



Tourism & Environment
Department. NA



***Launching of National Year of Environment
2009 in Northern Areas***

**And
One Day Conference on
High Altitude Wetlands Research in Northern
Areas, Pakistan**

26th February, 2009

**2009
PAKISTAN**

**Venue:-
Rupal Inn, Khomer, Gilgit**

Partners:-

- Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Agency (NA-EPA)**
- World Wide Fund for Nature Gilgit (WWF)**
- Pakistan Wetlands Program (PWP)**

**Report on Launching Ceremony of National Year of Environment 2009 in
Gilgit Baltistan**

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Summary:

The northern areas have a unique and critical role to play in the sustainable development of the country and serves as vital catchments for mighty Indus River upon which the entire agricultural, hydyl economy of country depends.

Outside the arctic worlds largest glaciers and snow deposits are situated here. The area is mostly covered by mountains and snow covered peaks. The region is also hosting some of the high altitude wetlands of the country and these wetlands situated above 10,000 feet or simply above tree line make the pragmatic High Altitude Wetlands (HAWs) of the area. Most of these alpine lakes (high altitude wetlands) are along the Indus Flyway and are ecologically very important and responsible for the stabilization of regional and local climate. These wetlands provide habitats, temporary as well as permanent staging and breeding grounds for migratory and resident waterfowls throughout the year. Forests and pastures surrounding the lakes are full of medicinal and aromatic plants. Majority of the endemic and endangered mammals and birds depend largely on these pastures and forests for their food and shelter, and these HAWs are major source of fresh water for rest of the country.

Northern Areas contain some of the most important wetlands of Pakistan. In the recent past, these wetlands have become exposed to anthropogenic pressures, mainly arising from unwise resource exploitation, Introduction of pollutants, deforestation, and mass tourism.

1. Introduction:

Pakistan is confronted with a number of severe environmental problems caused by accelerated rate of economic and demographic changes. Inadequate economic and resource management, poverty and illiteracy, environmental degradation by over exploitation resource base high and unsustainable rate of population growth, and unprecedented pace of urban expansion have played havoc with our surroundings. Pakistan is also facing negative consequences of climate change, such as glacial retreat, glacial lake outburst, droughts, flash floods and other associated natural hazards. The environmental degradation is estimated to cause economic loss of Rs. 365 billion per annum alone, which amounts to six per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.

With a commitment to cope with the regional and global challenges of environmental degradation and climate change, the government of Pakistan has declared the year, 2009 as "The National Year of Environment".

Keeping in view the urgency for arresting environmental degradation, the Ministry of Environment has developed a comprehensive plan of activities for engaging all stakeholders including government and non-government institution, civil society organizations, conservation professionals, academia, local communities and electronic/print media for a proactive role in the environment conservation and achieving sustainable development goals. The Ministry of Environment has also designed a calendar of activities that range from workshops, awareness campaigns, tree plantation initiatives, screening of documentaries on channels, establishment of forest nurseries and plantation of fruit plants and radio talks to create mass awareness about the wise use of natural resources and environment.

Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Agency in continuation of the efforts of Federal Ministry of Environment has also designed a calendar of events for Northern Areas to launch and celebrate the National Year of Environment 2009 in the region.

Moreover the local high altitude wetlands of Northern Areas are under threat due to human actions, drainage, dredging and stream channelization, deposition of fill material, damming, poor agricultural practices, construction, runoff, air and water pollutants,

changing nutrient levels, Introducing non-native species, grazing by domestic animals, natural threats, erosion, droughts and severe storms.

In this connection Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Agency in collaboration with WWF- Pakistan and Pakistan Wetlands Programme (PWP) has arranged one day conference on "High Altitude Wetlands" on 26th, February 2009 in Rupal Hotel Khomar Gilgit during the Launching Ceremony of National Year of Environment 2009 in Northern Area.

2. Objectives:

The main objective of the event was to formally launch National Year of Environment 2009 in Gilgit-Baltistan and the purpose of conference was to disseminate information and to raise awareness amongst stakeholders, communities, partners and decision makers about High Altitude Wetlands particularly promote environmental awareness among students, teachers and activists and other relevant stakeholders understand more about environment seek their support for better protection of natural environment especially water resources in Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan).

3. Date/Venue:

The launching ceremony was held at Rupal Inn Hotel Gilgit from 9:00 to 15:00 on Thursday 26th February 2009.

4. Participants/Target Groups:

Government and non government officials, civil society, community representatives, schools, research and academic institutions, Karakoram International University students and faculty members, local notables and media persons were the participating guests. More than 60 participants from all over Northern Areas and down country attended the event.



5. Proceedings:

The programme was divided in three sessions, inaugural, technical and closing session. Participants were seated at 9:00.

