

The Water Resources Division Wetlands Program

April 1997

Introduction

The National Park Service manages more than 16 million acres of wetlands, and is therefore a key participant in the preservation, restoration, and management of wetland habitats across the United States. Common types of wetlands include swamps, bogs, marshes, mudflats, shallow ponds, wet meadows, and similar areas. These highly productive, biologically diverse systems provide fish and wildlife habitat, erosion control, stream flow maintenance, water quality enhancement, recreational opportunities, and many other important functions. They are also known to harbor at least 35% of the federally listed threatened and endangered plant and animal species. However, wetlands are a threatened resource; 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 National Park System units are in essentially pristine condition, others have been damaged by drainage, pollution, diking, filling, and related activities. In 1991, the National Park Service initiated a Servicewide program designed to enhance its wetland protection, restoration, inventory, applied research, and education efforts. This program is implemented via project funding and technical assistance from the Service's Water Resources Division.

Wetland Inventories

Wetland inventories are critical for resource management and facility planning in all National Park System units, yet some units continue to operate without them. To speed the acquisition of



Cypress Dome, Everglades National Park

basic information about the locations and types of wetlands in its care, the National Park Service has joined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a 50:50 cost sharing agreement to produce National Wetland Inventory maps for the National Park System. During 1991-1996, the Water Resources Division provided more than \$500,000 (including matching money from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) for wetland inventories at Acadia National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, Glacier National Park, Great Basin National Park, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, and several other units.

In addition to the inventories by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$274,000 were spent during 1991-1996 for higher resolution inventories tailored to specific needs of several units, including Capitol Reef National Park, Glen Canyon Na-

tional Recreation Area, North Cascades National Park, Pecos National Monument, and Sequoia National Park.

Restoration and Protection of Wetlands

The National Park Service mandates the protection of wetlands from degradation and the restoration of natural wetland functions and values where they have been disturbed by human activities. During 1991-1996, the Water Resources Division wetlands program provided \$597,000 for wetland restoration and protection projects. Several smaller wetlands were restored and seed money was provided for larger restoration projects at Cape Cod National Seashore, Denali National Park and Preserve, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Rocky Mountain National Park, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and other units.

Technical Assistance

The Water Resources Division places a high priority on providing technical assistance on wetland issues to units of the National Park System. Assistance includes impact assessments, restorations, evaluations of wetland functions, wetland delineations, regulatory analyses, and preparation of technical manuals and reports about wetlands. Some specific examples of technical assistance include analysis of wetland impacts at Cape Lookout National Seashore, resolution of an alleged Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.) violation at John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, quantification of drainage effects of a proposed housing development on wetlands at Gulf Islands National Seashore, and wetland restorations at Dinosaur National Monument, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, and Moores Creek National Battlefield.

Service-wide technical assistance has included development of wetland policy and guidance, analyses of effects of proposed federal wetland laws and regulations, and participation in interagency committees charged with coordination of wetland technical and policy issues.

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, and regulatory compliance is offered in courses sponsored by National Park Service regional offices and in the *Natural Resources Fundamentals Course* at the Service's Albright Training Center. The Water Resources Division periodically sponsors courses in wetland delineation, classification, regulatory compliance, and related topics, and also arranges for placement of National Park Service employees in similar courses offered by other federal agencies. In addition, Water Resources Division staff are developing instruction modules for training in several wetland topics.

Public Awareness and Education

A full-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, research, restoration, interpretation, and education. To date, approximately 100,000 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. The Water Resources Division is seeking funding for a third printing of this popular brochure.

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Suggested Web Links

Wetland Links

<http://aapg.geol.lsu.edu:8081/wetland.htm>

National Wetland Inventory

<http://www.nwi.fws.gov/data.html>

Society of Wetland Scientists Links to Wetland Web Sites

<http://www.sws.org/wetlandweblinks.html>

Hydric Soils of the United States (Natural Resources Conservation Service)

<http://www.statlab.iastate.edu/soils/hydric/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds

<http://www.epa.gov/owow/wtr1/general/>

Wetlands in the National Parks (brochure text only)

<http://aqsun.aqd.nps.gov/natnet/wrd/#WETBRO>



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