

5 .Conservation and Restoration of Diverse Natural Environment

From the viewpoint of biodiversity conservation and encouraging people to experience nature, conservation of neighboring nature, including coppices, pastures and farmlands, with appropriate measures, is important, as is the conservation of nature exhibiting little human influence. It is also important to take active steps to restore destroyed nature. "Natural" areas formed and maintained by modest human intervention provide diverse environments that many species depend upon, and also play a vital role in affording urban residents opportunities to maintain contact with nature in their daily lives.

5.1 Conservation of Forests, Green Tracts and Rivers

The Ministry of the Environment pursues nature conservation together with other government agencies concerned by taking part in planning or programming in which environmental conservation is considered and/or expected, such as the basic plan for forests, green tracts, rivers, lakes and coastal areas. The Ministry also participates in the designation of wild species as Natural Monuments.

The Ministry of the Environment is taking active measures for the conservation of natural environment in collaboration with other related ministries and agencies. Those conservation efforts include: designing and developing basic plans for forests,

green tracts, rivers, lakes and coastal areas, which, either totally or partially, aim at and/or serve for conservation of natural environment, participating in the designation of wild animals and plants as protected species, and so forth.

Sufficient consideration should also be given to wetlands and tidal flats as the natural environments of great importance. The Ministry implements comprehensive efforts, for example, designating "Important Wetlands 500" and promoting related studies and research for preserving them.



5.2 Conservation and Restoration of The Satoyama Landscape

The Satoyama Landscape are areas where moderate disturbances associated with human activities contributed in forming and maintaining their unique environment. These areas are vital for biodiversity conservation because they provide crucial habitats for both endangered species and common wildlife such as frogs and katakuri (dog-tooth violet). They are also important as place where people can come into contact with nature and learn about the natural environment. In recent years, however, The Satoyama Landscape have become threatened with loss or degradation due to a number of factors including: decline in the economic value of secondary woodlands (coppices); abandonment of arable land as a result of depopulation in rural areas; and rapid change of land use by development in urban and suburban areas.

The Ministry of the Environment is working with local governments, citizens, NPOs, experts and related government agencies (including the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport) to conserve and restore The Satoyama Landscape.



5.3 Nature Restoration

The Law for the Promotion of Nature Restoration came into force on January 1, 2003. This law intends to promote nature restoration by adopting bottom-up approaches in project formulation process, that respect local stakeholder's initiative.

The Law for the Promotion of Nature Restoration

【Key Feature】

The Law for the Promotion of Nature Restoration does not intend to add another set of new regulations. The government is involved with the implementation plans drawn up by people or groups in local communities by giving advice to those in need. It is expected that this law will serve to promote the restoration of natural environments based on discussions initiated by local stakeholders throughout Japan.

【Purpose】

This Law is established to pursue the comprehensive implementation of measures concerning nature restoration, to secure biodiversity in support of efforts toward realizing a society that is in harmony with nature, and to contribute to conservation of the global environment.

【Nature Restoration】

Nature restoration is carried out with the objective of recovering the ecosystems and other natural environments that have been damaged or destroyed by human activities in the past. Nature restoration includes the following 4 activities:

Conservation

Activity to proactively maintain the conditions of existing good natural environments.

Restoration

Activity to restoring the natural environment in the areas where it has been destroyed or where secondary natural environmental degradation took place.

Creration

Activity to recover the natural ecosystem by creating green tracts in areas where most of the natural environment has been lost, such as in big cities.

Maintenance

Activity to monitor the condition of the restored natural environment and to provide the necessary management in order to maintain the condition for a long time.

※ Compensatory measures that are to create a similar environment near the one destroyed by development activities not included in Nature Restoration.

【Nature Restoration Committee】

When undertaking nature restoration in an area, the effector who plans to implement the project needs to: indicate the purpose and the contents of the project; provide an opportunity for broad and fair participation; and form a Nature Restoration Committee with local residents, NPOs, experts, landowners, and local and national governmental agencies concerned.

