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MEETING TO ENDORSE THE PROPOSED  
WESTERN/CENTRAL ASIAN SITE NETWORK  
FOR SIBERIAN CRANES (AND OTHER  
WATERBIRDS)

New Delhi, 21 March 2005  
Agenda Items 4.0-8.0

**THE PROPOSED WESTERN/CENTRAL ASIAN SITE NETWORK FOR SIBERIAN  
CRANES (AND OTHER WATERBIRDS): BACKGROUND PAPER**

*(Prepared by the International Crane Foundation in consultation with the CMS Secretariat)*

1. The UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetland Project (SCWP) has a stated goal to develop flyway site networks with nomination procedures for sites harmonized with other site network schemes. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) is currently working with Wetlands International on an initiative to develop the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan to Conserve Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats that would include a provision to establish a site network for migratory waterbirds in the Central Asia Flyway (CAF).
2. At the Waterbirds Around the World Meeting, Edinburgh (April 2004), side events were held to discuss steps needed to develop these two related initiatives. Joint discussions focused on exploring the best mechanisms to link these initiatives, identifying frameworks for cooperation and applying lessons learned from the successful North East Asia Crane Site Network (NEACSN) established under the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy.
3. CMS administers the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the Siberian Crane (MoU). The MoU involves the Siberian Crane's 11 Range States and provides the basis for developing and implementing flyway level conservation plans for the Western, Central and Eastern populations of Siberian Cranes.
4. The Fifth Meeting of Signatory States to the CMS Siberian Crane Memorandum of Understanding (Moscow, April 2004) agreed on the need to establish a network of sites critical for Siberian Cranes of the Western and Central populations to promote protection of key wetlands and coordination among the Range State in the Central Asian Flyway. It also agreed with a proposal to introduce the site network concept into the next version of the respective MoU conservation plans.



5. The Meeting set up an inter-sessional Working Group. The Working Group was requested to:

- a. Develop the criteria to be used for the designation of sites;
- b. Make recommendations on procedures for site nomination and approval;
- c. Propose the scope of activities to be conducted under the network (i.e., training, capacity-building, exchange programmes, education and public awareness, site monitoring, information exchange); and
- d. Identify other projects and processes with which the network should interact and exchange information to take advantage of synergies and avoid duplicating work.

6. The Working Group<sup>1</sup> was convened and coordinated by the CMS Secretariat and Elena Ilyashenko (Siberian Crane Flyway Coordinator). It worked by correspondence and the results of its work are presented in this note.

7. It was recognized early on that the establishment of a Siberian Crane site network under the framework of the MoU would have additional benefits for other cranes and waterbirds. In addition to being of critical importance for Siberian Cranes, such a network would be the first step towards developing a more comprehensive site network for migratory waterbirds under a wider framework proposed within the CAF initiative. The main aim would be to start the Siberian Crane site network development process quickly, while the more extensive CAF framework consultations continued. The proposed Siberian Crane site network would eventually be integrated within the wider site network under CAF. Consequently its characteristics would need to be compatible with this aim.

8. The initiative to establish a Siberian Crane site network under the CMS MoU would focus attention on:

- Sites of importance for the conservation or recovery of Siberian Cranes;
- Sites which are also important for other migratory cranes and waterbirds; and
- Involving local people in conservation efforts at the sites.

9. The preliminary conclusions of the MoU's inter-sessional Working Group were presented to the GEF SCWP's Third Project Steering Committee Meeting (SCM3) in December 2004 in Iran. The process, title, objectives, site selection criteria, scope of activities to be conducted under the network, and opportunities for interaction and exchange were discussed throughout the course of the SCM3.

10. The SCM3 participants recommended that the site network be called the Western/Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Crane (and other waterbirds) (WCASN-SC).

11. They further recommended that the CMS Secretariat explore opportunities arising in 2005 for representatives from the MoU Signatory States to comment on and endorse the site network proposal as addenda to the Western/Central Conservation Plans. It was noted that the Government of India was considering hosting a future meeting on the CAF.

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<sup>1</sup> The Working Group consisted of the following members: Eldar Rustamov (Turkmenistan), Taej Mundkur (Wetlands International), K.S. Gopisundar (India), Sadegh Sadeghi-Zadegan (Iran), Valentin Ilyashenko (Russia), Tatyana Bragina (Kazakhstan). In addition, Crawford Prentice and Claire Mirande (ICF) provided input and comments on the proposals.

