



Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

MEDIA RELEASE

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Lower Mekong River Basin Celebrates World Water Day

Celebrating progress towards improved water and wetlands management should be the focus for World Water Day, 22 March 2006, in the Lower Mekong River Basin

Although the situation for water and wetlands management in the Lower Mekong River Basin still faces many challenges, World Water Day 2006 is a good opportunity to highlight the achievements and progress that has taken place.

The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP), a joint programme of the governments of – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), is working to strengthen the capacity of people and institutions to improve biodiversity conservation and ensure linkages with sustainable use and the livelihoods of people using wetlands.

"Wetlands management in the Lower Mekong River Basin is a critical component of ensuring availability of resources to all and contributing to the improved management of trans-boundary issues. MWBP has been working hard to strengthen capacity within the region to move closer to wise use of wetlands, and World Water Day is an appropriate time to reflect on our impact and contribution," said Mr Peter-John Meynell, UNDP Team Leader of MWBP.

In Cambodia the programme recently held two large celebrations for World Wetlands Days (2 February 2006). Combined, the events attracted around 2,000 people who took part in creative and educational activities such as art competitions, poem writing, plays, watching comic performance and observing informative displays. Participants included honorable delegates, government officers, NGOs, school children, and community members. Such an event increased the awareness of large audiences who will be able to make informed decisions towards achieving wise use of wetlands.

MWBP in Thailand has supported and contributed to the launch of two informative publications *Fish Species in the Wetlands of the Lower Songkhram River Basin - Local Knowledge of the Fishers in the Lower Songkhram River Basin* and *Thai Baan Research on the Ecology and History of the Seasonally-Flooded Forest in the Lower Songkhram River Basin*. Both publications draw upon local traditional knowledge to document comprehensive and relevant publications, which are available in Thai script. The production and subsequent success of the publications highlights the importance and need for documenting and distributing local knowledge in order to ensure appropriate methods of living with and managing wetlands are implemented.

In Lao PDR, MWBP staff have been actively working to ensure that the uses of water and wetlands resources are sustainable. Interventions at the community level include an Integrated Participatory Planning (IPP) process to facilitate the community in making their own work and implementation plans for the conservation and management of water and wetlands resources. At the district and provincial levels, MWBP Lao has conducted various capacity building activities. One highlight has been the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) trainings conducted for district and provincial counterparts to enhance their capacity to monitor and evaluate the impacts of water and wetlands. The trainings were followed-up by writing of case studies in order to provide clear information for decision-making.

A JOINT UNDP - IUCN - MRC GEF-FUNDED PROGRAMME



CAMBODIA



LAO PDR



THAILAND



VIETNAM



IUCN
The World Conservation Union





Viet Nam's first Wetlands Status Report titled "Overview of Wetlands Status in Viet Nam Following 15 Years of Ramsar Convention Implementation" was released earlier this year. The report, a collaborative effort of the Vietnam Environment Protection Agency (VEPA), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Viet Nam, and the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP), with financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), "serves as a comprehensive, up-to-date source of information on wetlands for policy-makers and researchers alike, thus facilitating future policies, research, and strategies. Finally, it identifies those national and international laws and policies that relate to wetlands, and highlights those aspects that are relevant or critical to future wetlands management in Viet Nam", said Dr Tran Hong Ha, Director of VEPA. The release of the report is a milestone for Viet Nam in addressing and evaluating wetlands management and functions.

MWBP works across the Lower Mekong River Basin, focusing on areas such as biodiversity, livelihoods, economics, capacity building and awareness raising, in order to strengthen capacity at different levels (regional, national and provincial) for wetland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. The programme coordinates many activities which contribute to the wise use of wetlands. Further information about MWBP and its activities can be found at www.mekongwetlands.org

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*The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, the Royal Netherlands Government, MRCS, the Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) and other donors, the programme addresses the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands. MWBP aims to strengthen the capacity of organisations and people to develop sustainable livelihoods and manage wetland biodiversity resources wisely. It is a five-year (2004-2009) intervention at three levels – regional, national and local – with demonstration wetland areas in each of the four countries: in the Songkhram river basin, Thailand; in Attapeu province in southern Lao PDR; in Stung Treng, Cambodia; and in the Plain of Reeds in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam.

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