The Committee will (1) draw up the overall plan for nature restoration, (2) discuss the draft implementation plan of the nature restoration project, and (3) conduct communication and coordination for implementing the nature restoration project. Until the end of March, 2009, 20 Nature Restoration Committees have been established in Japan. By the same month, 19 committees have drawn up the overall plan for nature restoration, and 11 of which have drawn up implementation plans of the nature restoration project.

Nature Restoration Project

In order to realize a Society Coexisting with Nature, which is one of the major goals of the Government, the Ministry of the Environment works to restore the damaged or destroyed natural environment such as wetlands, tidal flats and Satoyama in cooperation with local residents, NPOs, experts and other government agencies concerned.

In Kushiro Wetland area, the Kushiro Wetland Nature Restoration Committee was established in November 2003, with the participation of more than 100 individual and group members. Activities toward nature restoration are now being undertaken by various participating actors.



5.4 National Trust Movement

To preserve the natural environment, it is essential to set aside "land", which is fundamental to biodiversity. The National Trust (National Fund for the Environment) movement is a citizen's movement that raises funds and donations widely, and purchases and manages lands containing nature of high conservation value. The idea of this movement was born in Britain and has spread worldwide. In Japan, the movement is promoted in many areas, such as the "Shiretoko 100 Square Meters Movement" in Shari, Hokkaido, and the "Citizen's Movement for Conservation of Tenjinzaki" in Tanabe, Wakayama.

Such movements are meaningful for promoting nature conservation activities not only by official organizations but also by citizens themselves. So these movements are expected to develop further from now on. For the promotion of the National Trust movement, the Ministry of the Environment is publicizing the importance of tax incentives and supporting the successful National Trust activities.



Tenjinzaki, Wakayama

5.5 Natural World Heritage

The world is blessed with a vast number of sites of unique natural and cultural interest. Among those, World Heritage sites are irreplaceable assets of all humanity and treasures to be preserved for future generations. They were inscribed on the World Heritage List under the provision of World Heritage Convention.

As of July 2008, there are 14 World Heritage sites in Japan including 3 natural sites: Yakushima, Shirakami-sanchi and Shiretoko.

Natural World Heritage sites in Japan

■ Yakushima (Kagoshima prefecture)



Yakushima was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993 for its unique ecosystem and landscape containing the globally rare ancient forest of Yakusugi trees that are thousands of years old; biota including a number of endemic and endangered species of fauna and flora; and typical vertical distribution of vegetation from the coast to subalpine zone.

■ Shirakami-sanchi (Aomori and Akita prefectures)



Shirakami-sanchi was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993 for its remaining pristine cool-temperate forest dominated by beech, and diverse fauna and flora including the Asian black bear, Japanese serow and birds.

■ Shiretoko (Hokkaido prefecture)

Shiretoko was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005 for its unique feature of interaction between the rich marine ecosystem nurtured by sea ice and the pristine terrestrial ecosystem, and being an important habitat for endangered species of international significance such as Steller's sea eagle, white-tailed eagle and Blakiston's fish owl.



Challenges for the new inscription of Natural World Heritage sites

Two candidate natural sites were selected for nomination to the World Heritage List, namely the Ogasawara Islands and the Ryukyu Islands.

The Ogasawara Islands (Metropolitan Tokyo) have various activities on the earth in the past 48 million years recorded in its unique geological conditions, such as Boninite, and peculiar geological formation. Since the islands have never been a part of any continent, they are highly valued for their wide arrays of endemic and rare species and unique island ecosystems. On the other hand, the Ryukyu Islands (Kagoshima prefecture and Okinawa prefecture) have a geological history in relation to the Asian continent. In its history, they were a part of the continent in some periods and were isolated from it in other periods. This geohistory has resulted in the laurel forest ecosystem of the islands. This ecosystem is also highly valued for various endemic and rare species living there. The government agencies and local citizens concerned are cooperating in making further efforts in treatment of alien species to win designation for as new Natural World Heritage sites.