

COLORADO WETLAND INVENTORY
U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1:100,000 MAP NARRATIVE REPORT
-LA JUNTA SW-

INTRODUCTION

In 1974, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service directed its Office of Biological Services to complete an inventory of the Nation's wetlands. As part of this overall objective, an effort began in September 1978, to delineate and classify photo-interpretable wetlands within the eastern five-sevenths of Colorado.

Wetland maps at 1:100,000 scale and wetland overlay maps at 1:24,000 scale are produced at National Wetland Inventory headquarters in St. Petersburg, Florida. Final Colorado wetland maps are available at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Regional Office located in Denver, Colorado. An integral part of all final wetland maps is the completion of narrative reports for each 1:100,000 quadrangle inventoried. The following narrative report provides both basic and specific data which aids the user in understanding not only the general area of the La Junta SW quadrangle but also representative details of its wetland habitat.

MAP PREPARATION

Contractor for this wetland inventory was Colorado Division of Wildlife, 317 West Prospect, P. O. Box 2287, Fort Collins, Colorado 80526. Richard Hopper was the contract officer. Photo-interpretation was done by the subcontractor, Colorado State Forest Service, Foothills Campus, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523. Photo-interpreters were Thomas Owens and Alexander Kosinski. Preparation of this narrative report was completed by Thomas Owens. Regional Wetland Coordinator was Charles Elliott, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver Federal Center, P. O. Box 25486, Denver, Colorado 80225.

Wetland delineation and classification for La Junta SW 1:100,000 quadrangle was done on 1:80,000 black and white aerial photographs taken in June and July 1975 and July 1976. Photography covered 100 percent of the quadrangle. Wetland classification was done in accordance with Cowardin, et al., 1979. Specific mapping conventions developed at National Wetland Inventory headquarters were used to assist in photo-interpretation. Field checking was done April 17, 1979.

Map users are cautioned that mapping with aerial photography has limitations. Wetlands are identified and classified through stereoscopic examination of photography on the basis of tone, texture, pattern, site, size, local ecology, and cultural patterns. Aerial photographs reflect conditions during the year and season they are taken. In addition, the 1:80,000

black and white photography used on this project was photographed for purposes other than wetland mapping. The small scale precludes delineating very small wetlands (less than 1/4-acre) and narrow linear wetlands (less than 15 feet wide). Black and white emulsion makes distinguishing between classes of vegetation (and nonvegetation) difficult. Some imagery was not photographed during the best season for wetland delineation and classification. If photographed too early or too late in the season, moist (dark) tones are not evident. The photography was four to five years old when it was interpreted and land use changes have occurred.

Any discrepancies noticed regarding wetland omissions, inclusions, or errors should be given to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Wetland Coordinator who is located in Denver, Colorado, and whose address is on the previous page.

Special Mapping Problems

This quadrangle has many small depressions scattered across the plains. There are two types of depressions: wetlands with emergent species and non-wetlands without emergents. Non-wetland depressions without emergents are often dark in tone and conspicuous on the imagery, which is due to slightly more moisture and lush vegetation than surrounding areas, but have no lighter toned ring. Depressions with wetland species (usually) have a lighter toned ring in them which shows the extent of inundation after rain. Depressions receive water from local summer thunderstorms, are dry most of the time, and are not part of drainage systems. These wetlands are locally important, but are often difficult to see on the imagery, unless flooded after a thunderstorm.

AREA DESCRIPTION

Bailey's Ecoregions

La Junta SW 1:100,000 quadrangle falls into one province in Bailey's Description of the Ecoregions of the United States, 1978, which classifies land into a hierarchical system based upon bioclimatic, geologic, and geomorphic criteria. The province is Great Plains-Shortgrass, Grama-Buffalo Grass Section (3113L) and is characterized by bunched short grasses, with scattered trees.