5.1 Inaugural Session:

The inaugural session of launching ceremony of National Year for Environment started at 10:00 with the recitation of Holy Quran by Mr. Mohammad Faiz Deputy Secretary Tourism and Environment Northern Area followed by the welcome words of the Chief Guest of inaugural session Mr. Abdul Hameed Advisor Tourism & Environment NA, Gilgit.

5.1.1 Welcome Remarks Mr. Abdul Hameed, Advisor Tourism & Environment GB:

Mr. Abdul Hameed welcomed the participants and announced that the Government of Pakistan has declared the year 2009 as national year of environment for the protection and conservation of natural environment of the region. This program is the part of that event. During his speech he stressed to avoid extensive use of natural resources particularly high altitude wetlands of the region. He also highlighted the importance of mountain ecosystem on regional, national and international level. During his address he suggested the need of collaboration among government and non government organizations on environment related issues and disseminate research on high altitude wetlands offering great attention for conservation and sustainability. At the end he appreciated the role and efforts of Gilgit-Baltistan Environmental Protection Agency, WWF-P and PWP for their efforts about protection, conservation, rehabilitation and improvement of natural environment in the Northern Areas. He concluded with a reference from sayings of Imam Jafar Sadiq (A.S) about the importance of natural environment that is "mankind should keep clean his environment, once the natural environment will be polluted than it is impossible to live healthy and prosperous".



5.1.2 Briefing on Program by Director GB-EPA:

Director GB-EPA, Mr. Shehzad Hasan Shigri welcomed the participants and explained the objectives of the conference and launching ceremony which was to disseminate research findings on Gilgit-Baltistan wetlands and create awareness about the importance of the environment, wetlands and biodiversity in the Northern Areas. Mr. Shehzad said that the northern areas have a unique and critical role to play in the sustainable development of the country and serves as vital catchments for mighty Indus River, he also pin pointed that the area is hosting some of the rare and endangered wild flora and fauna which needs to be protected and conserved for future generations, he also stressed on the economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence and the importance of environmental education and awareness among school, college and university levels.



This was followed by a presentation by Dr. Humaira Khan, Wetlands Specialist with the Pakistan Wetlands Programme (WWF-P).

5.1.3 Presentation on High Altitude Wetland Conservation in NA by Dr. Humaira Wetlands Specialist of Pakistan Wetlands Programme (PWP)

Dr. Humaira Khan has given informative presentation about the conservation of High Altitude Wetland in Gilgit-Baltistan. She highlighted the efforts of PWP regarding conservation of high altitude wetlands of Northern Areas. She said that there were two programmes operational in the NAs. The Pakistan Wetlands Programme and Saving Wetlands Sky High programme. Both were being implemented by WWF-P, had similar objectives and were conducting many activities jointly in the region. She



showed the various interventions that these programmes have carried out in the last four years including designing and implementing management plans at selected wetlands sites, awareness raising, trainings, climate change research and internship programmes.

5.2 Technical Session

This session was titled “Biophysical and Socio-economic Aspects of Northern Areas Wetlands.” The technical session started after tea break followed by the address of chief guest technical session Mr. Abdul Sattar Secretary Planning and Development Department (P&DD) NA. He appreciated and congratulates the whole team in arranging and conducting such a beautiful event and shows his full support to environment department for better management of natural environment of the region. He also mentioned that planning and development department of Northern Area is keen to incorporate environment in all developmental planning and execution processes.



5.2.1 Presentation on Faunal Diversity of Wetlands in Northern Areas: Potential, Threats and Recommendations for future Conservation and Management Pakistan Museum of Natural History, Islamabad and Leader of PWP Survey Team.

Dr. Muhammad Rafique said that Wetlands are symbols of beauty and play a vital role in tourism development of the country. Provide recreational activities such as angling, boating, swimming, and bird watching, maintain natural hydrological balance and provide protection against floods and climate stabilizing action on surrounding environment. Maintain water quality by filtering pollutants such as sediments, nutrients, organic and inorganic matter and pathogens.

Wetlands of NA are welcome sites for migratory birds and are highly productive ecosystems, capture energy and provide feeding and breeding grounds for animals.

They support an enormous diversity of plants and animals, including a large number of threatened and endangered species. Refuges for wildlife especially during drought.

He recommended that it is necessary to establish current inventory of wetlands and to identify gaps in data, technology and other information for the wetland baseline.

It is need to assess the status of determining wetland functions and establish a consistent methodology and schedule for evaluation and updating of the wetland baseline. Identification of wetlands of international, national, and regional significance and chalk out priorities for conservation/ restoration is also important. Dr. Rafique then described the faunal diversity of Deosai which is a unique ecosystem in Pakistan with many exclusive biodiversity characteristics. He also presented the faunal diversity in regional wetlands, with some findings from recent PWP surveys, such as the species *Hyperacrius fertilus* has been recorded for the first time from Shandur, Handarap, Khukush and Rama lakes. He also showed the audience all the large mammals associated directly or indirectly with wetlands. This was followed by a discussion of the threatened bird species found in the Northern Areas and their conservation, and protection measures in future.



