

# ***CANADA 13: RASMUSSEN LOWLANDS, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES***

## ***Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands***

**Effective Date of Information:** The information provided is taken from the List of Canadian Wetlands Designated as of International Importance, May 1982 updated by the Canadian Wildlife Service – Prairie and Northern Region in October 2001.

**Reference:** 13th Ramsar site designated in Canada.

**Name and Address of Compiler:** Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Suite 301, 5204 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Yellowknife, N.W.T., X1A 1E2.

**Date of Ramsar Designation:** 24 May 1982.

**Geographical Coordinates:** 68°40'N., 93°00'W.

**General Location:** East of Rasmussen Basin about 100 km south of Spence Bay in the Nunavut Territory.

**Area:** 300 000 ha.

**Wetland Type (Ramsar Classification System):** *Marine and coastal wetlands:* Type A - marine waters; Type G - intertidal mud, sand, and salt flats; Type H - intertidal marshes. *Inland wetlands:* Type O - permanent freshwater lakes; Type Sp - permanent freshwater ponds, marshes, and swamps; Type Ss - seasonal freshwater ponds and marshes; Type U - peatlands; Type Vt -tundra wetlands.

**Altitude:** Range is from sea level to 50 m.

### **Overview (Principal Characteristics):**

**Physical Features (Geology, Geomorphology, Hydrology, Soils, Water, Climate):** The southern area of the lowland is flat, poorly-drained, and covered in marine silts and sands with occasional esker or rock outcrops. About 10 km north of Inglis River, glacial moraine outcrops through the marine sediments forming the gently rolling Ross Hills. Numerous fresh oligotrophic lakes, peat bogs and temporary waters from snow melt are scattered throughout the lowlands. The escarpment of Wager Highlands is on the eastern border of the area.

### **Ecological Features (Habitats, Vegetation):**

#### **Land Tenure:**

**(a) Site:** Most of the area is federal Crown land. Title to sites near the Inglis and Murchison rivers are held in fee simple by the Inuit of Nunavut as per the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*.

**(b) Surrounding Area:** A mix of federal Crown land and Inuit-owned land.

**Conservation Measures Taken:** None to date.

**Conservation Measures Proposed:** This area may be proposed to be designated as a National Wildlife Area. It would be subject to co-management agreements under the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*.

**Current Land Use/Activities in:**

(a) **Site:** Hunting, fishing and trapping continue by local Inuit of Taloyoak and Gjoa Haven. The area is used as a winter travel route between local communities. Permits are issued by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada under the Territorial Land Use Regulations for this area. Screening of projects under the Nunavut Impact Review Board is undertaken with certificates issued by the Nunavut Planning Commission. Permission is required to gain access to Inuit-owned land. Habitat and ornithological studies are underway for this area.

(b) **Surrounding Area:** Hunting, fishing and trapping continue by local Inuit of Taloyoak and Gjoa Haven.

**Threats to Integrity of:**

(a) **Site:** A plan developed in the 1970s for the proposed Polar Gas pipeline called for the pipeline corridor to cross this area. This project has not proven viable to date.

(b) **Surrounding Area:** None currently.

**Hydrological/Physical Values:**

**Social/Cultural Values:**

**Noteworthy Fauna:** Approximately 4 000 Tundra Swans *Cygnus c. columbianus* (3.8% of the total Canadian population) summered in the Rasmussen Lowlands in 1994-95. About 90% of the population is known to nest in the eastern Arctic. An estimated 15 000 White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons*, comprising 4.6% of the total Canadian population, occurred in the Lowlands in 1994-95. Roughly 38 000 Lesser Snow Geese *Chen caerulescens* were found here in these years as well (1% of the mid-continent population), 2 000 Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis*, 6 000 King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, and relatively dense raptors nesting along the eastern escarpment. Studies in the mid 1990s found that nationally significant of Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*, Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*, Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, and Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*, all occur in the Rasmussen Lowlands. Shorebird numbers have generally declined since earlier in the mid 1970s.

**Noteworthy Flora:**

**Current Scientific Research and Facilities:**

**Current Conservation Education:**

**Current Recreation and Tourism:**

**Management Authority:**

Canadian Wildlife Service  
Environmental Conservation Branch  
Environment Canada  
P.O. Box 1714  
Iqaluit, Nunavut  
X0A 0H0

**Jurisdiction:** Federal - Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

**Selected Bibliography:**

- Adan, R.W. and D.B. Brackett. 1976. Migratory bird populations survey in the District of Keewatin and Somerset Island. ESCOM Report No. A: 1-18. Environmental Social Program, Northern Pipelines. Ottawa, Ontario.
- Allen, D.L. and T.H. Hogg. 1978. Bird studies in the District of Keewatin: patterns of distribution, habitat preferences and potential impact of a pipeline. Final Report, Arctic Islands Pipeline Project.
- Johnston, V.H., C.L. Grattoi-Trevor, and S.T. Pepper. 2000. Assessment of bird populations in the Rasmussen Lowlands, Nunavut. Canadian Wildlife Service Occasional Paper No. 101, Ottawa, Ontario.
- McLaren, M.A., P.L. McLaren, and W.G. Alliston. 1977. Bird populations in the Rasmussen Basin lowlands, NWT. June-September 1976. L.G.L. Environmental Research Associates Ltd. for Polar Gas Project. Calgary, Alberta.

**Reasons for Ramsar Designation:** The area is a rich coastal plain providing summer range and nesting habitat for up to 500 000 geese, shorebirds, and other migratory waterfowl.

**Status of Management Plan:** There currently is no active management of this area. Should the area be designated as a National Wildlife Area, under the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement* a management plan for this area would be required within five years of its designation after the declaration of the Nunavut Territory in 1999.