



WETLANDS

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Turkmenistan

Update of the information on the status,
work with the local communities and
recommendations on wise use





Tengiz-Korgalzhyn Lake system, Kazakhstan

What are wetlands?

In our arid region, Central Asia, wetlands are represented by rivers and canals, lakes and reservoirs, overflows and ponds, moistened and marshy lands. They are indispensable water resources and biodiversity hotspots, with which people's health and lives are connected throughout the region. In our countries, the human health and life itself depend on the purity and ecological state of the wetlands.

Why are wetlands important?

Their role in the natural processes and in the life of communities is rather large and diverse. Among the most important ecological functions of wetlands are the following:

- conservation of fresh water;
- regulation of surface and subsurface run-off;
- maintenance of the groundwater level;
- natural water purification and retention of pollutants;
- return of oxygen to the atmosphere, removal of carbon from the atmosphere and its accumulation;
- climate stabilization, especially in relation to precipitation and temperature regime;
- containment of shores from degradation and soils from erosion;
- maintenance of biological diversity;
- provision of habitats for plants and animals, including the threatened ones and/or those, which are of practical importance for humans.





Alakol-Sassykkol Lake system, Kazakhstan



Why conservation and rational use of wetlands are needed?

There are serious threats of anthropogenic character in the region, which leads to the deterioration of the quality of the wetland environment and degradation of the wetland ecosystems such as human-made pollution, unregulated water intake for the agricultural needs, uncontrolled use of the biological resources, change of natural drains and construction of dams, as well as the transboundary issues of rational use of the water resources.



Photo by Marina Bazarevskaya

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The mission of the Convention is aimed at the achievement of the condition, when “wetlands are conserved, wisely used, restored and their benefits are recognized and valued by all”.

This vision is presented in the Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan for 2016–2024.

The Plan includes four overall goals and 19 specific targets:

Goal 1: addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation

Goal 2: effectively conserving and managing the Ramsar Site network

Goal 3: wisely using all wetlands

Goal 4: enhancing implementation of the Ramsar Convention

170 countries, including all five countries of Central Asia, are Parties to the Convention.

At present, 21 wetlands in Central Asia have the status of wetlands of international importance – Ramsar Sites.





Photo by Marina Bazarevskaya

Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA)

RRI-CA was established in 2016 to enhance regional cooperation and interaction on the conservation and rational use of wetlands for the effective implementation of the Ramsar Convention at the national and regional levels. Currently, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan are members of the RRI-CA. The most experienced experts – scientists and practitioners from these three countries became members of the RRI-CA Coordination Committee.



Implementation of the Ramsar Convention and management of the Ramsar Sites in the region

The Ramsar Convention does not require the Parties to create a body or a system of bodies for the wetland management, giving the countries the right of determining conditions and means for fulfilling their obligations. In this connection, each of the Central Asian countries has developed its own practices for the wetland management.



Alakol-Sassykkol
Lake system,
Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan joined the Ramsar Convention on 2 May 2007 and has 10 Ramsar Sites at present. Besides, five potential wetlands have been identified for the inclusion in the Ramsar List in the years 2018-2021.

The Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 593-II, dated July 9, 2004 “On Protection, Reproduction and Use of Wildlife”, and No. 175-III, dated July 7, 2006 “On Specially Protected Natural Territories” were adopted in Kazakhstan, which included the legal norms and regulations of the wetland issues (as amended of June 15, 2017); the rules for assigning the reservoirs to the wetlands of international and national importance were established (Decree of the RK Government, No.18-03/94, dated February 11, 2015); the lists of the wetlands of International and Republican importance were approved (Order of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan No.18-03/369, dated April 24, 2015). By Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No.242-IV, dated January 21, 2010 “On amendments and additions to certain legislative acts of the Republic of

Kazakhstan on flora and fauna», Article 39-1 “Wetlands. On the Regulation of the Wetlands” has been added to Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No.593-II, dated July 9, 2004 “On Protection, Reproduction and Use of Wildlife”. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No.175-III, dated July 7, 2006 “On Specially Protected Natural Territories” has been supplemented with the regulations for the Important Bird Areas (as amended of June 15, 2017).

All Ramsar wetlands in Kazakhstan, in accordance with the current national legislation, are in whole or in part are protected areas, and are influenced by the local authorities indirectly. Within the frames of the preparation of the State Program for the RK Water Management, by the Protocol Resolution of the Prime Minister (Minutes of the Meeting No.11-5/07-168, dated July 2, 2013) it has been commissioned to include the issues of water reservoirs, located in protected areas, including the wetlands of international importance. It has been also commissioned to determine the necessary actions for the wetland remediation.

Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz Republic joined the Ramsar Convention in accordance with Law No.54, dated April 10, 2002 “On Accession to the UN Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as the Waterfowl Habitat, dated February 2, 1971”.

The State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic coordinates and ensures the fulfillment of the obligations, related to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Republic. The activities aimed at studying and conserving the wetland complexes comprise the development and implementation of the projects of the above Agency and National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic for the inventory of the wetlands, elaboration of the standard provisions for the regime of use and protection of the wetlands, their Management Plans, including the effective Project “Strategy for the Wetland Conservation in Kyrgyzstan (2013-2023)”.

Upon fulfilling the obligations of Kyrgyzstan under the Ramsar Convention, a working group consisting of the representatives of the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry and the national expert members of the RRI-CA Coordination Committee (B. Mamatayirov, R. Akulov, A.T. Davletbakov, A.N. Ostashchenko) selected the most promising wetlands for the inclusion in the Ramsar List: the Chardaktusu, Kara-Suu and Sary-Chelek lakes, as well as the Orto-Tokoy and Toktogul reservoirs. The task of the working group includes studying these wetlands in order to develop management plans for their sustainable use and the basis for the conservation measures. Besides, the wintering of wetland birds is being monitored with the frames of IWC not only on the Ramsar wetlands but also on the IBA. The above-mentioned experts, together with the stuff of the protected areas, National Academy of Sciences and relevant hunting farms, monitor both the Ramsar and other wetlands in Kyrgyzstan.



Chatyr-Kul Lake,
Kyrgyzstan

The north-east part
of the Turkmenbashi Bay,
Turkmenistan



Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan became a party to the Ramsar Convention in July 2009, and so far, nominated only one Ramsar area – the Turkmenbashi Bay. Nevertheless, as far back as 2010, under the State Commission for ensuring the implementation by Turkmenistan of its obligations resulting from the UN Conventions and Programs on the Environment, a Working Group has been created for monitoring the implementation of the provisions of the Convention in the country and the management of the wetlands, which are already entered and will be entered into the Ramsar List in the future.

The Working Group has taken part in the development of the RRI-CA. The participation of Turkmenistan in the RRI-CA will help the State Committee for Environmental Protection and Land Resources in fulfilling the international obligations of Turkmenistan within the frames of the Ramsar Convention, as well as moving towards the achievement of the following main objectives: to organize, as in the other countries, a network of the Ramsar wetlands, for which purpose to nominate in the Ramsar list such potential areas as the Zeyit Reservoir named after the 15th anniversary of Independence of Turkmenistan and the Kelif lakes, the Kurtli lake as a

city wetland, the Ogurjaly Island together with the South Cheleken and Turkmen Bays, the Altyn-Assyr lake of Turkmenistan, the Sarykamysh lake, the Soltandag-Kyzylburun lake system; and to continue the monitoring of wintering of wetland birds, including marine (EBSA/CBD) and territorial wetland sites, such as the Important Bird Areas (IBA).

The experts of the Working Group (E.A. Rustamov, A. Veyssov, Sh. Karryyeva), in accordance with the Ramsar Convention procedure, started preparing nominations (the RIS information document) for the Ogurjaly Island along with the South Cheleken and Turkmen Bays and have carried out, in accordance with the Working Plan, the monitoring of the wetlands not only of the nominated area (the Turkmenbashi Bay), but also of the other wetlands.

The main tasks facing the Working Group and the State Committee for the Protection of the Environment and Land Resources of Turkmenistan in the study and protection of the wetlands consist in carrying out their complete inventory, ensuring their legislative protection and elaborating the relevant Management Plans.

The first project of the RRI-CA aimed at working with local communities

The project “Update of the information on the status of wetlands in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan by collection and dissemination of good practices for the conservation and sustainable use of the wetlands by local communities” was approved by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and implemented at the expense of a voluntary contribution from the Government of Japan.

The goal of the Project has been to collect, update, and disseminate the information on the good practices, which the local communities have in managing and sustaining the Ramsar Sites in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan.

The Project has had the following objectives:

- To update the information on the wetlands in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan;
- To study the awareness of the local communities of the value of the wetlands and the services they provide, and to conduct discussions in order to increase their awareness of the importance of the wetlands;
- To carry out large-scale events timed to the World Wetlands Day, involving the local population.
- To prepare the relevant Guidelines on the best practices for the wetland conservation and management in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, which has been the final and main result of the project.



Photo by Marina Bazarevskaya



Field work within the framework of the project

During the field work, the national experts of the project Adylbek Kozybakov (Kazakhstan), Askar Davletbakov (Kyrgyzstan) and Eldar Rustamov (Turkmenistan) held meetings with representatives of the local government and population and collected material on the state of the 10 wetlands presented in the table.

