

Introducción



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Executive summary

The project

Peatlands are wetland ecosystems covering at least 500 millions hectares and occurring in all continents and latitudes. In recent years they have become increasingly recognised as a vital part of the world's wetlands heritage and as key economic and ecological resources, obtaining the protection of many international treaties. Actions directed to peatland conservation and wise use are becoming more widespread. But we cannot conserve what we do not know, so the first step in the conservation of a resource is to know the resource itself. In this sense, the information about the Patagonian peatlands, their distribution, attributes and functions was very patchy and not easily accessible.

The present publication is the result of the project “**An inventory of the Patagonian Peatlands: towards the wise use and biodiversity conservation**”, which aimed to improve the knowledge level of these ecosystems of Patagonia, as a first step in the process of their inventory and wise use in Argentina and Chile. The project also aimed to strengthen the capacity of both countries -as Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention-, to fulfil the obligations derived from the Recommendation 7.1 “A global plan for the wise use and management of Peatlands”.

The project included the cooperation between different specialists involved with peatland conservation and wise use in Argentina and Chile, and has been carried out thanks to the financial support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS), under the Global Peatland Initiative managed by Wetlands International in cooperation with the IUCN-Netherlands Committee, Alterra, the International Mire Conservation Group and the International Peat Society.

An inventory of the Patagonian peatlands

Peatlands are common ecosystems in the wet areas of Patagonia, in southern South America. This region can be divided in six main peatland zones and three subzones, based mainly on climatic variables –like temperature and precipitation–, soil characteristics and vegetation. Each zone is characterised by different peatland types, ranging from the wet grasslands of *Carex* sp. to the better known ombrotrophic *Sphagnum* bogs and the *Astelia-Donatia* communities growing in those areas of highest rains.

Apart from their value for biodiversity conservation, peatlands provide important benefits to local communities within Patagonia like the provision of peat resources, drinking water, support to animals and forestry, regulation of climate and hydrology and recreational areas, between others.

In Tierra del Fuego peat has been commercially exploited for horticulture and gardening during the last 20 years, but the activity was geographically restricted to some few localities. The panorama has changed during recent years, and local demands for peatlands exploitation have increased in both Argentina and Chile, resulting in the need of new conservation and management tools.

This publication

This book compiles the results and the information produced by the Patagonian Peatlands project, with the aim of making them easily available to stakeholders, academic community and general public. The volume starts with a section of general remarks, including the adopted Spanish terminology and the introduction to the main features of the Patagonian peatlands. Follows the zonation of the region in six peatland zones, as a first step in the inventory process. In a second step and given the vast extension of the Patagonia, a “view modules” approach was used to exemplify with a greater scale the different peatland types occurring within Argentina and Chile. For both countries an exhaustive revision of background studies is included as separated chapters.

The volume also includes a section with information on birds, mammals and macroinvertebrates inhabiting the *Sphagnum* bogs of Tierra del Fuego, as well as a chapter dealing with peatland benefits, current uses and conservation in Argentina. A final chapter is dedicated to peatlands as wetlands of special concern for the Ramsar Convention.

We expect that this publication will contribute to awareness rising, as well as to guide stakeholders in the “decision-making” process for peatland conservation and wise use.