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LOUISIANA
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Louisiana Wetland News

As often as is feasible, I plan to keep everyone up to date on current wetlands issues through both circular letters (issues needing immediate attention) and this newsletter called "Louisiana Wetlands News." Through this newsletter current wetland and coastal resources issues of interest will be reviewed, and evolving Agricultural Center - Cooperative Extension Service educational efforts will be announced. If you have any suggestions or information of interest, please call and share your thoughts with me.

Endangered Species Reform Act Amendments of 1992

Most endangered species in the U.S. are found primarily in wetland habitats. For this reason endangered species policy recommendations should be very significant to everyone interested in wetland conservation policy.

In the final days of the 102nd Congress, Congressman W. J. (Billy) Tauzin introduced legislation aimed at amending the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Reauthorization of this Act is expected to be one of the major issues taken up during the next (103rd) Congress. Due to

the timing of this proposal, it is expected that these amendments will be setting the stage for debate on this issue. Congress will convene in January 1993.

The Endangered Species Reform Act Amendment goals listed by Congressman Tauzin include:

- The Act should be reauthorized for five years with substantially increased funding and with meaningful management changes that should be given an opportunity to work;
- The process used to list species as threatened or endangered should continue to be based solely on biological factors;
- All segments of our society including state and local governments, industry, individuals and landowners should be encouraged to become active partners in species conservation before listing becomes necessary. Such efforts can be encouraged through the use of active management programs, private species enhancement programs, and efforts by the federal government to protect habitats containing more than one species;



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- The Act should encourage the development of innovative Cooperative Management Agreements to be approved by the federal government and to be implemented before a species requires listing and after a species is listed when appropriate;
- When strict federal mandates are necessary to conserve species, the Act should require greater consideration of the economic impact of such mandates on state and local governments, local businesses, schools, jobs, communities, and landowners; and
- The Act should be amended to recognize that species conservation should be a shared responsibility rather than a burden that is imposed upon a small segment of our society.

Developments pertaining to reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act should begin when the 103rd Congress convenes in January 1993.

Wetland Reserve Program Update

As reported previously, over 400 landowners signed intention forms offering over 119,000 acres for consideration to be included in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) in Louisiana. After intentions were reviewed and Wetland Plans of Operation (WRPO) were developed by SCS, bids were submitted by landowners and a total of 69,913 acres were offered by 270 landowners. These bid offerings are currently being reviewed by ASCS, SCS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and final selection should be announced sometime before the end of the year.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a parish breakdown of WRP bid data showing acreage and number of landowners with pending bids now under review. With only enough funding in FY92 for 50,000 acres nationwide in the 9 pilot states, Louisiana is not expected to enroll but a small portion of the acreage offered for bid (> 69,000 acres). Funding for WRP in FY93 has been cut drastically; however, many expect increased funding in future years due to the tremendous amount of participation in the 1992 pilot program sign-up.

Conservation Easements on Private Property Securing an FmHA Loan

When borrowers cannot meet payment schedules, FmHA begins offering a complex variety of loan servicing options that borrowers can consider. FmHA loan servicing has two primary objectives: 1) to keep farmers in business and 2) to avoid or minimize losses to government and taxpayers.

Section 1318 of the 1985 Food Security Act (FSA) established a new loan servicing mechanism called "Farm Debt Restructure and Conservation Set-aside" by which FmHA can help farmers avert farm foreclosure. Through this provision FmHA is authorized to reduce the principal of farmers' delinquent loans in exchange for easements on land suitable for conservation, recreation or wildlife. Other options include consolidation, rescheduling, reamortization, interest rate reduction, and loan deferral.

"Debt for Nature" easements can be requested at any time by any borrower. Easements can be used alone, or in combination with other loan servicing options. Although delinquent borrowers are generally considered likely candidates for easements, all loan servicing mechanisms are optional. FmHA cannot require even seriously delinquent borrowers to accept an easement or any other loan servicing option. These are simply services made available to help farmers stay solvent. Easements, therefore, are not promoted by FmHA, but must be requested in writing by the interested borrower if there is sufficient interest.

Interested delinquent borrowers who have received Exhibit A, "Notice of the Availability of Loan Service and Debt Settlement Programs for Delinquent Farm Borrowers," must take the following actions: (1) return Attachment 2 ("Acknowledgment of Notice of Program Availability") or Attachment 4 ("Response to Notice Informing Me of FmHA's Intent To Accelerate My Loan"), and (2) submit an ASCS photo of the farm showing the portion of the farm and approximate acres to be considered for an easement. All other information included in the FmHA packet must also be submitted.

The portion of existing debt reduced with an easement is the same as the proportion of the farm securing the loan that is placed under easement, provided the amount reduced does not exceed the fair market value of the easement area. For example, if a farmer has his entire 500-acre farm as collateral for \$200,000 in FmHA loans and he places 100 acres (20 percent of the farm) under easement, then 20 percent of the total principal (or \$40,000) secured by the 500 acres (not to exceed fair market value of the easement area) will be canceled.

