

Water Resources Division Wetlands Program

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Natural Resource Program Center



Program Purpose:

Preserve the integrity of NPS wetland resources by establishing Servicewide wetland protection policies, acquiring wetland inventory and condition assessment data, and supporting wetland restoration and management projects.

Introduction

The National Park Service manages more than 16 million acres of wetlands across the United States. Common types of wetlands include marshes, swamps, bogs, mudflats, wet meadows, and similar areas. These highly productive, biologically diverse systems provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat, erosion control, ground water recharge, and water quality enhancement in our parks. Wetlands are also known to harbor at least 35% of federally listed threatened and endangered plant and animal species. In addition to these important ecological functions, the aesthetic appeal, recreational opportunities, and cultural landscape contributions provided by wetlands make them an integral part of the visitor experience.

Unfortunately, wetlands are a threatened resource on a national scale; fewer than half of the wetlands that existed in the lower 48 states at the time of European settlement still remain. Although many wetlands in the National Park System remain unaltered, others have been damaged by drainage, pollution, diking, filling, and related activities.

In response to these ongoing threats to wetland resources, the NPS selected “wetland health” as a primary goal in its Strategic Plan. The Service is addressing this goal by: 1) establishing strong Servicewide wetland protection policies and procedures; 2) acquiring baseline wetland inventory data; 3) assessing wetland condition or “health”; and 4) restoring degraded wetlands. The Water Resources Division’s Wetlands Program

plays important roles in each of these activities.

Wetland Policy and Guidance

The Wetlands Program is responsible for developing NPS wetland protection policy and guidance. Important accomplishments include preparation of *NPS Director’s*

One of the most important program functions is review and certification of wetland Statements of Findings (SOFs). These documents assure compliance with the required wetland protection sequence, including compensation for unavoidable wetland losses. For the 32 wetland SOFs that program staff certified during 2001-2004, impacts were held to a total of 56 acres and commitments to restore or acquire wetlands exceeded 122 acres. This compensation ratio of more than 2:1 assures consistency with the NPS no-net-loss of wetlands policy.



Cypress Dome, Everglades National Park

Order #77-1: Wetland Protection, Procedural Manual #77-1, and the wetland sections of NPS Management Policies 2001 (<http://data2.itc.nps.gov/npspolicy/index.cfm>). These documents established a “no-net-loss of wetlands” policy for the agency, and require a sequence of avoiding, mitigating, and compensating for wetland impacts caused by NPS activities.

Other related program responsibilities include review of proposed federal wetland laws and regulations and participation in interagency committees charged with coordinating wetland technical and policy issues.

Wetland Inventories

Wetland inventories are critical for resource management and facility planning in all NPS units, yet many parks continue

to operate without them. To speed the acquisition of baseline information about locations and types of wetlands on NPS lands, Wetlands Program staff developed a cost sharing agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to produce National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps for the National Park System. Since 1991, the Division has provided more than \$1.3 million (including matching money) for NWI mapping at 16 parks including Acadia National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, Glacier National Park, Great Basin National Park, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, and Yosemite National Park.

The Division has also provided over \$600,000 for higher resolution or “enhanced” wetland inventories tailored to specific needs of many NPS units, including North Cascades National Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Point Reyes National Seashore, Sequoia National Park, and Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve.

The Division’s wetland specialists provide program oversight, project coordination, and technical assistance for all of these inventory activities.

Wetland Restoration and Management

NPS Management Policies require the agency to protect wetlands from degradation and to restore natural wetland functions and values where human



activities have disturbed them. To meet these directives and the wetland health goals in the Strategic Plan, the Wetlands Program provides technical assistance and project funding to parks to assess and restore wetland-riparian health. Since 1991, the Division has provided more than \$1.9 million for wetland restoration and protection projects at Biscayne National Park, Buffalo National River, Cape Cod National Seashore, Denali National Park and Preserve, Pecos National Historical Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and at 49 other NPS units.

Wetlands Program staff provide assistance to parks in all phases of wetland restoration and condition assessment projects, including technical oversight and coordination of funded projects and design and implementation assistance for other projects. Recent examples of technical assistance in this area include wetland restorations at Pecos National Historical Park, Grand Teton National Park, and Moores Creek National Battlefield. Recent assistance for a riparian-wetland condition assessment led to publication of the report *Riparian System Recovery after Removal of Livestock from Santa Rosa Island, Channel Islands National Park, California*, which is available at www.nature.nps.gov/water/reports.htm.

Training

The goals of the Water Resources Division cannot be fully achieved without the transfer of technical and regulatory information to the field. Training in wetland management, protection, restoration and regulatory compliance is offered periodically in courses sponsored by NPS regional offices and in the *Natural Resources Fundamentals* course. The Wetlands Program also arranges for NPS

employees to take wetland-related courses offered by other federal agencies.

Public Awareness and Education

A color brochure titled *Wetlands in the National Parks* provides visitors with basic information on the types, functions, values, and origins of wetlands found throughout the National Park System. The brochure also addresses the role of the National Park Service in wetland management, restoration, interpretation, and education. To date, over 185,000 brochures have been distributed to the public at park visitor center displays, interpretive programs, public affairs offices, and through other federal and state agency programs.

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