

Visit from the Ramsar Convention Secretariat to the Tyrifjorden Wetland System

Presentation by Kjetil Aa. Solbakken, Director BirdLife Norway July 2nd 2015

Nature can create a wetland without our help – it takes roughly 10.000 years. But we can destroy it in just a few weeks if we want to. And this happens all the time nowadays.

From the last COP of the Ramsar convention in Uruguay a couple of weeks ago we got some important and deeply worrying news on the state of the wetlands of the world. 40 % of the world's wetlands have been destroyed in the last 40 years, and 2/3 since the beginning of the 1900s. And 76 % of all wetland species are threatened. The situation in Europe is as bad as anywhere, actually worse. Wetlands are natural wonders of the world, and they are crumbling away right before our eyes.

The reasons for this are many, but one common reason is that the true value of wetlands are not acknowledged as it is not easy to measure in money. The value of wetlands is about biodiversity, countless species of fish, insects, plants, animals and birds and the intrinsic value of nature. It is also about ecosystem services, such as flood control, food supply, drinking water, outdoor recreation and securing our fragile climate. Wetlands can provide this for free if we let them, and so far we have taken it for granted.

It seems like the real value of Ramsar wetlands in Norway is not fully recognized by our top decision-makers. It too often viewed as an obstacle, something just lying in the way of development and easy to destroy.

This may explain why we have not seen any real initiatives from the government with the intention of saving this wetland or any real measures to increase its conservation value. On the contrary - the plan to establish new nature conservation areas in Tyrifjorden is put on hold awaiting the railway and highway plans.

A highway and railroad as planned here will naturally come with a high price tag. It always does. But economy is no excuse to destroy a globally important wetlands in one of the richest countries in the world. We expect the rest of the world to protect their natural heritage. But how can we expect this from anybody else, if we can't do it ourselves? If we can't protect a globally important Norwegian wetland like Tyrifjorden from destruction, what can we really expect to protect in the long run?

When you build a new highway or railroad it will be there for a hundred years, but still the government doesn't seem to have the time to find solutions that can spare the wetlands of Tyrifjorden. Important aspects of this wetland's ecological character are at risk – especially in Kroksund which is a bottleneck for migratory waterbirds. Tyrifjorden Wetland System is also recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International.

In this case there ARE alternatives to destroying the wetland! It is possible to establish the railway through Åsa or another alternative via Nittedal. It is not necessary to take it through the wetland system. There are also tunnel options, to pass under the wetlands.

I therefore urge the Norwegian government to take its responsibility seriously on behalf of the Tyrifjorden wetland system, and fulfill its obligations under the Ramsar Convention and protect this wetland from further damage.

The chance to do so is now, because if we build a railway and highway through this wetland and protect the rest of it later, as the plan seems to be, the wetland will be punctured and damaged forever.