Wetlands surveyed under the project

	Name	Date of registration: the Ramsar list and are	Coordi- nates	Administrative belonging	
				Protected area	Administrative territory (<i>oblast or velayat, district or etrap</i>)
1	Tengiz-Korgalzhyn Lake system	11.10.1976 353 341 ra	50°25'59" 69°11'20"	Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve	Korgalzhyn district, Akmola oblast, Nurin district, Karaganda oblast
2	Alakol-Sassykkol Lake system	25.11.2009 914.663 ra	46°16'00" 81°32'00"	Alakol State Nature Reserve	Alakol district, Almaty oblast, Urdzhar district, East Kazakhstan oblast
3	Lesser Aral Sea and Delta of the Syrdarya River	02.02.2012 330.000 ra	46°20'50" 61°00'09"	Barsakelmes State Nature Reserve	Aral district, Kyzylorda oblast
4	Karakol Lake	3.773 ra	43°53'44" 51°30'93"	Karakiya-Karakol Sanctuary of the Ustyurt State Nature Reserve	City of Aktau, Mangistau oblast
5	Issyk-Kul Lake	26.12.1976 624.439 ra	42°22'17" 77°21'58"	Issyk-Kul State Nature Reserve	Issyk-Kul, Jeti-Oguz, Tyup, Aksu districts, Issyk-Kul oblast
6	Son-Kul Lake	23.01.2011 38.869 ra	41°55'03" 75°08'32"	Karatal-Japyryk State Nature Reserve	Ak-Talaa district, Naryn oblast
7	Chatyr-Kul Lake	08.11.2005 16.100 ra	40°33'31" 75°09'03"		Naryn district, Naryn oblast
8	Turkmenbashy Bay	03.07.2009 267.124 ra	39°47'47" 53°21'70"	Hazar State Nature Reserve	Turkmenbashy etrap, Balkan velayt
9	Kurtli Lake	1421 ra	38°01'00" 58°22'00"	-	Shakher Ashgabat
10	Zeyt Reservoir named after the 15 th anniversary of Independence of Turkmenistan and Kelif Lakes	85.488 ra	37°31'00" 65°06'00"	Kelif Sanctuary of the Amu Darya State Reserve	Kerki and Halach etraps of the Lebap velayt

A polling survey has been carried out among the local communities. The purpose of the survey has been to find out how local people use the wetlands, what benefits they derive, what problems they have, and what wishes and suggestions they propose for overcoming these problems. On the basis of the questionnaire survey, the awareness of the local communities of the wetlands, their understanding of the peculiarities of the environmental services and the importance of conservation and sustainable use of the wetlands on which they live have been identified. A total of 505 people have been interviewed, of which 77 on the wetlands in Kazakhstan, 240 in Kyrgyzstan, and 188 in Turkmenistan.

Wetland ecosystem services for the local people

Wetlands provide fresh water

- For example, the local population living on the shore of Issyk-Kul estimates this wetland primarily as a source of water (91%) and uses the water resources of small rivers in the Issyk-Kul basin for drinking and for irrigation purposes for the production of agricultural products.
- The local people, living on the shore of the Zeiyt Reservoir named after the 15th anniversary of Independence of Turkmenistan, do not imagine their life without the reservoir, as the water supply of the adjacent settlements, as well as irrigation of the farmlands on the virgin soils, are realized solely at the expense of the Reservoir. The respondents have noted a decrease in the incoming volumes of water in the Reservoir in recent years, which adversely affects the socio-economic status of the local communities.

At the top

Local fishers of the Aral district
of the Kyzylorda region

At the bottom

Survey

Respondents

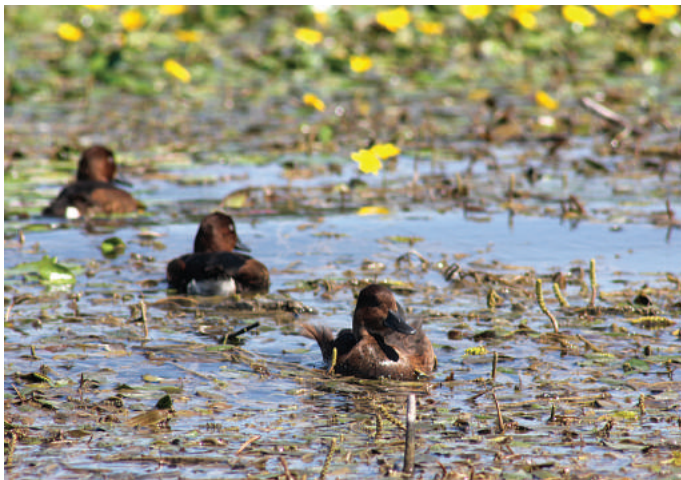




Wetlands feed the local population, provide a source of income and affect the well-being of the local people