**5.2.2 Presentation on Socioeconomic Study Communities around Khukush (Baha) Lake
Dr. Javed Iqbal, PWP Islamabad**

Dr. Javed Iqbal, PWP Islamabad shared information and experience about Socioeconomic Study of Communities living around Khukush (Baha) Lake District Ghizer. Majority of the local communities in the area

are extremely poor and lack alternative livelihood and income opportunities. He said that the area is rich in floral and faunal diversity and best site for ecotourism development. He recommended developing a management plan for sustainable use of natural



resources with involvement of the concerned stakeholders including communities and introducing an income generating activities to reduce dependency on natural resources.

5.2.3 Presentation on Role of GIS in the Management of Wetlands and other Natural Resources in the Northern Areas” by Akbar Shah, GIS Analyst, WWF-P, Gilgit.

Mr Akbar Shah explains about Geographical Information System (GIS) and its role in managing natural resources including wetlands. He described the work of WWF-P in GIS and support to large programmes such as Pakistan Wetlands GIS, Pakistan Wetlands Programme and Saving Wetlands Sky High. In his recommendations, Mr. Akbar Shah listed



joint collaboration of government and NGOs, acquisition of high resolution satellite images and creating a data sharing environment. In conclusion he said that GIS can be used for planning, decision making and monitoring of natural resources.

5.2.4 Presentation on “The National Wetlands Policy Process” by Haider Raza, Head, IUCN-P, Northern Areas

Mr Haider Raza explained activities already completed in the policy formulation process such as administrative and institutional review and policy and legislative review. He then focused on the Northern Alpine wetlands complex and identified the pressures on these wetlands. He showed examples of consultations with wetland communities and line departments as an important step towards policy formulation. Out of these consultations the following



emerged as the main issues of wetlands: ambiguous land tenure, lack of coordination and awareness, water quality degradation and many others. For 2009 the process would

include developing and reviewing a National Issue Statement, developing a draft policy, sub-national and national consultations and concluding with a final draft National Wetlands Policy.

5.2.5 Presentation on Eco-tourism in the Northern Areas by Yasir Hussain, Deputy Director Tourism, Northern Areas

Mr. Yasir explained the potential of ecotourism in Northern Areas. He has given information about the current actions taken by the tourism department for the promotion of ecotourism in the region. The department is further organizing awareness events in order to promote environment friendly tourism in northern areas the most environmentally fragile region of the country. He explained some of the current activities of tourism



department in publicizing ecotourism and presented the calendar of events for 2009 for the entire Northern Areas which had been developed keeping in mind the National Year of Environment.

5.3 Closing Session

The closing speech was given by Mr. Abdul Sattar, Secretary Planning and Development Department Northern Areas. He emphasized the need to conserve the natural resource base of the region and insisted that the database and scientific information shared with the audience in the conference must be put to use. He said that all problems in the region can be solved if its unexplored wealth is utilised properly. He concluded with the hope that the National Year of Environment will be successful in achieving its goals. At the end he shows his full support for incorporation of environment in development processes.

He appreciated the NAEPA and WWF-Pakistan efforts for organizing the event especially for conservation of biodiversity and high altitude wetlands in Northern Areas.

5.3.1 Vote of Thanks

Director NA-EPA, Mr. Shehzad Shigri said thanks to all participants, chief guest and notables who have spared their time and attended the launching ceremony with a missionary zeal.

5.4 Conclusion

National year of Environment 2009 has been formally launched in Northern Area (Gilgit-Baltistan) and calendar of events started.

ANNEX 1. Conference Programme
Launching of National Year of Environment 2009 in Northern Areas
And
One Day Conference on
High Altitude Wetlands Research in Northern Areas, Pakistan
Rupal Inn, Gilgit
26 February 2009

