

Lake Chapala gets international standing

THE NEWS

Activists who for years have lobbied for the designation of Lake Chapala as an internationally protected wetland praised the decision Monday to accord it Ramsar status, but urged the government to ensure the new status is respected.

"It's a great thing for Lake Chapala, after all these years, to be designated a Ramsar site," said Alicia Córdoba López, of the non-profit Amigos del Lago Chapala, or Friends of Lake Chapala. "The government must respect [the treaty]."

Lake Chapala, in Jalisco, is now on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, an honor it received on World Wetlands Day. The Ramsar Convention, which was signed in the Iranian city of the same name in 1971, is an international treaty that aims to conserve and encourage sustainable exploitation of wet-

lands worldwide. A signee of the treaty, Mexico has nearly 100 designated sites on the list.

Concerned about the state of Lake Chapala, activist groups like Amigos del Lago have in recent years made a strong push to have the 1,080 square meter lake accorded Ramsar status. They argue it will at least push authorities to better manage the lake.

The Ramsar status must now be signed into effect in the Senate.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, according to those who oversee the treaty, "provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources."

More than 1,800 wetland sites around the world – a total of 170 million hectares – are on the list.

Lake Chapala, Mexico's largest, has suffered from declining water lev-

els in recent years, as well as heavy pollution, activists and experts say.

Even though water levels are rebounding in large part due to heavy rainy seasons, pollution remains a serious problem, they say. Located about 50 kilometers south of Guadalajara, Lake Chapala also supplies much of the Jalisco capital's potable water.

It is home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna species. In addition, it is a huge boon to the local tourist economy.

In the Lake Chapala area this week, Amigos del Lago is also hosting a conference on the lake, as part of Jalisco's Wetlands Conservation Week.

Activities and forums will take place in the González Gallo Cultural Center in Ajijic, which is located on the shores of Lake Chapala, through Feb. 6.



NOTIMEX PHOTO/ILUIS FERNANDO MORENO

Lake Chapala was designated an important wetland according to an international treaty on Monday.



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KEEPING GOOD COMPANY

Lake Chapala joined the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance on Monday. Here are some other Mexican sites protected under the international treaty, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971:

Agua Dulce: Located within the Biosphere Reserve "Del Picante y Desierto de Altar," Agua Dulce is a 3 kilometer stretch of the Sonora River where water comes to the surface, creating conditions of an oasis in a desert.

Laguna de Términos: The largest coastal lagoon on the Mexican shore of the Gulf of Mexico, this Campeche reserve is home to Mangrove forests of approximately 127,000 hectares.

Yum Balam: This Quintana Roo coastal lagoon boasts a wide variety of fauna, including the jaguar, crocodiles, sea turtles and manatees. It is also home to well-preserved forests and Everglade palms.

Bahía de San Quintín: Located between temperate and subtropical zones, the Bahía de San Quintín is home to a number of threatened or endangered bird species.

Bala'an K'aax: These flooded low everlasting forests in Quintana Roo are a shelter for the great majority of animal species in the region, enhanced by the site's inaccessibility.

Isla Rasa: This Baja California island of volcanic origin has 3 coastal lagoons. Over 80 species of bird species have been registered on the island and its surroundings.

Laguna de Babicora: This Chihuahua site, located in the Sierra Madre Occidental, is composed of a series of small lagoons, and is considered to be of great importance for 122 species of migratory birds, some of them threatened.

Laguna de Tecocomulco: This lake is considered to be the last remnant of the ancient freshwater wetland system that dominated the Valle de México.

SOURCE: Ramsar.org

For more information:
ramsar.org

