c10134/201404/6c982d10b95a47bbb9ccc7a321bdec0f.shtml>. (In Chinese).

and their flora and fauna.” In the Convention on Wetlands, international cooperation is not just a measure to protect wetlands, but also a far-reaching international environmental protection concept. As a concrete manifestation of international cooperation in wetland protection, Article 10 of the Wetland Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China clearly stipulates: “The state supports international cooperation and exchanges in scientific and technological fields such as wetland protection, biodiversity, and migratory bird migration.” With the clear support of the law, China actively promotes international cooperation in wetland protection, focusing not only on the ecological value of wetlands themselves, but also on international cooperation in protecting migratory bird migration and biodiversity, further enriching and deepening the meaning and practice of wetland protection.

In the future, China needs to learn from the relevant experiences of other BRICS countries, for example, the Brazilian Parliament approved the reform of the Water and Sanitation Services (WSS) sector in July 2020, which is dedicated to solving the problems of sewage treatment and water supply for the people.⁴¹ Russia, with 20% of its area represented by peat bogs and overwatered lands occupying up to 35% of its surface, has unique resources of undisturbed wetlands and good prospects for implementing the principles of the Ramsar Convention and organizing nature management in accordance with modern recommendations.⁴² China should learn from Russia’s experience in peatland protection. Environmental issues are global and complex, and often require joint efforts by countries and enterprises. The legislation of the BRICS countries in the field of public-private partnership (PPP) practices is worth learning from China.⁴³ China should also actively adopt the successful experience of other countries in wetland protection and restoration. Aboriginal participation in the wetland management system in Australia and the wetland compensation system in the United States are successful models for wetlands conservation and restoration.

At the 14th Conference of the Parties, China and other parties jointly presented the Global Cooperation Mechanism for Wetland Nature Education and the Global Cooperation Mechanism for the Conservation and Management of Mangroves. In the future, China should actively pursue relevant initiatives to provide new opportunities and space to fulfill its international cooperation obligations under the Ramsar Convention. China should strengthen international cooperation with other countries on wetlands conservation and restoration, build a platform for information exchange and sharing, promote the ecological “One Belt, One Road”

⁴¹ Nunes, C. M., Anderaos, A. A., & Leal, M. D. A. C. (2021). The 2020 Reform of the Water and Sanitation Services Sector in Brazil. *BRICS Law Journal*, 8(2), 66–88.

⁴² Kopylov & Solntsev, 2012.

⁴³ Kvanina, V., Kovalenko, E., & Vypkhanova, G. (2023). Improving the Legislation on Public-Private Partnerships in Environmental Protection in the BRICS Countries. *BRICS Law Journal*, 10(3), 106–121.

under the Convention on Wetlands, and promote the construction of a community of common destiny for humanity.

7) Fully discharge the responsibilities of the Chair State of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention.

The 14th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention adopted the Wuhan Declaration and a number of conference resolutions indicating the direction of further development of the Convention. China became the Chair State of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention for the next 3 years, and should actively lead various work to promote the development of the Ramsar Convention and other global environmental conventions, continue work on the unfinished issues at the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, and promote the implementation of the Ramsar Convention and the protection and restoration of global wetlands.

Conclusion

The Ramsar Convention promotes the wise use of wetlands as a fundamental tenet behind the desire to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands.⁴⁴ Although biological conservation is based on international agreements, its effectiveness depends on how countries implement such recommendations as effective conservation tools.⁴⁵

In the process of implementing the Ramsar Convention, China faced many problems such as insufficient public awareness, delayed legislation and weakness of science and technology in wetlands monitoring. However, at the same time, China has introduced effective wetlands conservation policies and measures according to national conditions, and public awareness is improving. Overall, wetlands conservation in China continues to develop.

In October 2022, China issued the “National Wetland Protection Plan (2022–2030)” to clarify the goals and development direction for future wetland protection work. According to the plan, China’s wetland protection rate will increase to 55% by 2025. In addition, it is expected that 20 new internationally important wetlands and 50 new nationally important wetlands will be added during this period. Looking ahead to 2030, the quality of wetland ecosystems, their ecological services and their carbon sequestration capacity will have improved significantly, thus basically achieving the goal of high-quality wetland protection.

⁴⁴ McInnes, R. J., et al. (2017). Wetland Ecosystem Services and the Ramsar Convention: An Assessment of Needs. *Wetlands*, 37(1), 123–134.

⁴⁵ Gaget, E., et al. (2020). Assessing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention in Preserving Wintering Waterbirds in the Mediterranean. *Biological Conservation*, 243, Article 108485.

These plans and measures form a solid foundation for achieving the goal of wetland protection. They not only demonstrate China's firm determination in wetland protection, but also reflect the value of "Chinese wisdom" and have made a positive contribution to promoting the construction of a global ecological civilization and sustainable development. China's wetland protection is not only related to the improvement of the domestic ecological environment, but also provides a reference and model for global wetland protection.

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