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Louisiana Wetlands News

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Wetlands Bill Introduced By Senator Johnston

In October 1994, U.S. Senator Bennett Johnston introduced a bill to overhaul Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The late introduction of this bill establishes this issue as a high legislative priority for next Congress. Senator Johnston urges all interested parties to review the bill over the next few months and recommend improvements.

Instead of centering on the issue of compensation for lost private property rights, Senator Johnston includes provisions in the legislation that will help ensure that Section 404 wetland permitting does not result in a "taking" in the first place. The bill also contains the following provisions:

- 1) a ranking of wetlands by their ecological functions and values, with more protection provided for high-value wetlands and no federal regulation required for low-value wetlands;
- 2) allow states to regulate low value wetlands;
- 3) removes the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) veto power over wetlands development permits, if

EPA previously has given a state government the right to administer the Section 404 wetland permitting program;

- 4) removes EPA's veto authority over wetland development permits issues by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;
- 5) establishes time limits for issuing or denying federal wetland permits;
- 6) encourages the use of "Mitigation Banks" to offset man-made wetland losses; and
- 7) establishes an administrative process for appealing action on a Section 404 wetland permit.

I should have copies of the executive summary of this bill available shortly. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please call my office in Baton Rouge.



THE LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYMENT. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A. & M. COLLEGE, LOUISIANA PARISH GOVERNING BODIES, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, AND UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING

Wetland Delineation Certification Training Set

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has proposed that an individual wanting to become certified as a wetland delineator must have 1) at least one year of wetland delineation experience, 2) training in the 1987 Wetlands Delineation Manual, 3) successful completion of a written test on delineation, and 4) successful completion of a field test demonstrating delineation ability. In an effort to help individuals meet these requirements, the LSU Wetland Biogeochemistry Institute will be sponsoring a wetland delineation training course in Baton Rouge, May 1-5, 1995. This course will allow you to receive intensive training in the 1987 Wetlands Delineation Manual, and will include both written and field tests that will assure mastery of the Corps delineation techniques. The course will focus on helping participants become familiar with the three parameters used in wetland identification: 1) wetland vegetation, 2) hydric soil, and 3) wetland hydrology.

People who should be particularly interested in completing this course include land managers, agricultural/forestry/environmental consultants, state and federal agency regulatory personnel, developers, land-use planners, and engineering professionals.

Upon completion of the course, students will receive a certificate of training from LSU. Many Corps districts around the nation require this certificate before final wetland delineation certification is awarded.

When more complete information is available, I will notify everyone on the "Louisiana Wetlands News" mailing list. Another training course is also planned for September 1995. For more information you may call Dr. Steve Faulkner at the LSU Wetland Institute at (504) 388-8792.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Final 1992 Sign-up Results

The final 1992 WRP enrollment results for Louisiana have been completed by ASCS after two years of contract discussions, negotiations and field evaluations with approved landowners. Of the original 47 accepted bids (14,077 acres), 40 easements were filed totaling 12,663 acres (see table below). The average per acre

bid was \$491 and the total cost-share payments were \$1.185 million. Reimbursement payments for costs associated with easement filing and other official legal transactions totaled \$44,506. ASCS is now working on finalizing easements tentatively accepted during the 1994 WRP sign-up. All indications point to continued administration and congressional support for WRP in future years.

PARISH	Bids Accepted	Bid Acres	Bid Amounts	Bids Cancelled	Easements Filed	Easement Acres
Ascension	1	96	\$ 43,335	1		
Avoyelles	6	2964	1,089,936		6	2963.9
Caldwell	2	792	273,900	1	1	603.5
Catahoula	2	610	435,182	1	1	703.9
Concordia	3	764	260,847	2	1	66.8
East Carroll	2	236	124,865		2	235.7
Madison	5	2693	1,874,242		5	2693.0
Natchitoches	3	206	88,465		3	205.3
Ouachita	3	1097	244,130		3	1096.6
Pointe Coupee	2	699	403,048		2	698.7
Red River	1	91	36,200		1	90.5
Richland	10	2411	1,367,370	1	9	2367.9
St. Landry	7	1218	665,502	1	6	915.0
TOTAL	47	14,077	\$6,907,022	7	40	12,663.0

Source: ASCS

State "Blueprint" For Restoring The Louisiana Coastal Zone

In August 1994, the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities released a long-range coastal restoration plan titled, "An Environmental-Economic Blueprint for Restoring the Louisiana Coastal Zone: The State Plan." This plan is the counterpart to the federal Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) long-range plan that was developed and released last year.

While similar to the CWPPRA plan, the "State Plan" is generally more far-reaching. It calls for a 50-year outlook and focuses on major natural systems rather than basins. The central features of the State Plan center on "defensive" approaches to slow wetland loss, and "offensive" strategies aimed at restoring the coastal land building process now largely harnessed by the leveeing of the Mississippi River.

The State Plan was prepared for the Governor's Office by Sherwood Gagliano and Coastal Environments, Inc. Copies may be obtained from my office in Baton Rouge.

