

# Ramsar Convention

## What Ramsar Is:

- In 1971, an international convention was held in Ramsar, Iran and participants signed a treaty entitled, “The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat.”
- The Ramsar Convention provides a framework for voluntary international cooperation for wetland conservation.
- The U.S. signed onto the Ramsar Convention in 1987.

## What Ramsar Does:

- Recognizes wetlands’ importance to communities, cultures, governments, and businesses and encourages wetland conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- Defines “wetlands” and “waterfowl.”
- Establishes criteria for designating rivers, marshes, coral reefs and other areas as a “wetland of international importance.”
- Encourages nations to identify “wetlands of international importance” and list them under auspices of the Convention as Ramsar sites.
- Asks that nations promote conservation of wetlands.
- The Ramsar Secretariat facilitates implementation of wetlands conservation decisions made by nations, by preparing wise use guidelines, creating training opportunities, and providing access to financial resources.

## What Ramsar Does Not Do:

- Ramsar does not impose restrictions on nations and landowners. Ramsar is not a regulating entity, nor is it a United Nations Convention.
- Ramsar does not affect landowner sovereignty rights for wetlands management. Designation of property as a “wetland of international importance” is voluntary.

## How We Benefit from Ramsar:

- Wetlands provide many environmental services, including clean water, flood abatement, wildlife habitat, recreation, tourism, fishing, groundwater recharge.
- A “wetland of international importance” designation can bring economic benefits to surrounding areas due to increased tourism, fishing and recreation.

## Designating “Wetlands of International Importance” within the U.S.:

- Almost any local government, organization, or community can nominate a site for this Ramsar designation. Any one of nine criteria must be met.
- A written agreement is required from all landowners and a Member of Congress representing the geographic area.
- A final decision is made by trained staff at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Nine Criteria for “Wetlands of International Importance” Designation:

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it meets any one of the following criteria. The site:

1. contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region; or
2. supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities; or
3. supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region; or
4. supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions; or



*Sandhill cranes*

5. regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds; or
6. regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird; or
7. supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity; or
8. is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend; or

9. regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal.

**Ramsar Sites in the United States of America:**

24 sites have been designated in the United States. Some notable sites include:

- Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas provides a migratory habitat for thousands of ducks and geese that stop here each year on their way from their wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean to breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska.
- Florida's Everglades serve as a vast filter and reservoir of clean water, which

supplies Florida's expanding human population.

- Catahoula Lake in Louisiana supports large numbers of waterfowl and maintains the ecological diversity of Louisiana lowlands.

- Caddo Lake in East Texas is a critical habitat for migratory species as well as a center for community-based education and recreation such as bird-watching.

**Ramsar Sites Worldwide:**

- More than 155 nations have signed on to the Ramsar Convention Treaty.
- More than 1,740 sites have been designated to date, covering a surface area of nearly 400 million acres.

**United States Ramsar Sites**

1. Izembek National Wildlife Refuge & State Game Area, AK	13. Caddo Lake, TX
2. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, NJ	14. Connecticut River Estuary & Tidal Wetlands Complex, CT
3. Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, GA & FL	15. Cache River-Cypress Creek Wetlands, IL
4. Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, NV	16. Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge, SD
5. Everglades National Park, FL	17. Bolinas Lagoon, CA
6. Chesapeake Bay Estuarine Complex, MD & VA	18. Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, KS
7. Cheyenne Bottoms, KS	19. Tomales Bay, CA
8. Cache-Lower White Rivers Joint Venture Area, AR	20. Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, CA
9. Horicon Marsh, WI	21. Grassland Ecological Area, CA
10. Catahoula Lake, LA	22. Kawainui and Hamakua Marsh Complex, HI
11. Delaware Bay Estuary, DE, NJ, & PA	23. Francis Beidler Forest, SC
12. Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, FL	24. Olentangy River Wetland Research Park, OH

**For more information, contact:**

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
 Division of International Conservation  
 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Room 100  
 Arlington, VA 22203  
 703/358-1754 Fax: 703/358-2115  
 Email: jean\_schlegel@fws.gov

**Websites:**

[www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

<http://www.fws.gov/international/ramsar/ramsar.htm>

<http://www.ramsarcommittee.us/>