- The overall socio-economic status of the local population of the Korgalzhyn region in Kazakhstan is satisfactory due to the availability of rich steppe pastures, sufficient fish stocks and the proximity of a large city, in whose markets local fishers, farmers and farm households sell their products, obtained on and around the wetlands: fish, beef, horse meat, mutton, poultry, milk and sour milk derivatives (koumiss, kurt, irimshik, sour cream, etc.).
- Son-Kul Lake plays an extremely important role in the ecological and economic stability of the region. The lake provides the conditions for the development of fisheries, cattle, recreation, and tourism. Most of the wetland is used for pastures. The land close to the wetland is actively being used for cattle breeding. Milk and meat dominate in the branch, due to the availability of large pastures.
- All types of basic services and benefits, provided by the wetland Turkmenbashi Bay (sea and desalinated water, fish, poultry, tourism, hunting, and fishing) are vital for the local communities. The population of settlements, especially small ones around the wetlands and the reserve, is directly dependent on biological resources, including fish and game birds.
- Up to 120 tons of fish of various species: Schmidt's dace, pike-perch, carp, peled, whitefish, etc. are caught in the Issyk-Kul Lake annually. Production of cereals, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, and berries is established in the adjacent territory.
- The local people living in the wetlands of the Lesser Aral Sea and Delta of the Syrdarya River are mainly engaged in fishing. Fishing and fish processing is the main industry in the region. 61 subjects are engaged in fishing industry, in which 187 people are employed.





From top to bottom

Wintering places of waterfowl on the northern shore of the Issyk-Kul Lake, Kyrgyzstan
Ducks on the Alakol Lake, Kazakhstan

Wetlands provide habitats for migratory birds

- The Tengiz-Korgalzhyn Lake system is one of the Important Bird Areas of Central Asia, through which millions of waterbird and semi-aquatic birds migrate annually, including several thousands of globally threatened species such as white-headed duck and lesser white-fronted goose. Steppe landscapes surrounding the wetland area, serve as the habitat for colonies of globally threatened species – black-sided lapwing, numbering while nesting up to 150 pairs, which is close to the number of threatened black-winged pratincole - more than 700 pairs.



Nests of cormorants on the western shore of the Issyk-Kul Lake, Kyrgyzstan

- The Issyk-Kul Lake is also one of the Important Bird Areas in Central Asia: shallow waters, water area, and its coastal wetland ecosystem are valuable places for migrations, wintering, and nesting for more than 240 species of waterbirds and semi-aquatic birds. In general, in different years from 50 to 100 thousand species (30 types) of birds winter on the lake, that is 66,231 species on the average. Mallard ducks, gray ducks, pintails, European teals usually find food and rest near the shore; further from the shore, in the 20-30 m in the shallow waters there are coots, bullheads; in the sublittoral zone there are rufous-chested and Common pochards, grebes (horned, black-necked, little, great-chested, red-necked grebes), tufted ducks, buff-breasted mergansers, as well as swans - mute and whooper swans, less often Bewick's swans. The shallow coastal stripe with the depths of no more than 10 m covers an area of 478 ha and, in fact, is the main food reserve for the wintering birds.
- The list of avifauna numbers more than 300 species. On the nesting places the following species may be observed: vulture, long-legged buzzard, common kestrel, dikkop, stilt, little ringer plover, Kentish plover and Geoffrey's plover, black-bellied sandgrouse, rock pigeon, little owl, common and Alpine swifts, common and blue-cheeked bee eaters, hoopoe.



Photo by Marina Bazarevskaya



From top to bottom

The Issyk-Kul Lake, Kyrgyzstan
The Alakol Lake, Kazakhstan

Wetlands serve as a place for recreation and ecotourism

- The lake Issyk-Kul serve as a place for mass recreation of people in the warm season. Here is the most developed infrastructure: a large number of health resorts and holiday homes, which receive tourists from many countries. The total number of tourists, who have visited the Issyk-Kul oblast in the year 2016, has made up 1,159,656 people.
- Lake Alakol is a place for recreation for the local population, as well as for many tourists from Kazakhstan and Russia. On the coast of the lake, there is a growing number of zones and rest homes. Currently, over 60 houses and recreation centers operate on the coast of this lake.
- The local entrepreneurs of the Korgalzhyn region provide services for tourists-birdwatchers, offering them guest houses. The owners of the guest houses and yurts generally take care



themselves for the cleanliness of the banks and wetlands, as the tourists, in their opinion, are much more attracted by the clean objects.