14,000 Acres Considered For Purchase By LDWF

A new 14,000-acre wildlife management area in Tensas Parish could be available to Louisiana sportsmen by January 1995. The \$12.2 million purchase of prime bottomland hardwood wildlife habitat by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) must, however, first be approved by state legislators.

The acreage under consideration is located in the northwest portion of Tensas Parish and is composed of 10,700 acres of forest land and 3,200 acres of agricultural land. LDWF Wildlife Division Programs Manager Bob Love said "...it's the best land acquisition prospect we've had in 20 years. If this deal goes through, it will be the best bottomland hardwood tract we own, in my opinion."

The purchase agreement for the land has been finalized and the deal must be closed by the end of the year. The Department already has \$4.5 million on hand for land acquisitions and \$1.5 million in priority 1 bond money, so legislators are now being asked to approve a \$6.5 million bond supplement to make this historic purchase possible.

Though the cost seems high, timber stands on the land are valued at \$7.4 million. This timber can be selectively harvested to help fund new acquisitions and other Department programs. Selectively cutting of timber would not adversely affect wildlife habitat on the area because it would be accomplished over an extended period of time, according to Love. Timber also grows rather quickly in Tensas Parish. Analysis of tree stumps document that some hardwood trees have grown as much as an inch in diameter in some years.

The Department plans to restore much of the now agricultural lands to forested habitat through reforestation and use of water control structures to provide wetlands for migratory waterfowl.

Source: LDWF News Release - 10/7/94

Vermilion Parish Rice Industry Honored For Providing Waterfowl Habitat

Vermilion Parish rice growers and supporting organizations were honored in September 1994 for

initiating a special rice field waterfowl habitat program throughout the parish known as "Operation Quackback." The North American Waterfowl Management Plan presented certificates designating the Vermilion Parish Rice Growers Association (VRGA), the Vermilion Parish Farm Bureau and the Vermilion Parish office of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service as Conservation Partners. Receiving framed certificates were VRGA President Allen McLain, Parish Farm Bureau Vice President Dan Hebert and County Agent Howard Cormier of LSU Agricultural Center's parish Extension office.

Operation Quackback started last year when eight Vermilion farmers volunteered some 1,500 acres to be flooded during the winter to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl. Additional habitat benefits are also provided for shorebirds and migratory song birds found along the coast. Expected acres to be flooded during the winter of 1994-95 are expected to exceed 5,500.

Rice farmers receive no financial assistance for participating in this program, but waterfowl use can result in reduced red rice and other weed seed in the flooded fields. Fewer weeds can also result in reduced chemical weed control in the future. Participating farmers receive a free Operation Quackback sign that can be placed on their property showing that they are part of a wildlife conservation program.

The benefits of rice cultural practices to waterfowl have been well documented. Earlier studies have shown that shattered rice makes up approximately 50 percent or more of the diets of some species of ducks in the rice-marsh transition zone, according to Paul Selihan, rice education program coordinator for Extension.

Excellent wintering habitat in Louisiana and other Gulf Coast states helps send ducks back to their breeding grounds in the prairies of the northern U.S. and southern Canada in good physical condition.

For more information about Operation Quackback, contact Howard Cormier at the Vermilion Extension Service office at (318) 898-4335.

Source: LSU Agricultural Center News - 9/22/94

Corps of Engineers Establishes Atchafalaya Leadership Group

Due to removal of the Wax Lake weir north of Morgan City, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will re-evaluate its plans for the lower Atchafalaya River and the Morganza-to-the-Gulf Study. The weir, which controlled waterflow down the Wax Lake Outlet and the main Atchafalaya River channel, was a critical part of the Corps' river flow plan. Many user groups have expressed interest in assessing the impact of weir removal on Atchafalaya River land building processes, flood control, navigation, fish and wildlife resources, and habitat.

The Corps' re-evaluation and planning effort will be aided by an Atchafalaya Leadership Group which consists of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, the Coalition To Restore Coastal Louisiana, the mayor of Morgan City, Senator Thomas Green, shipping and navigation interests, and the Louisiana Landowners Association.

Updates on this effort will be reported in future editions of this newsletter.

LDWF Releases Position Statement Concerning Marsh Management

In August 1994 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sponsored a Structural Marsh Management Workshop in New Orleans. Issues addressed included 1) defining marsh management, 2) identifying and ranking objectives, 3) identifying resource impacts, 4) establishing "best management practices" for marsh management, 5) outlining research needs, 6) identifying limitations in research base, 7) monitoring and enforcement, 8) role of marsh management relative to CWPPRA, 9) establishing marsh management guidelines, and 10) identifying regional and site-specific marsh management conditions.

Over 200 participants attended the workshop which focused on positive discussion between both marsh management proponents and skeptics. Workshop proceedings will be published by EPA and made available to the public shortly. Notification of availability of the proceedings will be announced in a future issue of this newsletter.

