

Additional information

Ecosystem services

Hydrological values:

The main hydrological value of the peat land area and the lake Vatnshamarsvatn (41 ha) is in supporting the ecology of the area but also in mediating water flow and flood control. On the floodplain the hydrological value is in flood control, retention of sediments and nutrients and shoreline stabilization. The high water table in the peat land, furthermore, decreases release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

The estuarine plane along the Hvítá which is periodically flooded by brackish water is unique for the area and only a very few plains of this type exist in Iceland. Due to the input of nutrients the plain is fertile and has a high primary production that in turn favours the bird population. The secure fodder production of this plain is one of the major reasons why the Agricultural School was established at Hvanneyri. The alluvial plain was used for centuries for fodder production and kept that role well into the 20th century. Nowadays a part of it is regularly moved and grazed, but has never been fertilised. This part of the wetland thus plays an important role ecologically as well as historically and culturally.

Social and cultural values:

The site is the home of the Agricultural University of Iceland which specialises in teaching and research in agricultural and natural sciences, nature conservation and land use. The University established recently a Centre for Wetland Research and Monitoring which will be responsible for management and monitoring of the protected area.

The site fulfills the wise use features presented in Ramsar, as it is a site of sustainable forms of tourism, outdoor recreation, education, scientific research, agricultural production, grazing and fisheries. Hvanneyri has a long history, reaching back more than 1100 years ago at the time when Iceland was first settled by man. An agricultural school was founded at Hvanneyri in 1890. Since then, Hvanneyri has been the main centre of agricultural education and science in Iceland, having profound effect on the agricultural and land-use history of Iceland.

Current land (including water) use

The current land use is mainly habitat protection, education and research, agriculture and recreation. Within the Ramsar site, altogether 275 people live in the urban area at Hvanneyri, and about 25 people on the surrounding farms. In addition about 125 students reside at Hvanneyri during the academic year. The water use within the reserve is very limited, as water is piped into the area from springs further upstream.

In the alluvial floodplain, the natural floods of the river Hvítá provides natural fertilization of a number of agricultural fields.

Current scientific research and facilities

Number of scientific research projects conducted in the area by the staff of the University and visiting scientists, national and international. A new research facility will be opened in fall 2012 by the lake Vatnshamravatn, which will house the Wetland Centre and offer monitoring and research facilities for both the university scientists as well as visiting scientists.

Current recreation and tourism

The site is a recreation area for students and staff as well as visitors. Limited tourism.

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