Hammond's Land-Surface Forms

La Junta SW falls into two Hammond Land-Surface Forms which systematically characterizes United States topography (Ecoregion and Land-Surface Form Map, 1975). Both forms are in the Interior Division (III). One form

is in the High Plains Subdivision (14) and is Smooth Plains (III-14A2c) which have more than 80 percent of the area gently sloping, local relief 100-300 feet, 50-75 percent of gentle slope on upland, and covers 3 percent of the quadrangle on the eastern edge. The second form, in the Rocky Mountain Piedmont Subdivision (13), is Tablelands with Considerable Relief (III-13B4c) characterized by 50-80 percent of the area gently sloping, local relief 500-1,000 feet, 50-75 percent of gentle slope on upland, and covers 97 percent of the quadrangle.

Hydrologic Mapping Units

Four hydrologic mapping units are found in La Junta SW (Hydrologic Unit Map of Colorado, 1974). Hydrologic units are part of an effort by the United States Geological Survey to provide a series of uniform, Nationally consistent maps which accurately delineate hydrographic boundaries for Federal and State water resource agencies. Units are designated by eight-digit numbers tied to a computer file (Catalog of Information on Water Data) which contains information on water data activities (Langford and Kapinas, 1979). All units are in the Arkansas-Red-White Region (11). 11020010 covers 50 percent in the west and 11040001 covers 35 percent in the southeastern corner. 11040004 covers 5 percent in the east and 11020013 covers 10 percent in the northeastern corner.

Geography

La Junta SW is a semi-arid quadrangle covered by plains, mesas, and canyons. Elevations are from 5,100-6,900 feet. Vegetation on the plains is short grass, prairie and cholla cactus with cottonwoods and willows along the streams. Pinon-juniper and oak are found in canyons and on the sides of mesas.

The quadrangle's major river is the Purgatoire which flows through the northwestern corner.

There are no towns on this quadrangle. The major economic activity is agriculture, with flood-irrigated fields along the Purgatoire, and dryland farming and ranching elsewhere.

Geology

The oldest rocks in La Junta SW are Triassic (180-225 million years ago) sandstone, silt stone, and limestone which represent coastal plain, dune, or delta deposits. Jurassic (135-180 million years ago) clay stone, sandstone, and mudstone were deposited when this area was submerged beneath a sea. These old rocks are found in canyons where erosion has exposed them. Cretaceous (70-135 million years ago) sandstone, shale, and limestone cover most of La Junta SW and were also deposited when eastern Colorado was under a sea. The Ogallala aquifer, an important water bearing

sandstone formation deposited in the Tertiary Period (3-70 million years ago), is found in the east. Basalt, tuff, breccia, and conglomerate from the volcanic Tertiary Period top Mesa de Maya and other mesas in the southern portion of the quadrangle. These igneous rocks are resistant to erosion and so the mesas rise over the surrounding plains. Quaternary (present to 3 million years ago) eolian deposits of dune sand, silt, and loess cover scattered areas in the east.

Soils

Soil is an important element of wetlands; it is one criterion used to define wetlands. "The substrate of wetlands is predominately undrained hydric soil" (Cowardin, et al.). The National Wetland Inventory, in cooperation with the U. S. Soil Conservation Service, is preparing a list of hydric soils to accompany the Cowardin, et al. wetland classification system.

Two major wetland soil types are found in La Junta SW: soils associated with drainages and soils associated with flood-irrigated meadows.

Wetland soils in drainages vary greatly. These soils range in texture from gravels and sands to loamy clays, in permeability from excessively drained to impermeable. Along the Purgatoire, which has a continuous flow of water ensured by reservoirs, wetland soils in drainages are generally flooded every year, have textures ranging from sandy to loamy, and have water tables less than 3 feet from the surface. They are used for pastures where possible. Native vegetation includes willows, cottonwoods, grasses, sedges, rushes, and in low pockets cattails. Where streams are intermittent, wetland soils are sandy and gravelly, unstable, excessively drained, subject to occasional flooding, and have low water tables. Native vegetation includes cottonwoods and annual forbs (Cipra, et al., 1978).

Flood-irrigated soils are found near streams or reservoirs where there is a ready supply of water. These soils may not have been wetland soils originally, but since they have been irrigated the water table is less than 3 feet from the surface and they support tall grasses, sedges, rushes and cattails in low pockets. Their texture ranges from clay (impermeable clay may produce saline soils) to sand (Cipra, et al.).

