**Final Resolutions Adopted at the 12th INTECOL International Wetlands Conference and 20th Meeting of SWS Europe**

**Tartu, Estonia, June 29 - July 4, 2025**

More than XXX conference participants from 37 countries, representing a diverse range of expertise in wetland science, Indigenous knowledge, technology, policy, and management, met and collaborated at the conference held from June 29 to July 4, 2025. Agreement was reached on the following resolutions:

* **Resolution to Promote the Rights of Global Wetlands around the World.**
* **Resolution to Promote the Discipline of Wetland Science and the Importance of Science and Facts**

**The conference participants recommend the following 12th Intecol Wetlands Conference and 20th Meeting of SWS Europe Resolutions to the representatives of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Contracting Parties during the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands COP15 meeting, which will take place from 23 to 31 July 2025 in Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe).**

**The Tartu Declaration on Wetlands**

All facts and numbers in this Declaration are based on The Global Peatlands Assessment [1] and may have changed, sometimes becoming more alarming, since its publication.

1. **Resolution to Promote the Rights of Global Wetlands around the World.**

***Whereas***

1. Peatlands occupy approximately 3% of the world’s land surface and store approximately one-third of Earth’s soil carbon, which is twice as much as exists in global forest biomass, making peatlands the most carbon-dense terrestrial ecosystem;
2. Wetlands provide numerous benefits/ecosystem services, including enhancing community and ecological resilience through reduction of flooding, storm damage, and drought risks, improving water quality, and regulating water flows. Additionally, they provide critical habitat for rare flora and fauna and provide food, fiber and fuel for people and other living beings;
3. 500,000 hectares of actively carbon-storing peatlands are destroyed annually due to human activities — more than was identified in previous estimates. Boreal peatlands are being lost 10 times faster than they naturally expand and considerable areas of global peatlands are so degraded that they no longer form peat. Almost 50% of the European peatland area is degraded, making Europe the second-largest current emitter of greenhouse gases from drained peatlands. Still, about 88% of the world’s peatlands remain in a mostly natural, undegraded state;
4. Wetlands are degraded by drainage, agriculture, forestry, mining, pollution, infrastructure, and fires. Drainage of peatlands increases fire and erosion risks, worsening greenhouse gas emissions. Degraded peatlands (excluding fires) emit ~2,000 Mt CO₂e/year;
5. Intact wetlands are mainly in remote subarctic and boreal zones, while temperate and tropical peatlands are more likely to be degraded due to accessibility. Significant data gaps remain, especially in Africa, Amazonia, South-Eastern Asia and far northern regions;
6. *Climate change is having a profound effect on peatlands at all latitudes, changing hydrology and carbon cycling. We are seeing irreversible changes in permafrost-affected peatlands, where thawing is taking place at alarming rates, we are also detecting recent drying trends in temperate peatlands;*
7. **Despite** the actions of the 173 Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and others to stem the loss and degradation of peatlands and other wetlands over the past 50 years, such loss and degradation continue apace, accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss, and leading to increased vulnerability of communities and ecosystems to floods, storms, droughts, heatwaves, and degradation and loss of clean and plentiful water and food and materials supplies;
8. Many voices, particularly Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and more recently, the global community of scientists and policy makers, have recognized the extreme urgency to act now to stop the degradation and loss of wetlands and particulary peatlands, due to the critical role that they play in the Earth’s operating system, including maintaining a stable climate, supporting biodiversity, and providing many other benefits;
9. **Further,** the global community of scientists and others have recognized that current approaches to wetland conservation and restoration have failed to stop losses of wetlands and the relationship between the communities and wetlands is out of alignment, and:
   1. there is a critical and urgent need for transformative change;
   2. transformative change can be achieved by re-aligning the relationship between the communities and wetlands to be based on the recognition of the rights of wetlands.
10. Conference participants *also* recognize the severe impacts of ongoing armed conflicts around the world on people, wildlife, wetlands, and other ecosystems. These conflicts disrupt ecological processes and interfere with species migration routes

***Therefore, be it resolved*** by the participants of the 12th INTECOL International Wetlands Conference and 20th Meeting of SWS Europe, and as supported by the 470 participants of the 11th INTECOL International Wetlands Conference, that:

1. An ethical and legal paradigm shift in the human-wetlands relationship is needed to respond effectively to the global climate, biodiversity, wetlands and land use change emergencies, which are all aspects of the underlying misalignment of the relationship between people and Nature;
2. This paradigm shift can be facilitated by support for the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands*, which recognizes the inherent rights and living beingness of all wetlands as defined by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands;
3. The delegates to the 11th and 12th INTECOL International Wetlands Conferences endorse and support the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands and are committed to working towards widespread adoption of the Declaration;
4. The global scientific and wetlands communities, as individuals and organizations, and others, are urged to support and promote the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands in order to advance the ethical and legal paradigm shift in the human-wetlands relationship that is necessary to accelerate wetland and biodiversity conservation and restoration, thereby contributing to the re-establishment of a stable climate and equitable and sustainable adaptation to long-term effects of climate change;
5. To this end, the Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands are invited to recognize that wetlands have rights and to work towards effective integration of this principle into future policy and practice under the Convention.