Many state and federal regulatory and resource management agencies are developing position

statements on structural marsh management in an effort to clarify policy and address many of the questions outlined above. In July 1994, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries released the following position statement on marsh management:

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) believes that the long-term future of our fish and wildlife resources depends on the diversity, quantity and quality of their habitat. Wetlands conservation strategies must incorporate management programs designed to protect and restore habitat which will support the diversity of fish and wildlife resources present throughout coastal Louisiana. Wetlands conservation involves complex issues that can be broken down into two basic management approaches: 1) the restoration or creation of vegetated wetlands where freshwater and sediment are available, and 2) where adequate sources of freshwater and sediment are not available, the conservation and enhancement of wetlands through active marsh management.

LDWF presently owns and manages approximately 500,000 acres of coastal wetlands that represent a broad cross section of Louisiana's wetlands. The majority of this property has been managed by the Department since the early 1920s. During this time we have witnessed a variety of wetland loss problems and have developed land management programs that utilize a diversity of techniques to combat this wetland loss.

Sediment diversion is the primary management tool being utilized on our property in the active Mississippi Delta. Marsh creation utilizing dredge material is a principal technique being utilized on the emerging Atchafalaya Delta and on selected coastal barrier islands. Structural marsh management is the tool being utilized on various Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and refuges in the coastal zone. Breakerwater systems, fencing projects and earthen plugs are likewise utilized to manage wetland systems. It is apparent to our department that no single technique can be applied successful throughout the variety of habitat types that exist in coastal Louisiana.

In addition to the loss of vegetated wetlands, factors such as saltwater intrusion which transforms fresh habitat to more saline habitat will generate dramatic impacts which in effect reduce or eliminate some populations of fish and wildlife. In addition to wetlands loss, brackish and saline marsh types are expanding at the expense of fresh and intermediate systems. Entire

basins, such as the Breton Sound Basin, have been converted to brackish and saline marshes. Our Department feels we must maintain a proper gradation of marsh types (fresh, intermediate, brackish and saline) to achieve the diversity of fish and wildlife populations which account for the tremendous productivity of our coastal areas.

Projects such as the Caernarvon Freshwater Diversion Project are designed to re-establish a gradation of marsh types. In some basins, however, a freshwater resource such as the Mississippi River is not present. In these situations, structural marsh management is necessary to prevent saltwater intrusion from causing habitat degradation.

The maintenance of historical isohaline lines through structural marsh management has been successfully demonstrated on the Department's 80,000 acre Rockefeller Refuge. Additionally, the recent Mineral Management Service report, which is being utilized as a major scientific source for development of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on marsh management, noted that on Rockefeller Refuge structural marsh management produced the following results: 1) The managed area produced three times the vegetative biomass as compared to the unmanaged site; 2) the managed marsh significantly increased vegetated marsh acreage compared to the unmanaged site; 3) the managed marsh had higher primary productivity than the unmanaged marsh; 4) the managed marsh created a more oxidized soil environment conducive to plant growth than the unmanaged marsh; 5) plant species diversity was greater in the managed marsh, 6) salinities were reduced in the managed marsh; and 7) water levels were controlled on the managed site.

The unmanaged marsh control site for the Mineral Management Service study which received uninhibited tidal exchange during the investigation experienced a net loss of vegetated wetlands. It is apparent that marsh management can have beneficial results. Many of the negatives on marsh management have evolved from historical marsh management projects that focused primarily on waterfowl management or access for trapping programs. These projects were never intended to be coastal restoration projects but have been evaluated in terms of restoration. Recently, marsh management has focused on the conservation and restoration of vegetated wetlands as a primary objective.

Management goals must be established with the recognition that a habitat has a complex relationship to the overall system. Practices must provide a balanced approach which attempts to provide protection or enhancement to the vegetative components of the system and utilization of those benefits by the resident and migratory, aquatic and terrestrial animal components.

Marsh management is a tool no different than freshwater or sediment diversion, sediment fencing, or hydrologic modifications such as earthen dams. Each marsh management site should be evaluated on a case by case basis dependent upon the specific circumstances involved.

Our Department's perspective of wetlands restoration and creation, and its administration of wetlands resource management systems, has resulted in the preservation and maintenance of significant coastal wetlands. Wetlands enhancement projects on WMSs and refuges have demonstrated that a wide array of innovative marsh conservation strategies can be effective tools for conserving and restoring coastal wetlands and ensuring long-term production of fish and wildlife resources.

Marsh management position statements from other state and federal agencies will be published in future editions of this newsletter.

LSU-SCS Researchers Use Biotechnology Techniques To Study Coastal Land Loss In Louisiana

The LSU Agricultural Center and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) have recently undertaken a joint biotechnology study that may help address coastal land loss in Louisiana. Dr. Timothy Croughan of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station's (LAES) Rice Research Station and Michael Materne of the SCS are key investigators in the project.

Smooth cordgrass, a plant native to Louisiana marshes, has been identified by SCS as possessing excellent regeneration qualities and salinity tolerances that allow for fast growth in areas experiencing severe coastal erosion. It is a vigorous grass species that establishes quickly and spreads vegetatively, creating dense protective canopies and extensive root systems that help protect fragile marsh soils. Hand planting of

