

KK Wetlands should get Ramsar status

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KOTA KINABALU: The Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre (KKWC) in Likas looks set to attain Ramsar Site status – the equivalent of world heritage status for wetland areas – if the application for it is approved by the international governing body.

Senior Geologist of the Natural Resources Office here, Gerald J. Jetony, said under normal circumstances for a wetland to attain the status it has to comply with either one of eight Ramsar requirements.

To date, he said the Kota Kinabalu Wetlands fulfils three of the standard requirements. At the moment, the application is still at the Sabah Biodiversity Council stage.

“From thereon, after we complete the 40 questionnaires and other initial requirements, the compilation would be submitted to the State Government and subsequently to the Federal Natural Resources and Environment Ministry,” he said.

The Federal Ministry would then submit the application to the Ramsar Convention during Ramsar COP11 in Romania next year, he said.

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If all goes well, he said KKWC should be able to attain the Ramsar Site status.

Ramsar Site status is accorded to a wetlands site considered important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the ecological and hydrological functions it performs.

It is accorded by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

With the status, it would act as a catalyst for wetlands and its biological diversity conservation. It would also enhance the protection of the site as well as the maintenance of its ecological processes and provision of valued services including enhanced education and research.

At the same time, it would also increase capacity at all levels and increase access to expertise.

For Malaysia, it will raise the State's profile and enhance opportunities for cooperation in the country and region including increased attention and potential economic benefits.

There are only 36 Ramsar sites throughout the world with an area smaller than 24 hectares. In

Sabah, Lower Kinabatangan-Segama Wetland with an area of 78,803ha, was the first to be accorded the Ramsar status.

Elsewhere in Malaysia, Kuching Wetlands National Park (Sarawak), Pulau Kukup (Johor), Sungai Pulai (Johor), Tanjung Piai (Johor) and Tasek Bera (Pahang) have also attained Ramsar Site status.

On other developments, more than 300 participants comprising mostly the international community would be converging here for the Asian Wetland Symposium (AWS) at Magellan Sutera Resort on July 18-20.

State Secretary Datuk Sukarti Wakiman said host Sabah would be co-operating with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Ramsar Centre Japan to organise the event.

The three-day symposium, he said, is a series of international symposia aimed at providing a platform for active discussion on issues related to wetland conservation and the wise use of wetland resources.

"It is the premier forum for management, research, education and public awareness on wetlands," he said. The symposium is themed "Integrated Biodiversity Conservation: Linking Forests and Wetlands".

He said its primary objective is to enhance synergy in the delivery of the targets and goals of the Ramsar Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF).

The event is not only for researchers and practitioners in the area of conservation but also for people in the business sector especially those involved in tourism and oil palm industry.

"The outcome of the symposium will then be compiled into the Sabah Declaration, which then will be delivered to the Ramsar COP11, scheduled to be held in 2012 in Romania," he said.

Supporting the event are Sabah Tourism Board (STB), Ministry of Environment Japan, Keidanren Committee on Nature Conservation Japan, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), Scubazoo, Genting Plantations Berhad, Hap Seng Plantations Holding Bhd and Benta Wawasan Sdn Bhd.

Sukarti said Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman is expected to officiate at the event. Also attending the symposium are Secretary General of Ramsar Convention, Ananda Tiega, Director of Ecological and Earth Sciences UNESCO, Natarajan Ishwaran and Mahendra Joshi of United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF).

The event is open to the public.