



## INTERNATIONAL MIRE CONSERVATION GROUP

### Press release

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG)<sup>1</sup> with support from mainly the Finnish Environment administration organized its 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Field Symposium “Mires of Finland – daughters of the Baltic Sea” (13 -27 July 2006), as part of IMCG’s regular field assessments and symposia.

An IMCG delegation of 52 experts from 21 countries and 6 continents, accompanied and supported by representatives of the Finnish Government and Finnish scientists, travelled from Southern Lapland Teuravuoma to the southernmost point of Finland, studying the diversity and functionality of Finnish mires and peatlands and the issues faced by them. As a result, the IMCG experts fully recognize the achievements of the Finnish national and regional Governments in developing the existing network of protected areas, including those of international importance. The main points that arise from this field symposium are:

- The IMCG is extremely impressed by the enormous variation in the mires of Finland. With peatlands covering 30% of its surface area, Finland is one of the most important peatland countries in the world. In particular the aapa mires illustrate the surface patterning resulting from the complex and long-term interactions between plants, water, snow, ice and peat. Finnish mire scientists have contributed substantially to global understanding of peatlands. In recognition of this important role, the IMCG will confer honorary membership on two distinguished Finnish mire scientists and conservationists. The Finnish-Saami terms “aapa” and “palsa” have been adopted internationally to describe specific mire types.
- The IMCG is, however, shocked that so many Finnish mires have been irreversibly destroyed by drainage for forestry, agriculture and peat extraction. Finland did not meet our expectations of experiencing pristine mire ecosystems. Former and persisting drainage are even evident in all National Parks that we have visited. The boundaries of National Parks do not include the complete hydrological system, so that present and future conflict with competing land use outside the parks is inevitable.
- The IMCG strongly urges the local and national governments of Finland to meet their international responsibility to protect and conserve the remaining pristine peatland ecosystems. This includes the cessation of drainage and peat extraction in intact mire sites and the abandoning of current and planned groundwater extraction that may affect these sites.
- Finland should improve its recognition of the ecosystem services that pristine mires provide. Peatlands are important sites for biodiversity, water, carbon storage, paleoecology, human heritage and recreational needs, such as wild fruit collection, and they can form extensive wilderness areas. Many of these values are irreversibly destroyed by peatland drainage, cannot be restored and often

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<sup>1</sup> The International Mire Conservation Group is the global network of specialists having particular responsibility for and interest in the conservation and wise use of mires and peatlands worldwide.

cannot be substituted. By continuous neglect of these services Finland progressively destroys the integrity of its country. Conserving pristine mires is much more cost-effective than restoration of drained mires.

- Mire and peatland destruction in Finland is facilitated by the perverse argument that peat is a (slowly) renewable resource. There is no scientific basis to the claim that peat contributes any less to climate change than other fossil fuels. Peat grows so slowly that its rate of renewal is – like that of coal and lignite – irrelevant for society. The IMCG urges Finland to rapidly develop and implement a truly sustainable energy strategy with no reliance on peat for fuel.

The 2006 IMCG field symposium in Finland will stimulate further international interest in research, education and conservation management of this globally important resource. The IMCG feels privileged to have had the opportunity to see such a historically important area for peatland research and thanks the Finnish Ministry of Environment + the organizers for their much-valued support. The IMCG would like to work with the Finnish Government to ensure that this resource is conserved for future generations.

Tammela 24<sup>th</sup> July 2006

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