***Further*,** the participants of the 12th INTECOL International Wetlands Conference and 20th Meeting of SWS Europe:

1. Strongly recommend that the transformation include the responsibility of enterprises, which play a key role in land use and environmental impact. The participants strongly encourage businesses to adopt nature-positive practices, integrating environmental ethics into their operations. Their leadership and innovation are vital to restoring balance between people and Nature;
2. *Urge* world leaders to prioritize diplomatic solutions over military actions *to* reduce harm to both people and *N*ature*.*
3. *Urge world wetland managers and decision makers to take urgent action to protect permafrost-affected peatlands, including their ecological integrity and functioning*

Further information about the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands* is freely accessible at <https://www.rightsofwetlands.org/> and can be reproduced and shared freely by anyone, with appropriate acknowledgement of the source [2].

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| ***Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands***  *Acknowledging that wetlands are essential to the healthy functioning of Earth processes and provision of essential ecosystem services, including climate regulation at all scales, water supply and water purification, flood storage, drought mitigation and storm damage prevention;*    *Acknowledging that wetlands have significance for the spiritual or sacred inspirations and belief systems of many people worldwide, but particularly for Indigenous Peoples and local communities living in close relationship to wetlands, and that wetlands provide opportunities to learn from and about Nature, which supports scientific understanding and innovation, cultural expression and artistic creativity;*  *Further acknowledging that humans and the natural world, with all of its biodiversity depend upon the healthy functioning of wetlands and the benefits that they provide, and that wetlands play a significant role in global climate regulation;*  *Alarmed that existing wetland conservation and management approaches have failed to stem the loss and degradation of wetlands of all types around the globe;*  *Further alarmed that global climate destabilization and biodiversity losses are accelerating and that efforts to reverse these trends are failing;*    *Acknowledging that peoples around the world of many cultures and faiths have recognized for millennia that Nature, or elements of Nature, are sentient living beings with inherent value and rights independent of their value to humans, and that Indigenous peoples, local communities and non- governmental organizations have been contributing to a global movement to recognize the rights of Nature;*    *Aware that continued degradation and loss of wetlands threatens the very fabric of the planetary Web of Life upon which depend the livelihoods, wellbeing, community life and spirituality of many people, particularly Indigenous peoples and local communities who live in close relationship with wetlands;*  *Guided by recent legal recognition of the inherent rights of Nature, including recognition of the entire Colombian Amazon as an “entity subject to rights” by the Colombian Supreme Court; recognition of the rights and legal and living personhood of the Whanganui River through the Te Awa Tupua Act (Whanganui River Claims Settlement Act) agreed upon by the Māori iwi and the New Zealand Parliament; and Ecuador’s first-in-the-world recognition of the rights of Nature in their Constitution;*  *Convinced that recognizing the enduring rights and the legal and living personhood of all wetlands around the world will enable a paradigm shift in the human – Nature relationship towards greater understanding, reciprocity and respect, leading to a more sustainable, harmonious and healthy global environment that supports the well-being of both human and non-human Nature;*  *Further convinced that recognizing the rights and legal and living personhood of all wetlands and the paradigm shift that this represents will lead to increased capacity to manage wetlands in a manner that contributes to reversing the destabilization of the global climate and biodiversity loss;*  *WE DECLARE that all wetlands are entities entitled to inherent and enduring rights, which derive from their existence as members of the Earth community and should possess legal standing in courts of law. These inherent rights include the following:*  *1. The right to exist. 2. The right to their ecologically determined location in the landscape. 3. The right to natural, connected, and sustainable hydrological regimes. 4. The right to ecologically sustainable climatic conditions. 5. The right to have naturally occurring biodiversity, free of introduced or invasive species that disrupt their ecological integrity. 6. The right to integrity of structure, function, evolutionary processes and the ability to fulfil natural ecological roles in the Earth’s processes. 7. The right to be free from pollution and degradation.*  *8. The right to regeneration and restoration.* |

