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***Korean Wetlands of International Importance:
The Benefits of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to
the People of Korea***

By Professor Kim Diana Connolly*

Many wonderful wetland “jewels”¹ have been designated worldwide as Wetlands of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (often referred to as the Convention on Wetlands or the Ramsar Convention).² The Republic of Korea has designated eight such sites.³

With more than 150 Contracting Parties, including the Republic of Korea (where I present this paper) and the United States (my home)⁴, the Ramsar

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¹ See Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea, *The bird census for 2006 winter migratory birds*, http://eng.me.go.kr/docs/news/press_view.html?seq=324&page=5&mcode= (last visited Sept. 14, 2008).

² Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Feb. 2, 1971, T.I.A.S. No. 1084, 996 U.N.T.S. 245 (amended 1982 & 1987) [hereinafter Ramsar Convention], available at http://www.ramsar.org/key_conv_e.htm.

³ Ramsar, *The List of Wetlands of International Importance* (27 August 2008), <http://www.ramsar.org/sitelist.pdf> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴ Ramsar, *Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*, http://www.ramsar.org/key_cps.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

Convention employs a cooperative, non-regulatory means of wetland protection, providing support for conservation and wise use of wetlands worldwide.⁵ Members of the Ramsar Convention are obliged to designate at least one wetland for inclusion;⁶ however, designation is entirely voluntary.⁷

In 2007, I had the privilege of co-authoring an article with Professor Royal Gardner for THE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW REPORTER exploring whether the Ramsar Convention's non-regulatory approach created benefits associated with Ramsar designation.⁸ Our empirical research revealed that in addition to national laws regulating the U.S. wetlands⁹, the 22 then-designated U.S. Ramsar sites were benefited from international recognition.¹⁰ I come to your country in part to continue this research on the designated Wetlands of International Importance in your homeland.

Built from many thousands of years of rich history¹¹, The Republic of Korea has developed a vibrant economy ranking seventh in Gross Domestic Product in terms of per capita annual growth rate in the world.¹² However, Korea's ratio of protected area to surface area ranks 114th internationally¹³ even though its wetlands "lie at the crossroads of two of the world's eight major avian migratory flyways" posing a significant global concern.¹⁴

⁵ Ramsar Convention, *supra* note 2, Article 3.1. See also *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, The Wise Use Resource Centre*, http://www.ramsar.org/wurc/wurc_index.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁶ Ramsar Convention, *supra* note 2, at art. 2.4.

⁷ See *id.* at art. 2.

⁸ Royal C. Gardner and Kim Diana Connolly, *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Assessment of International Designations Within the United States*, 37 ENV'L LAW REPORTER 10089 (Feb. 2007). See also Royal C. Gardner and Kim Diana Connolly, *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Assessment of International Designations Within the United States*, 29 NATIONAL WETLANDS NEWSLETTER 6 (Mar.-Apr. 2007).

⁹ See generally KIM DIANA CONNOLLY, STEPHEN M. JOHNSON & DOUGLAS R. WILLIAMS, WETLANDS LAW AND POLICY: UNDERSTANDING SECTION 404 (2005); See also Stephen M. Johnson, Kim Diana Connolly & Mark A. Ryan, *Supplement to The Clean Water Handbook, Second Edition and Wetlands: Law and Policy: Understanding Section 404* (Jan. 2007), available at http://www.abanet.org/abastore/front_end/static/nosearch/watersuppp001-017.pdf.

¹⁰ *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Assessment of International Designations Within the United States*, *supra* note 8, at 10102.

