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A SURVEY OF THE WETLANDS INVENTORY AND ITS APPLICATION TO AGRICULTURAL DRAINAGE

A Presentation from the Committee on Water Use
Southeastern Section, Wildlife Society

By

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In accordance with a Water Use Committee assignment, a questionnaire was submitted to all states in the Southeastern Region. Following is a summary of the replies:

The twelve states reporting were equally divided as to whether they considered the Wetlands Inventory adequate for their needs.

Six states claimed to have wetlands that qualify as types 3, 4 and 5 but which were not listed in Circular 39.¹ Others indicated they were not certain where such types were, or that if there were any they would not be significant.

Seven states reported having no agreement or understanding with agricultural agencies (Soil Conservation Service and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service) regarding cooperative pre-drainage project studies of wetland types as listed in Circular 39. Some stated that agreements, either written, verbal or by liaison were in effect but most pertained primarily to Public Law 566 watershed projects.

Only the state of Florida reported that some proposed drainage projects were denied subsidies because of their being in wetland types as listed in Circular 39.

Drainage is reported to have been conducted under P. L. 566 despite protests in some states. Of interest is the fact that at least four states had not protested any agricultural drainage.

All states, two indicating it was not considered urgent, recommended updating the Wetlands Inventory with intent to supplement Circular 39 and amend legislation pertaining to it. Several reasons were cited, such as: to show the losses of wetlands in the past ten years, and to extend coverage of legislation to include other wetland types. Types of particular interest were one and seven, (Bottomland Hardwoods and Wooded Swamps) which are the more important types in the Southeast and which constitute the major types subjected to destruction by agricultural drainage in the Southeast.

Regarding the acreage involved in A. C. P. Practice "C-9" (Open Ditch Drainage): In the year 1962 there were 612,663 acres serviced by this practice in the Southeast. Nationwide this practice involved 1,026,717 acres at a cost of \$5,431,362.²

Acreage by states is as listed for the year 1962.³

Alabama	21,543	Kentucky	9,876
Arkansas	82,106	Maryland	8,127
Florida	24,802	Missouri	80,642
Georgia	14,373	North Carolina	42,859
Louisiana	73,903	Mississippi	160,298
Oklahoma	10,556	South Carolina	65,937
Tennessee	7,677	Virginia	9,964

The Wetlands Inventory was conducted about ten years ago. There is no question of its being a major accomplishment and the basis for current recognition of the importance of wetlands to the nation. The above mentioned Circular 39 is a summary of the inventory that was published in 1956. As a summary, much detail was omitted as stated in a letter: "The plates at the back of this circular (39) do not show these wetland types (3 and 5) as occurring in Kentucky because no large tracts were found there. However, the Wetlands Survey—prepared in 1954, of which you have a copy, does report them as present."⁴

Public Law 87-879, dated October 24, 1962 regarding the Agricultural Conservation Program provided "That no portion of the funds for the 1963 program may be utilized to provide financial or technical assistance for drainage on wetlands now designated as Wetland Types 3 (III), 4 (IV), and 5 (V) in United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service Circular 39, Wetlands of the United States, 1956:"

Quite probably it was not anticipated that such a law would be based on the circular rather than on the inventory proper; and unless there are some means for including the original inventory under the terms of the law, there is no protection for the "smaller areas" that were omitted from the circular.

The result is that some wetlands have been arbitrarily denied protection because of their size, without regard to their importance to the local area or state. Is it possible to update or supplement the circular in some manner, thus reclaiming the benefit of the law for wetlands currently being omitted?

It is seen how Circular 39 is inadequate due to the omissions. Now it should be pointed out how the law (87-879) is inadequate: In the first place, as is the circular, it is slanted toward waterfowl which are only as important as the next wetland species. It is restricted to wetland types 3, 4 and 5 which, except for the state of Florida, are considered a minor type in the southeast. It applies to A.C.P. drainage subsidies only and does not apply to P. L. 566 Watershed Project drainage; which is also financed by agricultural funds and is considered in some areas to be more detrimental to wetlands habitat.

To realize optimum benefits, the law should include wetland types in accordance to their importance on a local needs basis as well as by state and national needs. In the southeast there are thousands of acres of type 1 and 7 wetlands (Bottomland Hardwoods and Wooded Swamps) that are being subjected to drainage and clearing. These types are virtually limited to the southeast. Yet, except for the acreage that conservation agencies may purchase or lease, these types are afforded no protection. In essence, some of the wetland types that are included in the law are not protected because they were "too small" to be included in Circular 39. Other wetland types that need some protection were not included in the law.

One further observation should be reported here. There has been no known concerted effort to make use of or expand this anti-drainage law. It would seem likely that the Fish and Wildlife Service would have at once appreciated the omissions and initiated some provisions for maximum implementation of the law where applicable. It would also seem that the Soil Conservation Service, which is given the technical "responsibility for determining whether proposed drainage practices will drain types 3, 4 and 5 wetlands"⁵ would have requested assistance of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the state wildlife agencies to delineate the wetland areas in question. When the above did not materialize, it would seem that the state agencies would request an understanding of both the above mentioned services based on the law to protect their wetland areas. Except in the state of Florida, there is no report of the law being used in the southeast.

According to the plates in Circular 39, the Southeast, excluding the state of Florida, has an estimated 300,000 acres in Type 5 alone, for which technical and financial drainage subsidies have been prohibited by law.

The law is now two years old and it is based on a publication eight years old. There is still the immediate need for the agencies involved to combine efforts and utilize P. L. 87-879 as it was intended.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Wetlands Of The United States/Their Extent And Their Value To Waterfowl and Other Wildlife 1956. U.S.D.I. Fish and Wildlife Service Circular 39.
2. Agricultural Conservation Program/Statistical Summary, 1962. U.S.D.A.A.S.C.S. Washington, D. C. p. 4.
3. Agricultural Conservation Program/Summary By States 1962. U.S.D.A.A.S.C.S. Washington, D. C. pp. 6-61.
4. Interdepartmental correspondence: U.S.F. & W.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife to Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. Dated February 20, 1963.
5. Interdepartmental correspondence: U.S.F. & W.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife to Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. Dated March 8, 1963.

WATER USE COMMITTEE

Southeast Section Wildlife Society

Summary Report, 1964

HAROLD E. ALEXANDER, *Chairman**

Vast changes in rivers, streams, marshes and wetlands types in the U. S. and in the southeastern states have been the result of water developments of many types, which have altered the age-old environments in which fish, wildlife and associated organisms evolved over centuries of time, and to which they became adapted. These develop-

*Other Committee members are: Ted Ford, Dan Russell, Spencer Smith, Bob Klant, Max Summers & Robert Smith. Members of Watershed Sub-Committee: Ralph H. Allen, Jr., Bob Klant, Howard D. Zeller, Robert Hornsby, Max Summers, Kenneth Hicks, Jack Bayless, Robert Smith, Farrell Copelin & Jack M. Hoffman.