



222 S. Hamilton St. #1 Madison, WI 53703

Phone 608-250-9971 Fax 608-287-1179

www.wisconsinwetlands.org

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Contact: Katie Beilfuss, (608) 250-9971, Katie.Beilfuss@wisconsinwetlands.org

WISCONSIN WETLANDS ASSOCIATION WINS INTERNATIONAL WETLAND CONSERVATION AWARD

MADISON, WI. Wisconsin Wetlands Association has been selected to receive the 2012 Wetland Conservation Award by the international Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for the organization's outstanding achievements in the area of wetland education. Wisconsin Wetlands Association is the first ever recipient of this award from the United States, joining previous laureates from Thailand, Australia, Japan, Kenya, China, Peru, and Canada.

Wisconsin Wetlands Association is being honored for its work to promote and increase the number of designated Ramsar *Wetlands of International Importance* in Wisconsin and the United States. In 2009, Wisconsin Wetlands Association established the Wisconsin Ramsar Committee to identify globally-important wetlands in Wisconsin and to work toward international recognition and acclaim for these critical sites through designation as *Wetlands of International Importance*. This initiative is believed to be the first strategic approach to identifying sites for this prestigious designation. To date, one site has been nominated and is in official review and other nominations are in process.

The award also honors Wisconsin Wetlands Association's outreach and education programs that promote the ideals of the Ramsar Convention, including helping people understand what wetlands are and why they matter. Wisconsin Wetlands Association's *Wetland Gems* program, launched in 2009, recognizes and promotes 100 high-quality wetland sites that represent the diversity of wetlands in Wisconsin in order to increase public appreciation for all of Wisconsin's wetlands. Work to identify sites for designation as Ramsar *Wetlands of International Importance* built on the list of *Wetland Gems* (www.wisconsinwetlands.org/gems.htm).

"We are thrilled that our work to promote wetlands has received this prestigious recognition," said WWA Outreach Programs Director Katie Beilfuss, who also serves as Vice-Chair of the U.S. National Ramsar Committee. "We are eager for our initiative to bring international acclaim and economic opportunities to other Wisconsin communities to promote their wetland assets, as Horicon Marsh and the Upper Mississippi River Floodplain Wetlands have so effectively done."

The Ramsar Conservation Award is presented by Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources (see the attached fact sheet). The Award was established in 1996 to recognize and honor the contributions of individuals, organizations, and governments around the world to these ideals. The Award for education rewards the best initiative for communication, education, participation, and awareness of Ramsar-designated *Wetlands of International Importance*, focusing on initiatives that engage local communities. The Award is accompanied by the Evian Special Prize, a \$10,000 cash prize generously donated by the Danone Group of France.

"We are deeply honored and energized to receive this Award in recognition of our work to promote wetlands," said Mary Linton, Chair of the Board of the Wisconsin Wetlands Association. "We hope our work will inspire others across the region, nation, and beyond to work on behalf of wetlands, a critical part of our landscape."

Wisconsin Wetlands Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, restoration and enjoyment of wetlands and associated ecosystems through science-based programs, education and advocacy. Established in 1969, WWA is the first and oldest statewide organization focused exclusively on wetland protection. Our more than 1400 members include wetland scientists and educators, conservationists, hunters, concerned citizens, and local and regional organizations.

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Preserving Wisconsin's Wetland Heritage



Fact Sheet about the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The international Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is a cooperative, non-regulatory means of wetlands protection. In 1971, a convention was held in Ramsar, Iran, to ratify terms of an agreement that obligated Parties to the Convention (i.e. member nations) to designate sites as *Wetlands of International Importance* ("Ramsar sites"), apply a "wise use" (sustainable) concept to all wetlands within a Party's territory, and engage in international cooperation on wetland conservation. The Ramsar Convention is celebrating its 40th Anniversary in 2011.

Worldwide, more than 160 countries, including the United States, are Parties to the Ramsar Convention. To date, more than 1,960 sites comprising 470 million acres have been designated as *Wetlands of International Importance* worldwide, including the Okavango Delta in Botswana, the Everglades in south Florida, and the Pantanal in Brazil. Wisconsin boasts two listed *Wetlands of International Importance*: Horicon Marsh in Dodge County (designated in 1990) and the Upper Mississippi River Floodplain Wetlands (designated in 2010). Both sites are treasured by the people of Wisconsin and attract thousands of visitors each year, thus serving as economic engines for the communities in which they are located. The United States has designated 30 sites totaling over 3 million acres.

The U.S. National Ramsar Committee (USNRC) was formed in 1984 to support the goals and objectives of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands within the United States and internationally. The USNRC provides support and advice to initiatives that promote the conservation and wise, sustainable use of domestic and international wetlands. The USNRC is committed to increasing the number of designated Ramsar sites in the United States in recognition of our nation's wealth of wetlands. Wisconsin Wetlands Association is a member of the U.S. National Ramsar Committee and Outreach Programs Director Katie Beilfuss currently serves as Vice-Chair.

More information about the Ramsar Wetland Conservations Awards can be found at www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-news-announcing-2012-ramsar-awards/main/ramsar/1-26%5E25440_4000_0.

More information about the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands can be found at www.ramsar.org.

More information about Wisconsin Wetlands Association can be found at www.wisconsinwetlands.org.

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