¹¹ See AsianInfo, *Korea's History / Background*, <http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/history.htm> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

¹² Global Virtual University, http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/indicator_detail.cfm?Country=KR&IndicatorID=45#row (last visited Sept. 25, 2008); see also World Resources Institute, http://earthtrends.wri.org/pdf_library/country_profiles/eco_cou_410.pdf (last visited Sept. 25, 2008), Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ks.html> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

¹³ Global Virtual University, *South Korea: Ratio of Protected Area to Surface Area*, http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/indicator_detail.cfm?Country=KR&IndicatorID=80#row (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

¹⁴ Global Environment Facility, *Conservation of Globally Significant Wetlands in the Republic of Korea*, http://www.gefweb.org/Documents/Council/Documents/GEF_C22/Bio_-_Korea_-

The Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands begins later this week here in Changwon, Republic of Korea.¹⁵ The theme of the conference is “Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People”¹⁶ and incorporates local participants dedicated to the event’s success.¹⁷ In honor of this forthcoming event, with the assistance of Dr. Choon Hwan Kim of Chosun University, a survey of designated Wetlands of International Importance in the Republic of Korea was conducted and initial results are available here. Following the COP we will be further refining and adding to this research and publishing a scholarly article detailing the further findings. It is an honor to present the initial findings here today.

As most of you know, on compliance with Article 2 of the Ramsar Convention, each party must designate at least one “suitable wetland[] within its territory for inclusion in a List of Wetlands of International Importance.”¹⁸ According to the Convention itself, a listed wetland must have “international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology.”¹⁹ As it has been further interpreted, numerous characteristics may make a site worthy of designation through compliance one or more of nine official criteria.²⁰ For example, a designated site might contain a representative, rare or unique wetland type.²¹ Alternatively, designation might be approved to conserve biological diversity.²² Furthermore, a site may be designated because it has a crucial role with respect to waterbirds²³, fish²⁴ or other taxa.²⁵

[Project Document 1.pdf](#) (United Nations Development Programme conclusions of Korea’s wetlands global significance).

¹⁵ Ramsar, *Tenth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties*, http://www.ramsar.org/index_cop10_e.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

¹⁶ *Id.* This theme was also that used for World Wetlands Day 2008. See Ramsar, *World Wetlands Day 2008*, http://www.ramsar.org/wwd/8/wwd2008_index.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Shin Boo-nam (director-general of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Environment), *Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People*, KOREAN TIMES (June 2, 2008), available at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2008/06/160_25150.html (“Now is the time to make conservation and the wise use of wetlands a top priority in our national environmental agenda. In this light, COP10 should be held as a festive event for the whole country. Therefore, your support and participation are essential.”); Korea.net, *2008 Ramsar Convention Highlights Korea’s Wetlands* (Oct. 29, 2007), http://www.korea.net/News/News/newsView.asp?serial_no=20071026034 (“One of the most prestigious international workshops on climate change and wetland protection will take place in Korea a year from now.”).

¹⁸ Ramsar Convention, *supra* note 2, at art. 2.1.

¹⁹ *Id.* at art. 2.2.

²⁰ See Ramsar.org, http://www.ramsar.org/key_criteria.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008); see generally Kim Diana Connolly and Valerie Cochran, *Guidelines for Nominating a Site as a Wetland of International Importance in the United States*, 2007, available at <http://www.ramsarcommittee.us/RAMSARWhitepaper.pdf>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² For example, a site supporting vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities; and/or a site supporting species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or providing refuge during adverse conditions. *Id.*

²³ For example, regularly supporting 20,000 or more waterbirds or 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies.

Once designated, a party is obliged “to promote the conservation of the site.”²⁶ Parties must also keep track of the ecological character of a Ramsar site and notify the Ramsar Secretariat if that character “has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.”²⁷ Furthermore, removal or reduction in boundaries of a listed site from the Ramsar List triggers the responsibility to “as far as possible compensate for any loss of wetland resources”²⁸ such as creating other “nature reserves.”²⁹ The Convention clarifies, however, that listing a site “does not prejudice [a party’s] exclusive sovereign rights.”³⁰

The Ramsar Convention also requires each party to “formulate and implement . . . planning so as to promote . . . as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory.”³¹ The “wise use” concept has been viewed a forerunner of, and compatible with, the notion of sustainable use or development.³² It applies to all wetlands in a party’s territory, not just designated sites.³³ A party can satisfy the obligation of “wise use” by adopting national wetland legislation or policies, by implementing programs on wetland inventories, monitoring, research, and education, and by developing plans

²⁴ For example, support for proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland ecosystem.

