



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

For Release July 21, 1989

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NATIONAL WETLANDS PRIORITY CONSERVATION PLAN AVAILABLE, PROVIDES ACQUISITION GUIDELINES FOR WETLANDS PROTECTION

The Department of the Interior today released a report establishing guidelines for identifying particularly important wetland areas. Entitled the "National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan," the report will help guide future wetlands acquisition efforts under the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

"This Plan will enable us to concentrate on acquiring the highest priority wetland areas first as part of our efforts to support the President's goal of no net loss of wetlands," Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan said in releasing the report.

The Plan, mandated by the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, was prepared by the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the states, and several environmental groups. It is designed to help Federal and state agencies identify and prioritize the wetlands types and locations warranting consideration for acquisition under the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The Plan also will help the private sector and local agencies identify wetlands suitable for protection through measures other than fee title land acquisition. Additionally, it will help states in their efforts to meet the Act's requirements to address wetlands as an important outdoor recreation resource in their Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans. The Act directs the states to develop a "wetlands component" to make state acquisition efforts consistent with those of Federal agencies.

According to the Plan, criteria to be considered in determining the value and priority of a wetland area include its function and value, historic wetland losses, and the threat of future losses of that wetland type. Threatened wetlands providing a high degree of public benefit, and those that represent rare or declining wetland types in an ecosystem, are to be given priority consideration under this plan.

Wetland areas in the United States have declined at an alarming rate--from an estimated 215 million acres at the time of the Nation's settlement to a current estimate of less than 95 million acres. Despite increased Federal, state, and local

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efforts to stem this decline, wetland losses continue throughout the United States at an estimated rate of approximately 450,000 acres per year. Among the many values of wetlands are outdoor recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, flood control, water purification and filtration, and groundwater recharge.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is used by Federal and state agencies to acquire lands for outdoor recreation and for endangered species. The fund is comprised of a portion of motorboat fuel taxes, a portion of receipts from outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing, proceeds from Federal surplus property sales, and certain user fees. The President has requested an addition of \$206 million for Federal land acquisition as part of the FY 90 budget package.

Copies of the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan are available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Endangered Species and Habitat Conservation, Branch of Special Projects, 400 Arlington Square, Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240, telephone: (703) 358-2201.

Wetlands Report and Mapping Projects Under Way

Other Interior Department activities called for by the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act include a two-volume Wetlands Loss Report for Congress and completion of the National Wetlands Inventory Maps. Volume One of the report, The Impact of Federal Programs on Wetlands, issued in late 1988, examines the impact of flood control, drainage, and small water projects in the Mississippi Delta; irrigation and Federal highway projects in the prairie potholes; and agriculture programs, subsidies, and tax incentives encouraging wetlands conversion, as well as conservation programs in both the Delta and the prairies.

Copies of this report may be obtained by writing: Wetlands Report, Office of Program Analysis, Room 4412, Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240.

The second volume is being prepared and will cover wetlands loss and degradation in other major problem areas of the country, such as coastal Louisiana and California's central valley.

Under the Service's National Wetlands Inventory Project to map the Nation's wetlands, 60 percent of the contiguous United States, 16 percent of Alaska, all of Hawaii, and all of Puerto Rico have been mapped. The Act calls for maps of all the contiguous states to be completed by 1998. For information on obtaining copies of completed maps, call 1-800-USA-MAPS. Those in area code 703 should call 648-5925.