- For the servicing of tourists, an appropriate infrastructure is being developed at the Son-Kul Lake, in which a significant part of the local population is involved. The Song-Kul Lake has a high tourist potential for development, which is facilitated by the following factors: the nature of high mountain lake, which is not affected by human activities, clean air, culture, customs and, in general, the way of life of the local communities. The traditional way of life of the local people and a national yurt with its decoration are of a particular interest to the foreign visitors. The region is included in the integrated tourist routes of the Great Silk Road. For the local residents, who host tourists, there are a number of advantages: financial income, raising the educational level, an opportunity to simultaneously conduct traditional economic activity.



From top to bottom

The yurt town for tourists at the Son-Kul Lake,
Kyrgyzstan

The family of birdwatchers from Germany
with the hostess of the guest house,
Korgalzhyn, Kazakhstan

National tourist zone "Avaza", Turkmenistan
Turkmenbashy Bay, Turkmenistan



- The "Avaza" national tourist zone is a modern resort town, located 4 km from the western border of the wetland Turkmenbashy Bay and 12 km from the city of Turkmenbashy. During the summer season, the "Avaza" is visited by the tourists from all Turkmenistan and from abroad. The number of vacationers in the "Avaza" zone may reach up to 4000 people. More than 20 hotels out of the 60 planned ones have already been built; there are 6 cottage complexes, 7 health centers, 2 yacht clubs, and a network of restaurants and cafes, mainly located along an artificial canal with the length of 7 km.



Son-Kul Lake,
Kyrgyzstan

Wetlands are part of the cultural heritage

- The wetland of the Issyk-Kul lake is of a special importance as a part of the cultural heritage of mankind, for example, for holding the World Nomad Games. It is connected with the spiritual values, being a source of aesthetic and artistic inspiration, and forming the basis of the important local traditions of social, economic and cultural nature.
- The Son-Kul lake area is the bearer of a part of the cultural heritage, for example, the monuments left by the troops of Manas ("Tash Tulga") ("Nine Hearths"). The basin of Son-Kul Lake is traditionally used by residents of adjacent areas for various cultural events and celebrations.



From top to bottom

Conducting the Day of Birds at the wetland of Turkmenbashy Bay, Turkmenistan
Schoolchildren birdwatching at Karakol Lake, Kazakhstan

Wetlands provide a place for excursions and field practices for schoolchildren and students

- Lake Karakol is used by non-governmental organizations and educational institutions of the city of Aktau for awareness-raising and educational purposes. Annually children and youth take part in clean-ups on the shores of the lake.
- The wetland of Turkmenbashy Bay is used by the research department of the Hazar state nature reserve, as well as by the schools of the city of Turkmenbashy for educational and awareness-raising purposes. Every year, schoolchildren take part in the international environmental action "March of Parks".

Assessment of the state of wetlands and existing problems

Unregulated water intake for agricultural needs, regulation of river flow and water pollution lead to the problem of the quantity and quality of water in wetlands

- The use of water for irrigation purposes produces a negative effect upon the fauna of the small rivers of the Issyk-Kul basin. As a result of the regulation of the flows of the large rivers, the floodplains are becoming degraded, the marshes dry up, river floodplains disappear, river beds are leveled due to heavy rains and increased melting of glaciers; in the summer, the unconfined flood waters lead to numerous destructions. In the Issyk-Kul basin there occurs water pollution with the industrial and domestic wastewaters, which are often discharged into water bodies without any cleaning, or the purification facilities do not provide the proper quality of treatment.



Cattle grazing
in the wetland
area, adjacent to
the Korgalzhyn
Reserve,
Kazakhstan



Overgrazing and felling of trees leads to degradation of vegetation on the banks of wetlands

- An increase in the number of livestock possessed by the local population and the haphazard use of pastures result in an increase in weed vegetation around Son-Kul Lake. High concentrations of cattle lead to exhausting of pastures and degradation of vegetation. This contributes to wind and water erosion, changes in the species composition of vegetation. Bird clutches and nestlings are dying under the hoofs of domestic animals. The shepherd camps, located on the shore of the lake outside the protected territory, deprive the bar-headed geese of the opportunity to come ashore for feeding.
- Despite the fact that the use of floodplain forests for obtaining timber is prohibited by law, illegal cutting of trees and bushes, alongside with grazing, lead to the degradation of vegetation at Issyk-Kul Lake.
- Outside the Korgalzhyn reserve, but on the territory of the wetlands, livestock farming in the form of peasant farms is largely developed, which affects the ecosystem of wetlands.

Uncontrolled use of biological resources

- Illegal fishing is widespread on Lake Son-Kul. In addition, there is a practice of catching chicks of molting birds.
- Unsustainable fishing practices all year round, poaching and reed fires pose potential threats to the biodiversity of the wetland of the Zeiyt Reservoir which was named after the 15th anniversary of Independence of Turkmenistan.

Steppe fires

- Despite the fact that the boundaries of the protected area of Korgalzhyn reserve are ploughed every year, in the period of July-August steppe fires are caused by dry thunderstorms, which are eliminated by the forces of the Reserve staff. By this time young birds of pale harrier and other terrestrial nesting birds usually are already fledglings, and their death from fires is almost excluded.



Fire in the steppe,
Kazakhstan

Assessment of management plans for Ramsar Sites

The main management directions, which are important for the protection of the Ramsar Sites, include the following:

- planning and zoning of the territory;
- state cadastre registration of land plots and the state cadastre of the protected areas;
- maintenance of the state water register and/or other accounting of the natural objects;
- establishing and changing the designated use of lands;
- making the lands and other natural objects available for use;
- land and forest management;
- monitoring of the state of the natural objects and their complexes;
- supervision over the compliance with the established requirements for the use and protection of the natural objects.

As it is outlined in the Chapter of the Handbook-16: Managing wetlands (3rd edition), issued by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat in the year 2007, the most important functions of the planning process for the wetland management should be as follows:

Function I	To identify the objectives of site management
Function II	To identify the factors that affect, or may affect, the features of wetlands
Function III	To resolve conflicts
Function IV	To define the monitoring requirements
Function V	To identify and describe the management required to achieve the objectives
Function VI	To maintain continuity of effective management
Function VII	To obtain resources
Function VIII	To enable communication within and between sites, organizations and stakeholders
Function IX	To demonstrate that management is effective and efficient
Function X	To ensure compliance with local, national, and international policies

Of all the wetlands in the region, 10 have been selected for studying the practices and plans for their management, among them only 6 are the Ramsar Sites. They have been assessed accordingly, based on the criteria (functions) of best practice in the management of wetlands.



The point assessment¹ of the management plans for the Ramsar Sites in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan

Wetlands	Functions of the process of preparation and implementation of the management plans									
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Tengiz-Korgalzhyn Lake system	5	5	2	3	4	4	3	4	4	3
Alakol-Sassykkol Lake system	4	4	1	2	3	2	2	3	3	2
Issyk-Kul Lake	4	5	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	4
Son-Kul Lake	5	5	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	4
Chatyr-Kul Lake	4	4	3	3	3	4	2	4	3	4
Turkmenbashy Bay	5	5	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	4

According to the assessment, the best management practices are applied on such wetlands as the Tengiz-Korgalzhyn Lake system in Kazakhstan, the Son-Kul Lake in Kyrgyzstan and the Turkmenbashy Bay in Turkmenistan.

In general, management of the protected areas, which fully or partially cover surveyed wetlands, is facing such problems as

- imperfection of the regulatory framework ensuring the conservation of wetlands;
- lack of a modern monitoring system;
- conflict of interests with hunting farms;
- insufficient material and technical capacity;
- lack of a system of targeted involvement of young professionals;
- loss of personnel;
- inadequate funding for research;
- the discrepancy between the composition of the specialists of the scientific department and the objective priorities of research activities.

¹ Points for each function: from 1 (the lowest one) to 5 (the highest one).



Representatives of the fauna in the wetlands
of the Tengiz-Korgalzhyn Lakes system and the Issyk-Kul Lake



The drawback of management plans is the lack of a well-established system of getting feedback from local communities. Results of the questionnaire showed that local population is interested in obtaining environmental knowledge. Therefore, one of the most important tasks is to involve local people into the protection of wetlands. It is necessary to develop a program for establishing contacts with the local population and the media in order to obtain support from locals and central authorities. This program could include: contacts with the media, informing and educating local communities, familiarization of visitors with protected objects, environmental advocacy, and publishing activities. The goal is to convince local population of the need to protect wetlands, explain what to do in order to gain benefits and use services while creating an environment for monitoring the territory. Local communities can and should play a big role in the wetland management. The goal of propaganda should be the education of a sense of unity and responsibility, the more knowledge is available, the more actively they will be involved in the affairs of the protected areas and wetlands.

Recommendations for the management planning in the practices of the existing Ramsar Sites

The wetlands provide conditions for the development of a variety of types of using the natural resources for the local communities: water supply, fisheries, agriculture (due to the maintenance of the groundwater level and high soil fertility), cattle breeding, poultry farming, beekeeping, hunting, procurement of medicinal raw materials, recreation and tourism, etc.

