

Chapter Title

Wetland drainage and restoration potential in the Lake Thompson watershed, South Dakota, USA

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Abstract

The glaciated Prairie Pothole Region is an area of about 770,000 km² located in the central portion of the North American Continent. Within the United States, the Prairie Pothole Region encompasses an area of 274,000 km². It extends from central Iowa north to the Canadian border and includes portions of the states of Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana (Figure 1). This region is characterized by small landscape depressions left behind as the glaciers receded from this part of the continent. These depressions, termed 'potholes', collect rainfall and snowmelt, forming small shallow wetlands and lakes.

These wetlands play a vital role in the maintenance of nearly all forms of prairie wildlife (Harmon 1970). Prairie potholes are commonly referred to as the 'duck factory of North America' because of their critical importance to breeding waterfowl (Crissey 1969; Bellrose 1979). Other values that pothole wetlands provide include water retention and forage production for livestock (Higgins et al. 1985), and economic and aesthetic values (Linder and Hubbard 1982).

This case study deals with the drainage of wetlands within the Lake Thompson Watershed of South Dakota. It is a history of unwise land use resulting in lost wetland values and functions and the attempts to regain those benefits through wetland restoration.

Publication Name

[Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands: Report of the Ramsar Convention Wise Use Project](#)

Publisher

[Ramsar Convention Bureau, Gland, Switzerland](#)

Link

http://www.ramsar.org/cda/ramsar/display/main/main.jsp?zn=ramsar&cp=1-30-101^21381_4000_0_#cs15