²⁵ Ramsar, *Resolution IX.1 Annex B: Revised Strategic Framework and Guidelines for the Future Development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, http://www.ramsar.org/res/key_res_ix_01_annexb_e.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2006) (if the site regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species).

²⁶ Ramsar Convention, *supra* note 2, at art. 3.1.

²⁷ *Id.* at art. 3.2. Sites where the ecological character has changed, is changing, or is likely to change are listed in the Montreux Record. *See also* RAMSAR CONVENTION SECRETARIAT, THE RAMSAR CONVENTION MANUAL: A GUIDE TO THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS 65 (4th ed. 2006) *available at* http://www.ramsar.org/lib/lib_manual2006e.pdf [hereinafter RAMSAR MANUAL], at 36. The Montreux Record is used “to identify priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention.” *Id.*

²⁸ Ramsar Convention, *supra* note 2, at art. 4.2.

²⁹ *Id.* A party may remove a Ramsar site from the list or modify the site’s boundaries in “its urgent national interest.” In addition to creating other nature reserves, a party may be able to satisfy the compensation requirement through restoration activities. *See* Royal C. Gardner, *Rehabilitating Nature: A Comparative Review of Legal Mechanisms That Encourage Wetland Restoration Efforts*, 52 CATH. L. REV. 573, 579 (2003).

³⁰ *Id.* at art. 2.3.

³¹ Ramsar Convention, *supra* note 2, at art. 3.1.

³² *See* RAMSAR MANUAL, *supra* note 27, at 48 (stating that through the “wise use” concept, Ramsar “continues to emphasize that human use on a sustainable basis is entirely compatible with Ramsar principles and wetland conservation in general”); *see also* Ramsar, *Resolution IX.1 Annex A: A Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character*, *available at* http://www.ramsar.org/res/key_res_ix_01_annexa_e.htm (comparing Ramsar and Millennium Ecosystem Assessment terminology).

³³ RAMSAR MANUAL, *supra* note 27, at 48

to “take action” at individual wetland sites.³⁴ The Secretariat has developed a center to help parties achieve their wise use obligations.³⁵

In light of other synergistic international agreements, the Ramsar Secretariat has developed relationships with related instruments and organizations, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);³⁶ The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);³⁷ The Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS);³⁸ the UNESCO World Heritage Convention;³⁹ the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);⁴⁰ the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC);⁴¹ UNEP’s Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and other regional conventions;⁴² UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme;⁴³ Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS) and others.⁴⁴

The Republic of Korea’s globally significant wetlands fall at the crossroads of two of the world’s eight major avian migratory flyways (geographical groupings of similar migration routes used by many individual species).⁴⁵ The extensive inter-tidal mudflats along the western and southern coasts host over 500,000 wading shorebirds of 42 species migrating along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (which extends from Siberia and Alaska southwards through South East Asia to Australia and New Zealand). Estimates are that more than 10% of the certain flyway populations (including birds from 14 species) stage through these tidal wetlands, and in the case of five species, over 25% of the population travels through. These make Korea’s designated and undesignated wetlands of importance to the worldwide community, and mean that the establishment of the Gyeongnam Ramsar Environmental Foundation is an important step for this nation and the world.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Ramsar, The Wise Use Resource Centre, http://www.ramsar.org/wurc/wurc_index.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

³⁶ United Nations Environment Programme, <http://www.unep.org/> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

³⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity, <http://www.cbd.int> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

³⁸ Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, <http://www.cms.int> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

³⁹ UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, <http://whc.unesco.org> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴⁰ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, <http://www.unccd.int> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, <http://unfccc.int/2860.php> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴² United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Seas Programme, <http://www.unep.org/regionalseas> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴³ UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme, <http://www.unesco.org/mab/mabProg.shtml> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴⁴ Ramsar, *Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation with Other Conventions and International Organizations*, http://www.ramsar.org/index_mou.htm (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁴⁵ See Birds Korea, *Wetlands: Korea's Most-Threatened Habitat*, <http://www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/Wetlands/BK-HA-Korea-threatened-Wetlands.shtml> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