Registration of the participants (0900 – 0945)	
Inaugural Session: Chief Guest: Mr. Abdul Hameed Khan Advisor Tourism & Environment NA, Gilgit.	
09:45-10:05	Seating and Recitation from the Holy Quran
10:05-10:15	Welcome Address and Objectives of the Conference by Director NAEPA
10:15-10:30	High Altitude Wetlands Conservation in Northern Areas (Dr. Humaira)
10:45-11:15	Launching of National Year of Environment 2009 by Mr. Abdul Hameed Khan Advisor Tourism & Environment NA, Gilgit.
11:15 - 11:45	Tea / Coffee Break
Technical Session (Biophysical and Socioeconomic Aspects of Northern Areas Wetlands): Chair: Mr. Abdul Sattar, Secretary Planning and Development Department (P&DD) Northern Areas, Gilgit	
11:45 – 12:00	Faunal Diversity of Wetlands in Northern Areas: threats, potential and recommendations for future conservation and management – by Dr. Mohammad Rafique, Pakistan Museum of Natural History & Survey Leader, Pakistan Wetlands Programme
12:00 - 12:15	Socioeconomic Studies of Communities around Baha Lake, Ghizer District, Northern Areas - by Dr. Javed Iqbal, Consultant & Survey Team Member, Pakistan Wetlands Programme
12:15 – 12:30	Role of Geographic Information System (GIS) in the Management of Wetlands and other Natural Resources in the Northern Areas - by Mr. Akbar Shah, GIS Analyst, WWF-P, Gilgit
12:30 – 12:45	Formulation of National Wetlands Policy – by IUCN-P, Northern Areas
12:45 – 13:00	Discussion
13:00 – 13:10	Concluding Remarks and Recommendations by Chair
Closing Session	
13:10 - 13:20	Closing Remarks by Mr. Abdul Sattar, Secretary Planning and Development Department Northern Areas.
13:20 - 13:25	Vote of Thanks by Shehzad Shigri, Director NA-EPA
13:25 –14:30	Lunch

ANNEX 2. List of Participants

No.	Name	Designation	Organization
1.	Sobia Perveen	Student	KIU
2.	Kishwer	Student	KIU
3.	Ghulam Tahir	Director	KNP
4.	Syed Mohd Abbas	Wildlife Officer	KNP
5.	Abbas	Member	PIDO
6.	Javaria Shakeel	Student	KIU
7.	Sobia	Student	KIU
8.	Rukhsana	Student	KIU
9.	Dr. Ravish	President	HDO
10.	Abdul Hamid Khan	Advisor	NA Environ. Dept
11.	Major Hamid	Principal	Fauji Foundation School Gilgit
12.	Sher Mehmood	Presenter	Radio Pakistan
13.	Wajid Ali	Producer	Radio Pakistan
14.	Haider Raza	Head	IUCN-P, NAs
15.	Dr. Javed Iqbal	Consultant	PWP
16.	Akbar Shah	GIS Analyst	WWF-P
17.	Garee Khan	GIS	WWF-P
18.	Farhana Khan	Student	KIU
19.	Muzaffar Shah	Chairman	NDO
20.	Muzaffar-ud-din	RPM	AKRSP
21.	Taj Mohammad	Sub-Engineer	Radio Pakistan
22.	Naseer Ahmed	Manager	WWF-P
23.	Arshad Ali	Professor	KIU
24.	Jamila Baig	Student	KIU
25.	Samina Mumtaz	Student	KIU
26.	Salima	Student	KIU

27.	Mehreen Khan	Intern	WWF-P
28.	Fatima	HRMP	AKRSP
29.	Saleem Khan	DPM	WASEP
30.	M. Ikram	Manager	Rupani Foundation
31.	Najeeb Ali	Section Officer	Environment Dept
32.	Faiz Ahmed	DS	Tourism Dept
33.	M. Alam	R.O.	P & D
34.	Nazakat	Staff reporter	Daily K2
35.	Zafar Abbas	Photographer	Daily K2
36.	Dr. M. Rafique	Director	PMNH
37.	Ali Haider	P&D	Dep. Sec
38.	Shehzadi	Student	KIU
39.	Shehzana	Student	KIU
40.	Shehnaz	Student	KIU
41.	Maliha Shah	Intern	WWF-P
42.	Karimullah Beg	PM	BACIP
43.	Ali Ahmed Shah	AKPBSP	PM
44.	Syed Yahya Shah	Chairman	UNAN
45.	Nasir Hussain	Organiser	PATAH
46.	Jehangir Shah	DS	Tourism Dept
47.	Mansoor Alam	Section Officer	Tourism Dept
48.	Shakeen Aga	Reporter	Express News
49.	Abdul Sattar	Secretary	P & DD
50.	Qasim Shah	Correspondent	Samaa TV
51.	Nahida Khurshid	Manager	BACIP
52.	Jill Taylor	Professor	KIU
53.	Sikander Ali	Member(Advisor Food & Agriculture)	NALA
54.	Amin Beg	PM	AKRSP
55.	Dr. Humaira Khan	Wetlands Specialist	PWP
56.	Suleiman Wali	Director General	Chairman Inspection Team
57.	Shehzad Hasan Shigri	Director	NAEPA

58.	Khadim Hussain	AD	NAEPA
59.	Syed Munawar Hussain	AD	NAEPA
60.	Syed Jarrar Hussain	SO	NAEPA
61.	Iqtidar Hussain	SO	NAEPA
62.	Nasir Hussain	FA	NAEPA
63.	Ejaz Hussain	FA	NAEPA