Climate

La Junta's climate is semi-arid and continental, with cool dry winters and warm, relatively dry, summers. Branson receives 15.8 inches of precipitation annually, 51 inches of this coming as snow. January's average maximum temperature is 45.7°F., average minimum is 21.0°F. July's average maximum temperature is 87.0°F., average minimum is 59.3°F. (Benci and McKee, 1977). The growing season is 165 days (SCS data, 1978).

WETLANDS

Community Description

Lacustrine System

No lakes are found in La Junta SW (information in this section comes from field notes taken April 17, 1980).

Riverine System

On the plains permanent streams are called lower perennial rivers (R2WZ). Lower perennial streams are characterized by slow-moving water, sand or mud bottoms, well developed flood plains, and low-dissolved oxygen concentrations.

A second stream type delineated is intermittent stream (R2SBW). This stream type is the most common stream type on the eastern plains where there is no permanent water source to supply moisture. Intermittent streams have a sandy substrate that is very well drained which is often scoured by flash floods. These streams flow after snow melt and after local summer thunderstorms.

Palustrine System

An important palustrine type is flood-irrigated meadow (PEMKC). Flood-irrigated meadows are found along streams and below springs. Ditches were built along the meadows' upper edges to allow water to flow from upper sources and spill out over the meadows. Standing water can be found for short periods early in the growing season; soil remains moist for extended periods through the growing season. Flood-irrigated meadows have not been cultivated and vegetation is native. Meadows are hayed or grazed by cattle. Vegetation includes Juncus arcticus, Eleocharis acicularis (species identification was according to Harrington, 1955; Fasset, 1957; Weber, 1976; Nelson, 1977), along with grasses and forbs. Many flood-irrigated fields are cultivated; these were not delineated.

Scrub/shrub and scrub/shrub-emergent areas are found along streams in this quadrangle (PSSW, PSSY, PSS/EMW, PSS/EMY). The water regime is dependent upon the amount of water flowing in the stream. In the western portion, where water is relatively plentiful, the water regime tends toward the seasonal regime. In the east, where moisture is scarce, water regimes are drier. Shrub species are Salix spp.; understory emergents include Juncus arcticus and Carex spp.

Forested wetlands (PFOW, PFOY, PFO/EMW, PFO/EMY, PFO/SSW, PFO/SSY) are found throughout the quadrangle along streams. The water regime situation is the same as that of scrub/shrub areas. Tree species include Populus sargentii and Salix spp. Understory species are the same as those mentioned with scrub/shrub-emergent areas.

On the plains numerous areas (PFLW, PEMW) are delineated which are small dugouts or impoundments constructed to supply water to livestock. These artificial wetlands are dependent upon local precipitation for their water supply and do not receive enough moisture to remain wet year-round. They often have saline soils. Vegetation consists of sparse stands of Distichlis stricta, Sporobolus airoides, forbs, and grasses.

Intermittent depressions are also delineated on the plains (PEMJ) that are the result of: wind deflation or blowouts, solution-subsidence (leaching water removes limestone and subsequent deflation), or differential compaction of Tertiary sediments of the plains (Thornbury, 1965). Delineated depressions are generally a few feet in depth and from 100 to several hundred feet across. There is not sufficient moisture in spring after snow melt to supply them with moisture; they are filled with water after local summer thunderstorms and hold water for a few days. They are dry most of the time, but do receive enough moisture to support stands of Eleocharis spp., as well as upland vegetation.

Many palustrine wetlands are cultivated, but remain wetlands. These are called Palustrine Farmed (PF).

Wetland Values

An important wetland value is flood-irrigated hay meadow production of hay for cattle (information in values section is from Hopper, 1980). Flood-irrigated hay meadows produce hay at a much higher rate than dryland meadows do. Wildlife also benefit from wet hay meadows: ducks nest in them, and shore birds use them for forage and cover.

Forested wetlands along streams are important wildlife habitat. Mule deer use these areas.

Canyons, with oak and pinon-juniper stands, provide habitat for wild turkey, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, and deer.

Intermittent depressions, streams, and windmills are important water sources for wildlife, such as antelope, scaled quail and livestock, in this semi-arid region.

Wetland Loss and Vulnerability

Wetland loss is not a major problem in La Junta SW. This quadrangle is sparsely populated and there were few wetlands originally.

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