12. The results of the SCM3 discussions were summarized and referred back to the CMS Secretariat for further action. The proposals of the Working Group are attached as Annex I to this note.

13. Four main issues were part of the Working Group's mandate and will be presented to the MoU Signatory States for discussion and agreement. First, a procedure needs to be identified for reviewing and approving site nominations. Second, the need for and membership of a site nomination review committee should be discussed. Third, agreement needs to be reached on who will oversee the WCASN-SC. Fourth, it may be useful to develop a preliminary list of 2 priority sites for each country (Russia could propose 3-4 since this country has both breeding and staging areas).

**Action requested:**

The meeting is invited to:

1. Agree on proposed criteria for site selection;
2. Agree on site nomination criteria;
3. Identify a procedure to review and approve the nominations;
4. Consider and agree on membership for the site nomination review committee;
5. Agree on who will oversee the WCASN-SC;
6. Develop a preliminary list of 2 priority sites for each country (Russia may propose 3-4 since this country has both breeding and staging areas);
7. Discuss proposed activities to be undertaken under the site network to be used in developing a draft action plan to be reviewed and approved by the Sixth Meeting of Signatory States to the Siberian Crane MoU; and
8. Discuss plans for developing fund raising goals, strategies and responsibilities to implement the Action Plan.

## ANNEX I

### PROPOSALS OF THE WORKING GROUP

#### 1. SITE DESIGNATION CRITERIA

The First Level Criterion is designed to ensure that governments will select sites based on their current and past importance for Siberian Cranes. The Second (Other Cranes) and Third (Other Waterbirds) Level Criteria are important to promote integration of the Western/Central Asian Siberian Crane Site Network (WCASN-SC) into the proposed larger waterbird site network for the Central Asia Flyway.

##### *A. FIRST LEVEL CRITERION: Site's Importance to Siberian Cranes*

The First Level Criterion is based on the site's importance to the Siberian Crane. This is the key species targeted under the CMS Siberian Crane Memorandum of Understanding.

In addition, there are four supporting temporal categories under the First Level Criterion. Under the temporal categories a site's protection status can vary during the year, based on when in the year the area is used by Siberian Cranes (i.e., seasonal protection regimes). This is especially important for Central Asian wetlands that have unstable and variable water conditions.

**Criterion 1 for Siberian Crane:** The site currently holds or historically held Siberian Cranes and meets the Ramsar 1% Criteria for Siberian Crane.

***Temporal Categories for Siberian Crane:*** A site must meet one of the following criteria (listed in order of importance).

- **Category 1.1:** Siberian Crane(s) were recorded at the site at least five times during the last 10 years. This should not include records within the same season or repeated sightings of the same individual birds.
- **Category 1.2:** The site has held one or more Siberian Cranes during the last 50 years, but there are less than five records during the 10 last years.
- **Category 1.3:** The site is historical habitat of the Siberian Crane, but there are less than five records during the last 50 years.
- **Category 1.4:** There are no records of Siberian Crane at a site, but it is considered to contain appropriate habitat for the species (wide expanses of shallow water containing appropriate food resources, and with low levels of disturbance) and it is suitable for release and reintroduction projects (e.g., safety of the site is secured, a management regime is in place, etc.).

Sites that are covered by **Temporal Categories 1.1 and 1.2** should be included in the WCASN-SC **on a priority basis** to ensure that the sites currently used by the species are being conserved.

For sites covered by **Temporal Categories 1.3 and 1.4** preference should be given to sites that also qualify under the **Second and Third Levels of Criteria for other crane and waterbird species** listed below.

**B. SECOND LEVEL CRITERION: Site's importance to other crane species**

**Criterion 2 for other crane species:** The site is known to support a total of 25 or more migratory cranes (which can be of more than one species) at any stage of their life cycle (e.g., breeding, migration stop-over (staging), non-breeding birds (wintering), etc.).<sup>2</sup>

**C. THIRD LEVEL CRITERION: Site's importance to other waterbird species**

The Third Level Criterion applies to the site's importance to other waterbird species. It is composed of three sub-criteria.

