

New circumpolar report: Arctic Wetlands can impact climate change, but whether they help fight or fuel climate change depends on how well they are managed

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A new Arctic Council report highlights the importance of Arctic wetlands and provides recommendations for their management. Many of the world's wetlands are found in the Arctic. This report, produced by the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group, shows that wetlands are globally important as wildlife habitats and migration pathways, and play a crucial role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, supporting biodiversity, and providing other ecosystem services. Less well known is wetlands' influence on climate change. Arctic wetlands store a stunning amount of carbon, and their carbon storage role is threatened by both climate change and increasing human impacts in the Arctic.

While many of Earth's intact wetlands are in Arctic states, there are also very large expanses of degraded wetlands in Arctic and Boreal zones, affected by e.g., drainage and peat mining. However, "climate-change and permafrost thaw is causing irreversible change to these ecosystems and the only way to avoid large emissions of wetland greenhouse gases is to slow human emissions globally," according to Stockholm University researcher Gustaf Hugelius, lead editor of the report.

Effective stewardship of Arctic wetlands, including conservation and restoration efforts, holds enormous potential to buy time by contributing to climate mitigation and adaptation, according to a new report and policy recommendations delivered to the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland on Thursday, May 20th. Marcus Carson, SEI Senior Fellow and one of the lead researchers for the study, notes that "the role of wetlands in climate change is underappreciated, but there are few areas where ecosystem stewardship – restoration, conservation and wise use under changing conditions – can address so many critical issues at once."

In addition to a pan-Arctic report, the Resilience and Management of Arctic Wetlands project provides 13 Key Findings and a suite of 20 Policy Recommendations designed to maintain and strengthen the resilience of wetlands. Many of these findings and recommendations are highly relevant both within and outside the Arctic, and Arctic States have an unusually important opportunity to act as role models for sustainable use of wetlands.

More details on the Key findings and Policy Recommendations: <https://www.caff.is/wetland>

Contacts for further information:

- Gustaf Hugelius, Bolin Centre, Stockholm Univ. gustaf.hugelius@natgeo.su.se, (+46)70 797 2952
- Marcus Carson, Stockholm Environment Institute: marcus.carson@sei.org (+46)73 460 4845
- Tom Barry, CAFF Executive Secretary: tom@caff.is, (+354) 861-9824

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About the Arctic Council: The Arctic Council is a high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Arctic Council Member States are Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America. In addition to the Member States, the Arctic Council has the category of Permanent Participants who include the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich'in Council International (GCI), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and the Saami Council (SC). <https://arctic-council.org/en/>

About the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group: CAFF is the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council and consists of National Representatives assigned by each of the eight Arctic Council Member States, representatives of Indigenous Peoples' organizations that are Permanent Participants to the Council, and Arctic Council observer countries and organizations. CAFF's mandate is to address the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, and to communicate its findings to the governments and residents of the Arctic, helping to promote practices which ensure the sustainability of the Arctic's living resources. <https://www.caff.is/>