In anticipation of the Conference of the Parties to take place later this week, I decided (with the recommendation of my co-author to the Environmental Law Reporter work and a forthcoming additional work surveying African Wetlands) to assess the listed Ramsar sites in Korea. Accordingly, the survey instrument used in the U.S.⁴⁶ was translated into Korean.⁴⁷ In April 2007, my co-investigator Dr. Choon Hwan Kim sent these surveys via email to site managers of the five Korean sites that were at that time designated as wetlands of international importance: the High Moor, Yongneup of Mt. Daeam; Upo Wetland; Jangdo Island High Moor; Suncheon Bay; and Mulyeongari-oreum. (The Republic of Korea has since designated three more sites, and we are in the process of gathering data on these newer sites).⁴⁸ Calls were placed to each site to ensure that they received and completed the survey, and certain follow-up questions were sent to site managers.⁴⁹ Like the U.S. survey, the primary focus was to determine the extent to which Korean Ramsar sites identified and promoted their international designation, and the effects (both positive and negative) of the designation. And similar to the results of the U.S survey, this research found that Ramsar designation provides varying levels of benefits to the sites and the surrounding communities in the Republic of Korea.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS –

REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S FIRST FIVE RAMSAR SITES (AS OF APR. 2007)

The High Moor, Yongneup of Mt. Daeam: Korea designated this 106-hectare area as its first Ramsar site in March 1997.⁵⁰ It contains two bogs, with peat layers approximately 150 centimeters thick, that were formed between 4,000 to 5,000 years ago.⁵¹ This site contains 13 species of rare plants, as well as a rare moth (*Grapholita dimorpha*) and an endemic leaf beetle (*Plateumaris* (Coleoptera)).⁵² Under Korea's domestic laws, the High Moor is designated and protected as a Natural Environment Preservation Area, a Natural Ecosystem Conservation Area, and a National Monument Protection Area.⁵³ Furthermore, because the site is adjacent to the

⁴⁶ See *supra* note 8, at 10094.

⁴⁷ University of South Carolina law student Ms. Yusun Woo was very helpful in translating and coordinating the survey.

⁴⁸ The sites are Du-ung Wetland (6 hectares) and Moojechinup (4 hectares), which were designated in December 2007; and Muan Tidal Flat (3.5 hectares) added in 2008. See Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea, *Ramsar sites in Korea*, http://english.ramsar2008.go.kr/06/03_02.jsp (last visited Sept. 25, 2008). These sites were not part of the initial survey, but we have been in touch with them and will include them in later work.

⁴⁹ All respondents will be provided an opportunity to comment on a later draft of this scholarship.

⁵⁰ Wetlands International, Ramsar Sites Information Service, <http://ramsar.wetlands.org/Database/Searchforsites/tabid/765/language/es-ES/Default.aspx> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

demilitarized zone, public access is severely limited and under the control of Korea's Ministry of National Defense.⁵⁴

Upo Wetland: Korea designated Upo Wetland as its second Ramsar site in March 1998.⁵⁵ A 854-hectare freshwater site, it includes an oxbow lake, ponds, and marshes adjacent to the eastern portion of the Nakdong River, the longest river in Korea.⁵⁶ Protected as a Nature Conservation Area, its Ramsar Information Sheet describes the Upo Wetland as the "largest native undisturbed wetland in the country."⁵⁷ Part of this Ramsar site is privately owned and subjected to agricultural activities during the dry season.⁵⁸ Known for its natural beauty, the site has high biodiversity values, including the feeding and spawning grounds it provides to fish.⁵⁹

Jangdo Island High Moor: Korea designated its next Ramsar site in March 2005.⁶⁰ Located off the southwestern coast, this site relatively small site (9 hectares) is part of Tadonhae-Haesand National Park and is also a National Wetland Conservation Area.⁶¹ Approximately half of the site is forested peatland, and the area provides habitat for 44 bird species, including the peregrine falcon.⁶² Its Ramsar Information Sheet characterizes the site as "is the only high moor on an island in Republic of Korea."⁶³

Suncheon Bay: Korea's largest Ramsar site (3,550 hectares), Suncheon Bay was designated as a wetland of international importance in January 2006.⁶⁴ With tidal flats and salt marshes (as well as some rice paddies),⁶⁵ Suncheon Bay is part of the critical flyway for birds migrating between East Asia and Australia.⁶⁶ The site supports a wide variety of birds, including 25 protected species;⁶⁷ its Ramsar Information Sheet reports that Suncheon Bay supports more than 1 percent of the population of Common Shelduck, Kentish Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Hooded Crane, and Saunders' Gull and that it "is Korea's only wintering site for *Grus monacha*

⁵⁴ Ke Chung Kim, *Preserving Biodiversity in Korea's Demilitarized Zone*, SCIENCE MAGAZINE, Oct. 10, 2007, <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/278/5336/242>.

⁵⁵ See *supra* note 50.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ See Birds Korea, *Upo Wetland: South Korea's "Second" Ramsar Site*, <http://www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/Wetlands/Upo/BK-HA-Upo-wetland.shtml> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

⁶⁰ See *supra* note 50.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

[Hooded Crane].”⁶⁸ he site is also designated as a Wetland Protected Area by the national government and as a Natural Eco-Park by Suncheon City.⁶⁹

Mulyeongari-oreum: Designated as a wetland of international importance in November 2006, the site is a small 31 hectares crater lake located in a secondary volcano (known as an oreum) on Mount Suryeong on Jeju Island.⁷⁰ It is the only such wetland system in Korea.⁷¹ The site provides habitat for the endangered narrow-mouthed frog (*Kaloula borealis*) and giant water bug (*Lethocerus deyrollei*).⁷² Mulyeongari-oreum was Korea’s first designated Wetland Conservation Area.⁷³

As mentioned above, the three most recent sites were not included in the initial survey, and though we have begun work on them our research is still preliminary. These three internationally-important wetlands (Du-ung Wetland, Moojechinup and Muan Tidal Flat) add much to Korea’s internationally designated wetland resources and should provide interesting insights in the next version of this research.

Survey Results for Initial Five Sites

Public Identification

The first section of the survey explored each site’s public identification with the Ramsar Convention. The survey recognized that there are many potential ways that a particular site can identify its affiliation with Ramsar, including signs, brochures and other documents, and websites. The research found great divergence in how the sites note their status as a wetland of international importance prior to the COP. Of course, the fact that COP 10 will bring national and world recognition to the wetlands of the Republic of Korea may change some of the findings.

Three sites (Upo Wetlands; Jangdo Island High Moor; and Suncheon Bay) reported using signage to promote their Ramsar status. For example, Jangdo Island High Moor has a stone sign commemorating the designation. Likewise, signs leading to Suncheon Bay say “Ramsar Wetland Suncheon Bay,” and a sign at the main entrance to that wetland proclaims it as a “Wetland of International Importance.” Several sites (High Moor, Yongneup of Mt. Daeam; Upo Wetlands; and Suncheon Bay) also reported websites that mention their Ramsar designation.⁷⁴

Upo Wetlands and Suncheon Bay, Korea’s two largest Ramsar sites, appear to be the most innovative with respect to public identification with the Ramsar Convention. Both have numerous publications and brochures onsite that refer to their Ramsar status. Suncheon Bay also has a public relations movie that speaks about Ramsar. Staff at the Upo Wetland publicize its Ramsar designation when holding workshops and conferences. The respondent for Upo Wetland also reported that they

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ See, e.g., <http://upo.or.kr/eng/e-frame01.html> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).

planned to invoke Ramsar in an upcoming campaign to enlist private company commitment to caring for wetland sites.

Only one site, Mulyeongari-oreum, appeared in 2007 to have no formal identification with Ramsar. The site had only been recently designated at the time of the survey, however, and the public was not permitted to enter until July 2007.

Because these results may change due to the presence of the COP, we will be revisiting this matter before publishing our final findings.