**Criterion 3 for other waterbird species:**

- **Sub-criterion 3.1:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 5,000 or more migratory waterbirds during migration periods.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sub-criterion 3.2:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of migratory waterbird.
- **Sub-criterion 3.3:** A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports migratory waterbird species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

These criteria follow and are adapted from selected criteria for nomination of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Guidance for applying these criteria can be found in the Convention's document: Ramsar Convention Handbook #7 Designating Ramsar Sites.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. SITE NOMINATION REQUIREMENTS

All sites that meet the above listed criteria for Siberian Crane may be considered for nomination without regard to whether:

- a. They are currently listed as national, provincial or local nature protection areas or international important areas (under Ramsar Convention, World Heritage Convention, etc.).
- b. Constant monitoring of birds is being undertaken at the site.

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<sup>2</sup> Crane species in this region include Common, Demoiselle and Sarus Cranes that share habitats with the Siberian Crane. A decision was made not to include the Black-necked Crane because this species is limited to the high altitude wetlands of the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau and uses different habitats than the Siberian Crane.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsar criteria recommend the wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more migratory waterbirds. However, in Western/Central Asia, there are few sites that support more than 20,000 waterbirds. Therefore application of a "turnover factor of 4" is recommended for this region. This effectively means that a site would need to support a total of 5,000 migratory waterbirds or 0.25% of a migratory waterbird population during a single migration period.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsar Convention Secretariat 2004. Ramsar handbooks for the wise use of wetlands. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Ramsar Convention Secretariat, Gland, Switzerland. Can be downloaded free from [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org).

To nominate a site, the following information about the site is needed:

1. Name of the site.
2. Geographic co-ordinates and a description of its geographic location.
3. Jurisdiction (administrative agency responsible for site).
4. Size of area (in hectares) and description of its boundaries.
5. Physiographic description with emphasis on wetland description.
6. Ecological description (fauna and flora).
7. Description of the site designation criteria according to Criteria described above for nomination for Siberian Crane (first level), other cranes (second level) or other waterbirds (third level).
8. Nature protection status of site (the lack of any current protection status/regime does not disqualify a site for consideration for inclusion in the Network).
9. Site usage (hunting, fishing, agriculture, water usage and management and so on) and its potential impact on sites.
10. Threats to the site and its biodiversity.
11. The presence of regular monitoring of the Siberian Crane, other cranes and other waterbird species. (Although the presence of constant monitoring is not a requirement for nominating a site for inclusion in the Network).
12. Contact details for the agencies/organisations responsible for the site (ownership and management).
13. Key stakeholders.
14. Evidence of support and approval of the agency/organizations to be involved in the network.

These nomination requirements were developed according to the Ramsar Wetland Information Sheet, with the addition of a few specific requirements concerning the Siberian Crane.

### **3. PROCEDURES FOR SITE NOMINATION, REVIEW AND APPROVAL**

The Working Group identified the following proposed procedures for site nomination, review and approval:

- a. Countries prepare and submit nomination applications.
- b. Establish a Site Nomination Review Committee (SNRC) to review applications (SNRC endorsed by the CMS MoU Signatories).
- c. SNRC will review and approve nomination applications; it will contact countries if more information is needed.
- d. Certificates presented to countries for approved sites at CMS MoU6 meeting (summer 2006).

### **4. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED UNDER THE WCASN-SC**

The Fifth Meeting of Signatory States to the CMS Siberian Crane Memorandum of Understanding recommended that the site network could develop a number of activities. A draft action plan could be prepared by email. It would be presented for review and adoption at the Sixth Meeting of the Signatory States proposed for the summer of 2006. The action plan could address:

- a. Training workshops (education and ecotourism; scientific survey; management);
- b. Capacity-building;
- c. Staff exchange programmes;
- d. Education and public awareness including Crane Celebration;
- e. Site monitoring including maintenance of Siberian Crane database;
- f. Information exchange; and
- g. Plans for developing fund raising goals, strategies and responsibilities.

## **5. OTHER RELATED PROJECTS AND PROCESSES**

The Working Group identified the following other related projects and processes:

- a. UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetland Project (SCWP);
- b. Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (APMWCS);
- c. North-East Asian Crane Site Network (NEACSN);
- d. Central Asian Flyway Project (CAF);
- e. UNEP/GEF Africa-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Project;
- f. UNEP/GEF Econet Project;
- g. Caspian Environment Programme (CEP); and
- h. Agreement of the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF).