

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

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2007 National Parks of Taiwan and Green Network Conference

Eleven years after their last meeting, central and local government officials, local and foreign experts, and NGO representatives came together once again, on December 19 and 20, 2007, at the 2007 National Parks of Taiwan and Green Network Conference to discuss targets and strategies for the next 10 years of national park and green area planning and development. Organized by the Construction and Planning Agency of the Ministry of the Interior, the meeting focused on the four main themes of national park systems, wetland systems, sustainable coastal systems, and urban and rural parks and green space systems.

Dr Lee Yuan-tse, former president of Academia Sinica, addressed the conference, while other leading international scholars and key academics from various disciplines gave papers and joined the discussion. The conference successfully cemented opinion on national land

conservation policy and its future development, while setting out Taiwan's promise to its citizens to promote government policy on park and green space planning, national land protection and sustainable development.

Over 600 people attended the conference, including the world-famous Dutch land planning expert, Ms Gerda Roeleveld of VROM International (the Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment), who explained the Dutch planning experience in developing its National Ecological Network.

Also present were Dr Hiroyuki Matsuda of Japan's Yokohama National University, who described Japan's efforts in establishing a Marine Management Plan for the Shiretoko World Heritage Site. Landscape architect Mr Kai Tai Lin, project leader at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, talked about America's experience in planning and creating Central Park and other large green space projects in the United States. Other well-known experts at the conference included University of

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Hong Kong assistant professor, Dr Billy CH Hau, University of Hong Kong Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management researcher Dr Winnie WY Law, and Mr Rudy D'Alessandro, international cooperation specialist at the US National Park Service Office of International Affairs.

A grand 'Important Wetland Certification' ceremony was held at the close of the conference. Awards were presented to representatives from all the counties and

municipalities where Taiwan's 75 national important wetlands (including two international-level wetlands, 41 national-level wetlands, and 32 local-level wetlands) are located. This action manifests Taiwan's resolution to take action to protect its wetlands and was the first activity in Taiwan's 2008 National Wetlands Year and a warm-up for the first Asia Wetland Convention 2008.

Furthermore, to realize the national goal of creating a 'green Taiwan, sustainable island', the conference concluded with the reading of the 2007 Taiwan National Parks and Green Network Declaration, which addressed the following targets: creating a green island with four networks of natural systems, making ecological sustainability an ultimate core value, listening to local voices and joining forces with NGOs, and emphasizing central and local collaboration. Delegates were invited to sign a pledge by which they promised to fully advance the national parks and green spaces system plan through the establishment of a national parks system, a wetlands system, a sustainable coastal system and an urban and rural parks and green space system.



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**Marine National Park Headquarters
Formally Established**

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Following the establishment of Taiwan's first Marine National Park on and around the offshore island of Dongsha (Pratas Islands) in January 2007, Taiwan's government has taken a further step in promoting marine protected areas with the establishment, on October 4, 2008, of the Marine National Park Headquarters in the southern port city of Kaohsiung.

Dongsha Atoll National Park was founded by the Ministry of the Interior on January 17, 2007. Encompassing the island of Dongsha and an area of 12 nautical miles around it, the Park's total area is 3,536 square kilometers, or approximately one tenth of Taiwan's total area. It was the first marine national park established in Taiwan and is its largest national park.

Responsible for planning and managing all of Taiwan's marine national parks, the Marine National Park Headquarters was formally established under the Construction and Planning Agency of the Ministry of the Interior within Kaohsiung's Metropolitan Park. Its first director, Mr Wu Chuan-an said that Dongsha Atoll National Park's primary goals will be nature conservation and research. It will not encourage tourism on the island. Furthermore, the Marine National Park Headquarters will manage the Dongsha Atoll National Park, while also continuing to assess the feasibility of establishing other island- or marine-type national parks at Green Island, the Penghu archipelago,

and the Three Northern Islands (Mianhuayu, Huapingyu, and Pengjiayu), thus improving the effectiveness of Taiwan's management of its marine resources. For further information about the Dongsha Atoll National Park, please see Volume 15, No. 1.



Taiwan Holds International Seabird Conservation Conference

The 2007 International Seabird Conservation Conference and Taiwan Environmental Protection Symposium took place from October 4 to 7, 2007 at Leader Landmark Hotel in the historic port of Lukang in central Taiwan. Organized jointly by National Changhwa University of Education, the Changhwa County Government, the International Taiwan Birding Association and the Wild Bird Society of Changhwa, discussion focused on wild bird research, biological diversity, ecology, behavior, environmental education, the impact of avian flu and its spread between wild birds and domesticated fowl, and seabird migration research, among other topics.

In his opening speech, Changhwa deputy county magistrate Jui-pin Chang said that, apart from increasing people's knowledge about the various species of seabird, the aim of the conference was to raise awareness of the

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importance of bird protection. He hoped that the conference would help balance human economic needs with seabird survival, thus ensuring that people can coexist harmoniously with seabirds and allowing future generations to experience the beauty of seabirds.

During the conference, Mr Wei-hsien Lu, a researcher at the Energy and Environment Research Laboratories of the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) and others presented research on the impact of wind turbines on bird species. They found that apart from the risk of collision with the propellers and other mechanisms, and environmental interference, the main issue in assessing the impact of wind turbines on seabirds depended on their location and density. Poor choice of location and positioning of wind turbines could significantly increase their negative impact on wild birds. The researchers recommended that the government should take steps as early as possible to assess the potential environmental impact of wind generators on seabirds.



Fifth Symposium on Vegetation Diversity in Taiwan

The Fifth Symposium on Vegetation Diversity in Taiwan, held jointly by the Forestry Bureau of the Council of Agriculture and the

Biodiversity Association of Taiwan (BAT) in Taipei on October 25 and 26, 2007, provided a valuable opportunity to publicize the initial findings of a national vegetation diversity survey and mapping project. The symposium also allowed local vegetation scientists to share their experiences and exchange opinions with leading international botanists and plant experts.

Members of the national vegetation diversity survey and mapping project research team presented analysis of survey data collected over the years at the symposium, which was also attended by 11 vegetation scientists from the Czech Republic, South Africa, the Russian Federation and Japan. These international researchers gave a total of nine papers on vegetation and related topics, making the symposium a platform for international botanical exchange.

The national vegetation diversity survey and mapping project is an important part of the Executive Yuan's Biodiversity Action Plan. Since the project's inception in 2003, researchers have been involved in surveying the diversity of native vegetation and mapping plant populations across the island. By 2007, researchers had completed surveys of 2,900 land-based sampling units in high mountain regions and had mapped out 2,500 natural vegetation patterns at a scale of 5,000:1 according to in situ research data.

The project aims to map the whole of

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Taiwan's native vegetation by the end of 2008. This complete map will serve as the basis for forest management and decision-making on national land planning, landscape design, ecosystem protection and planning, and wildlife habitat allocation and population change monitoring, and other management targets.

At the symposium at the Forestry Bureau's headquarters in Taipei, project researchers gave papers on the basic framework of Taiwan's vegetation research, including 'A Discussion of a Taiwan Vegetation Classification Framework' and 'The Integration and Application of Taiwan Vegetation Survey Data'. They also shared the results of vegetation analysis and mapping on the courses of the Danshuei River, Laonong Creek, Ailiao Creek, Nan'ao Creek, Jhuoshuei River, Lakula Creek, Ci-en Creek and the Taidong Coastal Mountain Range.

Meanwhile, the 11 international scholars also provided some excellent material for discussion. Professor Ladislav Mucina, the current vice-president of the International Association for Vegetation Sciences and an influential vegetation scientist and professor of botany at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, introduced European vegetation classification systems in his talk entitled 'Large-scale vegetation surveys and mapping: European and South African lessons'. Professor

Yukito Nakamura of the Tokyo University of Agriculture in Japan talked about the Japanese vegetation classification system, and Dr Milan Chytrý, associate professor of biology at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic, shared the history and application of the Czech vegetation database.

Taiwan's climate, geographic location, and its extraordinary range of elevations have created a large number of unique and indigenous plant communities. This extremely varied vegetation system is the source of great pride in Taiwan's high level of biodiversity. As the national vegetation diversity survey and mapping project enters its fifth and final year, Forestry Bureau officials hope that the Fifth Symposium on Vegetation Diversity in Taiwan, and other seminars like it, will serve as platforms for the continued sharing of vegetation science research among Taiwan's botanists and other experts, and international exchange and discussion.

Furthermore, once the basic work of exploring Taiwan's botanical biodiversity has been completed through the vegetation diversity survey and mapping project, Forestry Bureau officials say they hope this knowledge can be used to form an important cornerstone for decision-making in the future management of forests and nature reserves.



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Green Sea Project to Create 20,000 Hectares of Forest

Taiwan's Executive Yuan recently announced a project to grow 20,000 hectares of forest. According to government officials, the 'Green Sea Project' is part of a 2007 APEC resolution to increase forest cover in the region. The Council of Agriculture (COA) aims to convert 20,000 hectares of lowland farmland to forest in order to achieve the three key targets of environmental conservation, economic benefit, and pollution reduction.

The project will fulfill Taiwan's obligations under the APEC Action Agenda on Forests, which was included in the Sydney APEC Leaders' Declaration on Climate Change, Energy Security and Clean Development on September 9, 2007. The Action Agenda aims to achieve an APEC-wide aspirational goal of increasing the region's cover of all forest types by at least 20 million hectares by 2020—a goal which, if achieved, would store approximately 1.4 billion tonnes of carbon, equivalent to around 11 per cent of annual global emissions (in 2004).

In the initial stage, APEC member economies were requested to create 20,000 hectares of forest over the next five years to combat climate change. Taiwan has around 220,000 hectares of retired arable land where the COA aims to grow various crops and to plant

high-yield, economically-valuable tree species.

While helping reach government targets for environmental conservation, economic benefit, and pollution reduction, the Green Sea Project will also benefit the ecosystem by conserving soil and helping combat Taiwan's frequent mudslides and landslides.



Indigenous Land and Resources Joint Management Act

On December 18, 2007, the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Council of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, and the Veterans Affairs Commission of the Executive Yuan jointly promulgated the Indigenous Peoples Resources Joint Management Act. The new law will be used by central government to obtain the consent of indigenous people and to formulate a common management mechanism for the creation of national parks, and nature and recreation areas within indigenous land, thus minimizing conflict and ensuring the problem-free implementation of government policy.

According to the act, the common management team is to be made up of local indigenous peoples representatives, experts, scholars, and spokespersons from government resource management agencies. Indigenous

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representatives must be elected by local tribe members and their number should comprise over half the total number of representatives on the joint management committee.

The joint management committee's main function is to provide indigenous people with the means to become directly involved in medium- and long-term resource management plans and annual plans. It also gives them opportunities to establish and reform resource management mechanisms, and to provide suggestions to central resource management agencies on important policy-making decisions.

At a press conference to announce the new law held at the Council of Indigenous Peoples, Executive Yuan, in Taipei, the Indigenous Peoples Minister Icyang Parod praised the government for its commitment to promoting the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law (IPBL).

Parod said that the drafting, finalization over countless meetings, and the subsequent promulgation of the Indigenous Peoples Resources Joint Management Act was the direct embodiment of the IPBL, which stated that "the relevant authority shall amend, make or repeal relevant regulations in accordance with the principles of this law within three years from its effectiveness" on February 5, 2005.

Parod went on to say that Article 20 of the IPBL clearly states that "the government recognizes indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources" and that this means that

the government is dedicated to policies that protect indigenous peoples' basic rights and bring about ethnic equality. The law is an important starting point for environmental protection in Taiwan's indigenous lands and also for respecting the traditional lifestyles of Taiwan's indigenous tribes. Through Article 22 of the IPBL, the Indigenous Peoples Resources Joint Management Act was able to come into being, and this act ensures that local indigenous peoples are consulted over land reforms and allowed to jointly manage natural resources, thus providing concrete recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources.



New Target to Reduce 2025 CO₂ Emissions to 2000 Levels

Taiwan recently announced a major policy shift in its latest target for greenhouse gas emissions. On December 19, 2007, top science and technology advisor to the Taiwan government, Dr. Yuan-tse Lee confirmed Vice Premier Chiou I-jen's endorsement of a move to slash Taiwan's targeted CO₂ emissions 2025 to the same level as in 2000. The National Science Council will meet to incorporate this important development in Taiwan's latest State Energy Plan. In addition, inter-ministerial meetings will be held within the next two to three months to promote specific policies aimed at achieving this goal.

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The news was greeted with applause at the closing press conference of the 27th meeting of the Science and Technology Advisory Group (STAG) of the Executive Yuan. Since this record is an official document of the Executive Yuan, it is legally binding for all ministries; therefore, the move signals substantial changes to relevant industrial policy in Taiwan in order to achieve the new CO₂ goal.

Lee said that the targeted reduction for 2025 will mean a 40 percent reduction based on today's level. However, Taiwan Environmental Protection Union chairman, professor Gloria Kuang-Jung Hsu of the Atmospheric Sciences Department at National Taiwan University said that, according to the International Energy Agency's latest statistics, Taiwan's CO₂ emissions for 2005 were 261 million tons. If this were reduced by 40 percent, this would be 157 million tons, whereas Taiwan's 2000 CO₂ emissions were 221 million tons; therefore, it was incorrect to say that the latest target would mean a 40 percent reduction. She also said that the target of returning to 2000 emissions levels by 2025 was still a long way behind the international goals currently being discussed; however, she praised the government for putting forward the target.

She said that, to achieve the new goal there could be no room for large-scale iron and steel factories and petrochemical plants that currently

produced high levels of CO₂. However, with the most advanced environmental protection technologies and renewable energy measures, emissions could hardly remain unchanged. She reminded the government that CO₂ reduction is a long-term plan requiring consistent and timely action over several decades. Furthermore, changes of leadership, administration and personnel would inevitably affect the implementation of policies and plans; therefore, Hsu recommended that progress be reviewed at least every two years.



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