

Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) in Hokkaido

The Ramsar Convention calls for the conservation of important wetlands around the world that serve as waterfowl habitats, and the protection of animals and plants that live and thrive in these wetlands. The Ramsar Convention was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, with the Cobourg Peninsula in Australia becoming the first designated site in 1974. There are now over 2,200 Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) worldwide. Japan joined the convention in 1980 and presently has over 50 designated sites.

To become a Ramsar site, a wetland must meet at least one of nine Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance. For example, the area must support threatened ecological communities, regularly support over 20,000 waterbirds, or support a significant proportion of indigenous fish species.

There are thirteen Ramsar wetland sites located throughout Hokkaido. Known for its fertile natural environment, Hokkaido has the highest density of Ramsar sites of any region in Japan. It plays an important role as a habitat for various indigenous waterfowl as well as for many migratory birds.

Lake Akan is the only Ramsar site in Akan-Mashu National Park. Designated in 2005, it is notable for being the habitat of Marimo, a type of freshwater algae. Sakhalin taimen, the largest freshwater fish in Japan, and kokanee salmon, a saltwater fish now adapted to freshwater, also call this lake home, while a wide range of birds and mammals depend on the lake's ecosystem, including the surrounding forests of Yezo spruce, Sakhalin fir, and Japanese oak.