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'Towards a Pan-European Wetland Inventory' - report from the IUCN "Parks for Life"/RAMSAR Bureau workshop

Within the framework of the "Parks for Life: Action for Protected Areas in Europe", a workshop 'Towards a Pan-European Wetland Inventory' has been organized jointly by the IUCN "Parks for Life", Ramsar Bureau and Italian hosts (Centro Documentazione Internazionale Parchi-CEDIP and the Pistoia authorities). The workshop took place in the Montecatini Terme in Italy between 22-23 January 1997. Experts from most important international wetland conservation and information management organisations and other institutions discussed the needs and opportunities to prepare the Pan-European Wetland Inventory.

Participants of the workshop agreed that there was an urgent need to bring together the currently diverse and dispersed data on European wetlands for the following reasons:

- to monitor the status and value of wetlands as a basis for promoting better protection;
- to assess the impact of proposed development projects;
- to provide information for effective implementation of global and regional Conventions, Directives, Strategies and other international initiatives;
- to promote public awareness of the values and importance of wetlands;
- to provide the basis for a coordinated approach to wetland conservation at the pan-European level.

The following objectives of the Pan-European Inventory have been agreed:

- Provision of information

(a) to provide information on wetlands relevant to the implementation of international legal instruments (e.g. Ramsar and other Conventions, EU Directives) and other initiatives (e.g. Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy);

(b) to provide information on wetlands relevant to the implementation of national policies, action plans and other initiatives;

(c) to provide information on wetlands relevant to planning and development processes.

- Promotion of information management

(a) to promote the adoption of common standards in order to integrate and exchange information with respect to national agencies, international legal instruments and Pan-European initiatives;

(b) to promote and strengthen capacities in information management.

Action strategy for the future is based on the following:

- Pan-European Inventory of Wetlands

Database management system by linking relevant existing databases

Spatial coverage of wetlands

It should be noted that this project could be undertaken under the auspices of BCIS (Biodiversity Conservation Information System), since most of the relevant agencies are members of this consortium.

- Meta-Database Framework

Design the structure of a wetlands meta-database and make it available on the Internet for agencies, institutions and other organisations to provide details of their data holdings

- Wetlands Information Network (WIN)

Establish a Wetlands Information Network on the Internet, modelled on the World Heritage Information Network (WHIN)

- Guidelines on Best Practice in Managing Wetlands Information

The Ramsar Bureau will, in cooperation with other international organisations, take the leading role in the preparation of the Pan-European Wetland Inventory.