Effects of Ramsar Designation

Each surveyed Korean Ramsar sites had some type of protected status, such as a conservation area or national park, prior to Ramsar designation. Thus the survey sought to explore whether conferral of Ramsar status went beyond perception as an award or honor in recognition of the ecological value of a site to provide any other specific benefits. Survey respondents identified a range of benefits related to protection of the site, increased local interest in wetlands, increased funding opportunities, increased eco-tourism, and increased interest in scientific research at the sites. While the type and level of benefits varied from site to site, all sites reported that Ramsar designation had indeed provided specific benefits. Two respondents also noted that the designation had led to friction with some members of the local community who were concerned about impacts on property rights or access to the site. The results of this portion of the survey are discussed in more detail below.

Site Protection: Four of the five survey respondents reported that Ramsar designation, from an international perspective, had contributed to support for protection of a site and surrounding areas. For example, the respondent for the High Moor, Tongneup of Mt. Daeam, stated that the military bases near the site had more actively supported wetland preservation policies following designation. The respondent for Upo Wetland noted that citizens are increasing their efforts to clean up the environment around the site and that the local government has tightened its supervision of the site to prevent illegal activities. Similarly, the respondent for Suncheon Bay stated that Suncheon City has five people employed in the Suncheon Bay Preservation Division. Furthermore, Suncheon City has created a buffer area around the site by prohibiting the development of lands within 500 meters of Suncheon Bay.

Increased local interest and support of the site: All five surveyed sites reported that Ramsar designation had contributed to increased interest in the site by the local community. This interest is demonstrated by increasing requests for information about the site and efforts to clean up the areas surrounding the site.

Increased funding opportunities: Several surveyed sites reported that the Ramsar designation had assisted with funding opportunities. The respondent for the High Moor, Tongneup of Mt. Daeam, noted that it has become easier to obtain funds for wetland preservation, and the respondent for the Upo Wetland stated that Ramsar designation played a very important role with respect to financial support provided by the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility. The respondent for Suncheon Bay also provided specific examples, explaining that Ramsar designation led to funds to support the site from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

Increased eco-tourism: At the time of the survey, the three sites that permitted public access (Upo Wetland, Jangdo Island High Moor, and Suncheon Bay) stated that Ramsar designation had led to increased tourism. The respondent for Suncheon Bay reported that since Ramsar designation visitors to the site had increased by 1,000%, and local businesses also benefited, as their reservation rates have increased by 70%. The respondent for Mulyeongari-oreum noted that public access would be prohibited until July 2007. Since then, however, visitors have been coming to the site. The High Moor, Tongneup of Mt. Daeam, is the only site for which increased eco-tourism is not possible, given its location and military restrictions. Nevertheless, the site has produced a virtual tour and made it available through the internet.⁷⁵

Increased research interest: Two respondents, for Upo Wetland and Suncheon Bay, also reported that Ramsar designation had contributed to increased scientific studies of the site.

Concern with private property rights and access: The survey specifically inquired as to whether Ramsar designation had caused any problems. The respondents for the two larger sites, Upo Wetland and Suncheon Bay, reported some tension with portions of the local community. Upo Wetland includes some privately owned lands, and the respondent noted that due to the designation, the property rights of these local residents have been drastically limited. The respondent for Suncheon Bay stated that some local residents had concerns about potential restrictions on access to the site.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND ROADMAP FOR REMAINING RESEARCH

As you can see from the early results, the Republic of Korea has much to be proud of with its first five Ramsar sites, and the hosting of the tenth Conference of the Parties this fall. Creation of the Gyeongnam Ramsar Environmental Foundation and this International Symposium commemorating its inauguration is another major step, and deserves much congratulations.

It is an honor to be with you today, and to share in the wealth of knowledge assembled in this room. The Republic of Korea's commitment to wise use of its wetlands and continued study of these vital resources is important. I look forward to learning more from each of you, and hope you will assist me as I go forward in this research. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today to share some of what I have learned so far about Korea's wetland jewels.

⁷⁵ See <http://www.yongneup.go.kr/> (last visited Sept. 25, 2008).