All easements are established for conservation purposes, and crop production will be prohibited during the life of the easement. Specifics pertaining to compatible and prohibited uses must be made very clear in the easement document.

Eligible lands include: wetlands; wildlife habitat of local regional, state or national importance; uplands in 100-year floodplain; aquifer recharge areas; areas of high water quality or scenic value; historic or cultural property listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; buffer zones adjacent to conservation easement areas; and areas that SCS determines are not generally suited for cultivation. Except for wetlands and wildlife habitat, lands eligible for easements must have been considered row-cropped each year during the three-year period ending December 23, 1985.

FmHA will set up an easement review team to determine land suitability for conservation, designate the easement areas, formulate the easement management plan, and identify easement enforcement and management authority. Agencies involved include SCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) when wetland areas are considered. Additionally, the team will be responsible for determining whether the easement should be 50 years or longer, or perpetual. Perpetual easements will be recommended only if the area is considered important wildlife habitat for migratory birds or threatened, endangered or candidate species; serves as a wildlife habitat mitigation site for permitted activity; or serves other significant functions.

Management requirements of the easement area is identified by the review team and delegated to a qualified enforcement authority that may be a unit of federal, state or local government, or a non-governmental organization. Costs of managing the easement area are born by the enforcement authority; the landowner bears no management burden.

Currently, FmHA has approximately 150,000 borrowers nationwide, of which 30% are delinquent.

For more information about this program, contact any parish FmHA office.

Nutria and Muskrat Management Symposium Provides Consensus

A Nutria and Muskrat Management Symposium, co-sponsored by the LSU Agricultural Center was held October 8-9, 1992, in Baton Rouge. The two-day symposium focused attention on the impacts of nutria and muskrat in Louisiana wetlands - an issue of serious concern to wetland landowners, foresters, farmers, homeowners, and others.

Over 100 participants attended the symposium including private landowners, government wetland management authorities, Extension agents, and various research institutions.

Studies have shown that nutria, in particular, are eating much of the vegetation in many coastal regions of south central and southeast Louisiana, possibly causing more vegetative wetland loss than other causes of wetland deterioration such as saltwater intrusion, subsidence, and sea level rise. Coastal wetland restoration projects involving vegetative plantings have experienced very limited success due to nutria depredation. This has greatly aggravated Louisiana's coastal deterioration problems.

Short-term management recommendations included:

- population control in critical areas;

- use of exclosures in all coastal projects to help evaluate seriousness of the problem;
- encourage identification of unpalatable plant species for use in coastal vegetative planting projects;
- continue evaluating approved chemical poisons; and
- work for the establishment of a state incentive program that would supplement payments to trappers who harvest nutria from critical areas. This recommendation was seen as the most agreeable and effective option that would effectively address the problem.

Long-term management recommendations included:

- market promotion of nutria and muskrat fur resources; relate fur harvest and fur garment purchase to conservation and protection of critical wetland habitats;
- encourage the development of value-added fur processing industries in Louisiana;
- encourage formation of venture capital program that would allow for the pooling of large stocks of hides needed for large fur manufacturer markets;
- investigate additional markets for nutria and muskrat meat; and
- continue research associated with control of Fourchette (*Bidens laevis*) and the possibility of government cost share assistance.

Symposium proceedings will be published and made available sometime in early 1993. Anyone interested in getting a copy should contact my office in Baton Rouge.

Wetland and Coastal Resources In-service Training To Be Conducted

In the spring of 1993, all agricultural agents with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service will receive wetland and coastal resources in-service training. This training has been made available through an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Section 104 (b)(3) Clean Water Act grant.

The primary goals and objectives of this project include:

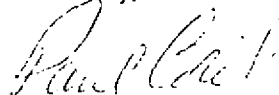
1) Conduct seven (7) in-service wetland and coastal resources related workshops throughout the state for LCES agricultural faculty. Up-to-date information regarding wetland conservation and management with emphasis on wetland functions and values will be presented. Current wetland and coastal resources regulatory policies and procedures will also be included. The information will be provided in written form and organized in a ring binder as a ready reference for ultimate distribution to landowners, land managers, and farmers.

2) A slide-tape program on wetland functions and values will also be developed and presented at each workshop session. Each parish LCES office will receive a copy of the slide program for use at any future parish wetland educational outreach meeting conducted at the local level. This training should be very beneficial in helping to keep agents and clientele up to date on current wetland policy and emerging wetland issues.

Selection of workshop locations and dates of training will be coordinated with the district agents in each LCES area and announced as soon as officially adopted.

Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or would like additional wetland and coastal resources related information.

Sincerely,



Paul Coreil
Area Agent (Wetland and Coastal Resources)