As a result of the performed works, the national experts of the project have developed the generalizing proposals. Based on the experience of the three countries, recommendations for the conservation, development, and dissemination of the best available practices for the sustainable use of the wetlands in Central Asia have been developed

- To update the boundaries and to carry out zoning to ensure an adequate management of the area due to the natural and anthropogenic changes in ecosystems (this applies to all wetlands, which are within the protected areas). To organize and equip the viewing platforms (as, for example, in the Alakol state nature reserve) for bird observations and more effective compliance with the protection regime. To expand, if necessary, the network of protected areas for more reliable protection of the appropriate wetlands (for example, the wetlands of the Lesser Aral Sea and the Syr Darya river delta).
- To create ecological corridors for ensuring migration of wetland birds, as, for example, in the Hazar and Korgalzhyn state nature reserves.
- To ensure regulation of pasture loads in order to reduce their negative impact on the wetlands.
- To continue monitoring of migratory, wintering and nesting wetland birds (in cooperation with the BirdLife International and Wetlands International) in the frames of the works for the implementation of the obligations under the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity and other agreements.
- To conduct, as much as possible, scientific researches, to use the accumulated data, and to upgrade the new information for the development and updating of the management plans for the wetlands.
- With the availability of the archives, collected during maintaining the “Annals of Nature” on the wetlands, to undertake special works for their processing and assessment of the adaptive capacity of the ecosystems.
- To develop cooperation with the interested parties for the use of the resources of the wetlands and adjacent areas (as, for example, the “Issyk-Kul” biospheric territory), including cooperation with hunters and local communities.
- In each of the countries to create a geo-information system of monitoring (GIS-technologies and remote sensing instruments for assessing the state of the wetlands) of the Ramsar Sites with the possibility of withdrawal and integration into a unified (regional) monitoring system. This, in its turn, will provide an opportunity, for example, to justify the integrated decision-making, aimed at the ecological and economic development of the corresponding territory, like the “Issyk-Kul” biospheric territory in Kyrgyzstan.
- To use all opportunities to promote information among the users of the information resources on the importance of conserving the wetlands, making use of various mass media and social networks. To develop the works under the environmental projects with young people (schoolchildren, students, etc.).
- To involve the local population in the tasks of conserving wetlands, taking into account the interests of the local communities, comprising the provision of new opportunities for employment of the local people in the field of tourist recreation, including excursions, bird-watching, wildlife photography, etc.

- The management plan is a “flagship” document in the wetland monitoring system, as a standard focused on the practical application and obtaining of actual, though reasonable, benefits. Its principles and criteria are aimed at the improvement of the management practices. The principles are the rules, wherefrom one may not deviate in the course of the wetland management, and the criteria are the means of verifying the compliance with these principles. The principles and criteria should encompass and permeate all activities in the wetland management. The management plan should comply with the legislation, regulations and International Treaties, Conventions and Agreements, ratified by the country. The organization (in this case, a protected area), if the wetland is located in its territory, should be a legal entity, which has passed the official documented registration procedure. It is obliged to develop and apply in its practice the appropriate (preventive) measures for the protection against the unauthorized or unlawful use of the wetlands, their biodiversity, and other resources. The management plan for the wetlands should provide the objectively verifiable indicators to assess in general the success of the monitoring and management practices.
- The ecosystem services of the wetlands are manifold. The parties, interested in them, should include the local communities, which are necessarily involved in using the ecosystem services and protection. This applies especially to the sites of cultural, ecological, economic or spiritual value. At the same

time, it is necessary to respect the right of the local communities to protect their traditional way of life. The local communities should be interested in maintaining such representative sites. In case of their violation, the persons responsible for the wetlands together with the local communities should strive to remediate the degraded sites. For example, the experience of the Song-Kul Lake in Kyrgyzstan, when the activities of the local communities have resulted in the destruction of nesting biotopes of bar-headed geese due to the improper cattle grazing, but in the year 1996, the artificial islands for bird nesting have been experimentally created there.

- Assessment of the wetland practice should be carried out on the basis of the monitoring of the Management Plan implementation and analysis of the monitoring results. The summaries of the results of the MP implementation (see paragraph 8) should be on the open (free) access, as, for example, this is the practice in Kyrgyzstan.
- A systematic assessment of the criteria in the process of improving the available Wetland Management Plans and their implementation should form the basis for the integrated monitoring, conservation and sustainable use of the wetlands. The interests for preserving the potential of the Ramsar Sites should be accounted for in the programs of social and economic development of our countries and in the issues of international cooperation.

