

# エコシステム

Ecosystem  
Conservation  
Society-Japan

1 No.155

January  
2018

## 「生態特区」で 持続可能な地域づくり

- | 自然がつくりあげた私たちの暮らし
- | 減っていく自然、減っていく湿地
- | 求められる「農地を自然に戻す」考え
- | 湿地を再生する「生態特区」を
- | 地方創生の基盤は自然再生

自然再生を進めるうえで問題となる「法律にもとづく規制」を改革する方法の一つとして、国に対し直接提案を行うことができる「特区制度」は、有効なしくみです。

Various Restrictions-by-Law in Japan hinder restoration of nature in many ways. One of the most effective ways to reform those restrictions is to use a Special District which can be created by local municipalities to make proposals directly to our national government.

# Using Special Ecological District to Promote Sustainable Community

Secondary natural areas called 'satouchi and satoyama' (maintained by human activity such as farming or village life) have contributed to formation of diverse cultures in Japan since ancient times. These natural areas have played important roles in promoting community development by creating local employment opportunities and by attracting tourists domestically and internationally. Wetlands are one of the ecosystems that especially characterize Japanese nature. With regard to their economic value, some reports hold that the Japanese people have been receiving annual ecological services and benefits worth one trillion yen in the form of recreation, water purification, and absorption of greenhouse gases such as CO<sub>2</sub>.

Even though wetlands have high economic value, Japan has been losing wetlands as they have been converted to farmland and other uses for many years. Rice paddies once were 'wet paddies' as water was retained in them during the winter season. But as farmers pursued more efficiency, they changed 'wet paddy' to 'dry paddy'. Thus rice paddies have lost their wetland character, and the many species of wildlife that once used them as their habitat have disappeared. Rice paddies have thereby lost much of their ecosystem value as wetlands.

Against this background, new movements to restore wetlands have been gradually spreading. These are recovering nature in rivers and ponds and changing rice growing methods to provide habitats for wildlife in rice paddies. In many communities, new rice farming techniques and tourism have been promoted by using wetlands with their wildlife. Some of the wetland restoration projects are large in scale. These use attractive water birds such as stork, ibis and cranes as indicator species

because these large birds need large areas of wetlands. To accelerate efforts to restore wetlands in local communities, Japan's society must promote new environmentally friendly rice farming methods. In addition, because Japan faces rapid population decline into the future, reverting rice paddies to wetlands will give us a new and important land use option.

Currently, Japan's agricultural policy is based on 'food production first'. All the agricultural laws and regulations have been made to implement this basic policy. If we try to restore wetlands under these circumstances, these laws and regulations can become 'restrictive walls' that slow or even prevent restoration projects. We really must change these laws and regulations that have become barriers to restoration of nature.

There is a unique system called Special District that has created many remarkable results in social and economic fields. We are proposing that this Special Districts system be used for the restoration of natural areas throughout Japan. The Special Districts system will allow easing of laws and regulations flexibly but only within the jurisdiction of specified municipalities. Local governments can make proposals directly to the national government. We encourage local municipalities to use this system to promote restoration of local nature.

The foundation of local revitalization is to restore its lost nature and use it to develop a local community that can coexist with nature. To fulfill the hopes of people who love nature of their communities and who are proud of their history and culture, and who want to leave those legacies to their future generation, it is necessary to utilize Special Districts as soon as possible to restore local nature.



Wetlands are one of the natural ecosystems that characterize Japan. But as Japan's modern economy has developed, most of them have been lost to farmland and subdivisions



Ecosystem Pyramid. Projects to revitalize local communities by restoring local nature using large water birds such as ibis, stork, and crane as indicator species have been spreading gradually in many municipalities of Japan



Winter-watered rice paddy and whooper swans. We need to promote both an agriculture that can coexist with nature and projects that revert rice paddies to wetlands



Parc du Pont de Gau, France. The foundation of sustainable community development is to protect local nature, to nurture it, and to leave it as local heritage. The Special District system is a useful tool to promote restoration of nature more easily