

September 11, 1997

**Memorandum Circular  
No. 97-17**

**SUBJECT : Criteria for the Identification of Wetlands Critical to  
Biodiversity Conservation**

Pursuant to Executive Order No. 192, Series of 1987, the DENR is the primary government agency responsible for the conservation, management, development and proper use of the country's environment and natural resources. Wetland ecosystems are the least understood of ecosystems and have been traditionally regarded as wastelands. Wetlands, however, perform certain functions, generate products and possess attributes that make them important to society. Wetlands are defined as areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters. Generally, the range of wetland habitat includes: estuaries; open coasts, floodplains, freshwater marshes; lakes; peatlands; and swamp forest. Aside from being depository of rich biodiversity, some wetlands also serve as source of water for domestic, industrial and agricultural use.

In accordance with the objectives of the Philippine Wetland Action Plan, the following set of criteria for identifying wetlands critical to biodiversity conservation and correspondingly, for the abatement of the water crisis is hereby issued to guide field implementors in the identification process:

A wetland should be considered important for biodiversity conservation if at least two (2) of the following criteria are met:

- It serves as a habitat of endemic wetland's plants and animals, including fishes.
- It supports an appreciable assemblage of rare, vulnerable or endangered species, or subspecies of plants and animals, or an appreciable number of individuals of any one or more of these species. A listing of important priority species for conservation is presented as Annex A.
- Important staging areas for migratory shorebirds.
- Areas with high diversity of natural populations of invertebrates and fishes and very important breeding and nursery area for many ecologically important wetland species.
- It is a good representative example of a natural or near natural wetland that plays a substantial hydrological, biological or ecological role in the natural functioning of a major river basin or coastal system, especially where it transcends provincial or regional boundaries.

This Circular takes effect immediately.

**(Sgd.) VICTOR O. RAMOS**

Secretary