The principles of the forthcoming planning for the potential Ramsar Sites

Depending on the geographic location and functioning of the wetlands, their management will be different from that of the protected area. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the following two principles:

- *The watershed principle.* The planning of the protection and use of the wetlands should be extended to the whole catchment basin, because such wetlands depend, to a large extent, on the water volumes and components of the catchment basin area as an integrated ecosystem.
- *The integrated principle.* It is necessary to combine both the active and passive protection of the wetlands, depending on the condition of the catchment basin area, as well as the peculiarities of the reservoir functioning, including its seasonal and annual dynamics. The integrated measures should include the formation of a positive attitude of the local communities to the wetlands, which is determined (as it has been shown above) by the special role of the wetlands in their life. If the wetland is located in whole or in part in the protected area, it is recommended that the Management Plan should account for the environmental value of the given wetland for the relevant ecosystem. Therefore, it is expedient to single out a special Management Plan for the conservation of the given wetland or to designate it separately as a part of the Management Plan of the protected area.

In conclusion, it is desirable to remind and to emphasize especially, that the international obligations under the Ramsar Convention, including those for the countries of Central Asia, make it possible:

- to identify and implement the planning of each country in such a way as to contribute to the protection of the wetlands, especially of those being on the Ramsar List, providing a proper supervision. Herewith, to provide an access to the information from the sites in case of changing the ecological status of a particular wetland due to the human-made effect, pollution or other types of anthropogenic pressure.
- to provide awareness of the recommendations of the Secretariat and/or the Conferences of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention for the protection, management and sustainable use of the wetlands, their biodiversity and the receipt by them of the obtained information for all interested parties, for all bodies, responsible for the wetland management and officials at all levels

At the same time, the tasks of the management of the Ramsar Sites are addressed to the government bodies, which are competent in the sphere of regulation of using the natural resources and/or environmental protection.

The main requirements of the Ramsar Convention for the management and control of the Ramsar Sites may be summarized in three main groups: 1) to identify and designate such wetlands according to the relevant Ramsar criteria; 2) to develop the Management Plans, providing for a special regime of nature management and contributing to the preservation of the designated purpose of such territories; 3) to exercise supervision over the Ramsar Sites in order to prevent the aggravation of their statuses, whereby they have been nominated.

Defining the conformity or contradictions between the wetland management practices and the requirements of the Ramsar Convention for the potential wetlands is possible upon obtaining the efficiency (result) assessment of the existing management practices. If the wetland natural complexes are preserved, biodiversity does not decrease, the habitat of waterbird does not degrade this may serve as a reliable indicator of the positive efficiency of the managerial activity. If otherwise, this activity is ineffective and contradicts the requirements of the Ramsar Convention and practices, which are applied, at least, in those Central Asian countries, which have united and established the RRI-CA.



From top to bottom

Round table in Turkmenistan

Open lesson for schoolchildren in Kyrgyzstan

Events organized within the framework of the project

Within the framework of the project, the following activities were held, devoted to the World Wetland Day:

1. World Wetland Day in the city of Turkmenbashi with the participation of employees of the reserve, the city administration and interested users of the resources of the wetland (January 21).
2. The meeting devoted to the World Wetland Day, which was held on February 2 in the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
3. Round table devoted to the World Wetland Day, organized on February 1 at the National Institute of Deserts, Flora and Fauna of Turkmenistan.
4. The meeting devoted to the World Wetland Day on the biosphere territory "Issyk-Kul".
5. Lectures for students of secondary schools in Naryn and secondary schools of At-Bashinsky, Kochkorsky and Naryn districts bordering on protected areas, as well as for Pamir kyrgyz students in Naryn lyceum No. 87, a roundtable in the Karatal-Japyryk state nature reserve (February 2), an open lesson for students of 9th grade of secondary school named after Naamatbek Usonaliiev of Kazybek village of At-Bashinsky district (February 7)
6. Clean-ups of solid waste and fishing nets in the coastal zone of the lakes Issyk-Kul and Chatyr-Kul.
7. Final workshop in Bishkek to discuss the second phase of the action plan for the conservation of wetlands for 2018–2020.
8. The event, dedicated to the World Wetland Day, on the theme "We will save wetlands of our native land!" on the basis of the Korgalzhyn nature reserve.

This material is a summary of the document on the update of the information on the status of wetlands in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan by collection and dissemination of good practices for the conservation and sustainable use of the wetlands by local communities.

Photo credit: national experts of the project Adylbek Kozybakov (Kazakhstan), Askar Davletbakov (Kyrgyzstan) and Eldar Rustamov (Turkmenistan).

An electronic version of the full document available at www.carececo.org

For additional information on the final document and the results of the project please address:

Kazakhstan, Almaty, Orbita-1, 40, Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia

Contact person:

Zhanel Karina, RRI-CA technical secretary
zhkarina@carececo.org

Photo on cover: Urazaliyev Ruslan (АСБК)

Cover design/layout/pre-press:

Marina Bazarevskaya