**2. Resolution to Promote the Discipline of Wetland Science and the Importance of Science and Facts**

***Whereas***

1. Scientific research on wetlands is critical for understanding and advancing a sustainable and resilient future;
2. Wetlands are among the world’s most productive environments; cradles of biological diversity that provide the water and productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival;
3. Over the past four years, several significant international initiatives and breakthroughs have focused on the restoration and protection of wetlands. These efforts have been driven by global collaboration among governments, NGOs, scientists, and local communities. It includes:
4. The **United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** (2021-2030) places peatlands at the forefront of its focus. It encourages countries to integrate peatland restoration into their national climate and biodiversity strategies and take urgent action to retain peatland carbon where it is – wet and in the ground. Additionally, it urges to re-wet and restore many already drained and degraded peatlands to halt their greenhouse gas emissions and protect ecosystem services;
5. The **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands** continues its technical and policy guidance to help countries scale up wetlands restoration. Their reports emphasize protecting all remaining peatlands from damage and restoring at least 50% of all degraded peatlands – 25 million hectares - by 2030 to meet climate and biodiversity goals. In their key messages, they underline that protecting and restoring wetlands are relatively cost-effective solutions for mitigating climate change and can be advanced by incorporating specific wetland targets into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) [3].
6. The **EU Nature Restoration Law** [4], adopted as part of the European Green Deal and Biodiversity Strategy, is a landmark regulation aimed at reversing ecosystem degradation across the EU—including a strong focus on wetlands. National Restoration Regulations of the EU Member States are adopted and target the rewetting of drained wetlands and the restoration of the original shape of rivers’ meanders and estuaries - a proper tool.
7. The work of the **Global Peatlands Initiative**, a multi-partner effort led by UNEP, has led to the publication of the Global Peatlands Assessment [1] and the Peatland Atlas. These resources present key facts and figures about peatlands—often referred to as "wet climate guardians". It includes detailed maps showing the extent and condition of peatlands, highlights critical hotspots, and identifies data gaps and areas requiring further research.
8. **Peatland Breakthrough** [5], launched as part of the UN Climate Action Pathways, aims to drive systemic change by mobilizing political will, funding, and technical expertise to protect and restore peatlands at scale.
9. Despite these advances, a full accounting of the climate-regulating services of wetlands is incomplete without acknowledging the dual mechanisms of carbon sequestration: (1) the well-documented in-situ storage of carbon in peat soils, and (2) the significant but often overlooked ex-situ sequestration via the microbial production and export of recalcitrant dissolved organic carbon (RDOC) to aquatic systems, a process driven by **the Microbial Carbon Pump** [6].

***However,***

1. We are living in times of significant geopolitical, technological, environmental, and demographic transformation. The core values that have long guided science in service of humanity—such as integrity, collaboration, openness, and the pursuit of truth—are increasingly under threat.
2. Financial pressures are leading to cuts in research funding, while ideological agendas are increasingly being used to suppress scientific inquiry and undermine academic freedom. In many places, scientific evidence—and those who champion it—are under attack by forces seeking to erode rational debate and public trust in science.
3. Platforms that should foster open and transparent dialogue are increasingly being misused. Instead of promoting informed debate, many now give free rein to harmful misinformation and ideological attacks—targeting both people and ideas. This erosion of truth and civility undermines the very foundation of scientific discourse.

1. Equality is also under threat. When discrimination and exclusion persist, the global scientific community suffers. Science thrives when everyone—regardless of their background, identity, or origin—has the opportunity to contribute. Diversity is not just a value; it is a strength that drives innovation and discovery.

***Therefore, the participants of this 12th INTECOL International Wetland Conference and the 20th Meeting of SWS Europe decisively and collectively resolve to:***

1. Support interdisciplinary and cross-border research on the drivers of wetland degradation and associated greenhouse gas emissions, with a new focus on foundational biogeochemical processes, including the Microbial Carbon Pump and the production of recalcitrant dissolved organic carbon (RDOC), to better understand and address the root causes of ecosystem decline;
2. Promote the dissemination of knowledge and  *support the people that are a voice for nature to* enable cross-sectoral decision-making, ensuring that science informs policy, planning, and sustainable land use;
3. Recommend the IPCC and UNFCCC to incorporate the most recent research findings, including the RDOC pool, into global climate models and national carbon accounting frameworks;
4. *Urge world governments to spend a higher % of GDP on wetland and nature conservation as a key national security strategy;*
5. Strengthen international cooperation and scientific networks to advance conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of wetlands globally;
6. Empower young scientists, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, recognizing their vital role in innovation, stewardship, and the long-term success of conservation efforts;
7. Promote open, respectful, and evidence-based dialogue across all platforms;
8. Stand up against misinformation and those who seek to distort or silence science;
9. Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion in every scientific endeavour.

**References**

[1] Global Peatlands Assessment – The State of the World’s Peatlands: Evidence for action toward the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of peatlands. Summary for Policy Makers. Global Peatlands Initiative. United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, 2022. Nairobi. <https://doi.org/10.59117/20.500.11822/41222>

[2] Davies G. T., Finlayson C. M., Pritchard D. E., Davidson N. C., Gardner R. C., Moomaw W. R., Okuno E., Whitacre J. C. (2021) Towards a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Wetlands. Marine and Freshwater Research 72, 593-600. <https://doi.org/10.1071/MF20219>

[3]Guiding peatland restoration for climate and biodiversity action. The Convention on Wetlands website. 2021. <https://www.ramsar.org/guiding-peatland-restoration-climate-biodiversity-action>

[4] Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (Text with EEA relevance). <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1991/oj>. Also see explained <https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-regulation_en>

[5] Peatland Breakthrough. Scaling up global action for peatlands: The Peatland Breakthrough and Call for Experts. Global Peatlands Initiative. 2025

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[6] Jiao N. Z, Herndl G. J., Hansell D. A., Benner R., Kattner G., Wilhelm S. W., Kirchman D. L., Weinbauer M. G., Luo T., Chen F., Azam F. (2010) Microbial production of recalcitrant dissolved organic matter: long-term carbon storage in the global ocean. *Nature Reviews Microbiology* 8.8 (2010): 593-599. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrmicro2386>