

Oregon Wetlands Priority Plan



Introduction

The Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-645) requires each state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan to include a component that identifies wetlands as a priority concern within the state. This Appendix describes a brief history of wetland protection in Oregon, current wetland protection strategies, and a priority listing of regions/watersheds for wetland restoration/ acquisition.

Background

In the early days settlers in Oregon, and in the rest of the country, viewed wetlands as an impediment to efficient development. Much of the conversion of wetlands was a result of public policies that provided public funding and technical assistance to drain and dike wetlands, as well as incentives to purchase cheap or free public "swampland" for conversion to "productive" use. The Swamp Land Acts of 1849, 1850, and 1860 provided public domain wetlands to any individuals who would drain them and put them to "productive" use. As a result, approximately 38 percent of Oregon's historic wetlands have been converted to agricultural, commercial, and other uses (Dahl, 1990).

In recent decades, we have learned much more about wetlands and the important functions they provide to society including:

- flood control and storm damage protection, which prevent loss of life and property;
- essential spawning, rearing, feeding, nesting and wintering habitats for a major portion of this state's fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species;
- essential habitat for waterfowl using the Pacific Flyway and for the rearing of salmon and other anadromous and resident fish;
- water quality improvement through absorption and filtration of sediments, nutrients, metals, and toxic materials that would otherwise degrade groundwater or the water quality of adjacent rivers, lakes, and estuaries; and
- significant opportunity for public recreation, environmental and ecological research, education, scenic diversity, and aesthetic value as open space.

Changes in public policy have attempted to reverse the trend of wetland conversion and to redirect regulatory, landowner incentive, and management efforts. The Fill Law, enacted by the Oregon Legislature in 1971, found that "unregulated filling in the waters of the state for any purpose may result in interfering with or injuring public navigation, fishery and recreational uses of the waters." During 1973, Oregonians expressed their concern about protecting wetlands in landmark land-use regulations; Statewide Planning Goals 5, 15, 16, and 17 all specifically mention wetland resources. Then, in 1989, the Oregon Legislature passed a comprehensive wetland bill that included several policies stressing the *importance* of wetlands (ORS 196.668 and 196.672). The legislation focused on integrating local wetland planning and state wetland permitting under the Removal-Fill Law, development of a statewide wetlands inventory, a Wetland Conservation Plan option for local governments to meet state-mandated wetland planning requirements, and identification of wetland restoration opportunities.

Strategic planning through the statewide land-use planning process has provided substantial protection for more than 99 percent of Oregon's remaining tidal marshes. The strategy used to manage Oregon's estuaries was the application of an estuary classification system and a goal to

maintain diversity of systems. The strategy identified estuarine management units for protection, conservation, or development (DLCD, 1987; Bella, 1974). Oregon's estuarine planning approach has successfully protected the public trust held in intertidal and subtidal lands. However, freshwater wetlands pose a significantly greater challenge for conservation.

Oregon's Wetland Conservation Strategy

In the state of Oregon, the long-term protection and management of the state's wetland resources is addressed through both regulatory and non-regulatory measures including:

- Providing protection of wetlands and restoration sites;
- Conserving and managing functions and values of wetlands;
- Encouraging restoration of wetlands for watershed, water quality and /or wildlife objectives, while accommodating necessary economic activities; and
- Managing Oregon's wetlands through partnerships that improve communication, cooperation and consistency among agencies, organizations and the public.

Towards this end, the Oregon Division of State Lands has developed a report entitled, "Oregon's Wetland Conservation Strategy, Issue Analysis, Public Discussions and Recommendations" (March 1995). The report was funded by a grant from Region 10, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for Wetland Program Enhancement and was adopted as an agency strategic plan by the State Land Board. It was written with the assistance and guidance of various federal, state, and local agencies and interest groups including:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Oregon Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Soil Conservation Service
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Oregon Parks & Recreation Department
- Bureau of Land Management
- Oregon Water Resources Department
- U.S. Forest Service
- Oregon Department of Energy
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- National Wildlife Federation

The report suggests direction and establishes priorities for the Oregon Wetland Conservation Strategy, an integrated state wetland program. The recommendations in the report are aimed toward improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Oregon's effort to conserve, restore, and protect wetlands, recognizing that many wetlands occur on private property. The goal of the Strategy is to:

"Ensure the long-term protection and management of the state's wetland resources through both regulatory and non-regulatory measures by a) providing protection of wetlands and restoration sites, b) conserving and managing functions, values, and acreage of wetlands, and c) encouraging restoration of wetlands for watershed, water quality, and/or wildlife objectives, while accommodating necessary economic activities. Also, to manage Oregon's wetlands through partnerships which improve education, communication, cooperation, and consistency among agencies, organizations, and the public."

Implementation of the Oregon Wetland Conservation Strategy will assist in attaining the Oregon Progress Board's Benchmark of no-net loss of freshwater wetland acreage and net increase of estuarine wetland acreage.

Priority Regions/Watersheds for Wetland Restoration/Acquisition

As part of the Wetland Conservation Strategy's planning process, a list of high-priority wetland restoration basins was proposed. The following table lists priority areas for wetland restoration/acquisition, based on ecological, political, and economic feasibility factors.

Table L.1. Priority Regions/Watersheds for Wetland Restoration/Acquisition

| Area | Rationale/Criteria |
|---|--|
| Coastal Estuaries: | Historic loss, ease of restoration with predicted high success rates. |
| Columbia River Estuary | Rare habitats, staging and wintering areas, raptors, etc. (Blind Slough). |
| Coastal Freshwater Wetlands | Loss of habitat, rapidly urbanizing areas (Gearhart Bog, Neskowin Marsh). |
| Floodplain Features of Lower Columbia River | Diminished by cessation of floods from dams and diking (shallow lakes, and willow flats of Sauvie and Government islands). |
| | |
| Rapidly Urbanizing Areas | Great historic loss, threat to resource. |
| | |
| Interior Valleys: | |
| Willamette Valley | Historic loss, land owner interest, proximity to development. |
| Wet Prairie & Forested Wetlands | |
| Willamette Greenway | Greatest historical loss, rapidly urbanizing areas, water quality issues, rare plant species and wet meadow and shrub habitat types. |
| Rogue Valley | Great historical loss, rapidly urbanizing areas, water quality issues. Threatened and Endangered species, rare plant species, and vernal pool habitat (highest priority area—Agate Desert). |
| Umpqua Valley | Great historical loss, rapidly urbanizing area, water quality issues. Rare plant species and wet grassland habitat (highest priority area—Sutherland). |
| Klamath Basin | Endangered fish (lost river and short nose sucker), Pacific flyway, water quality and quantity problems, loss of habitat, staging and wintering areas for raptors, staging area for waterfowl and shorebirds, fur bearers. |
| | |
| Oregon High Desert | |
| | |
| Closed Basin Wetlands | |
| Warner Basin | Important flyway stopover, rare fish and plant species, and rare habitat types. |
| Malheur Basin | Important flyway stopover, rare fish and plant species, and rare habitat types. |

Table L.1. Priority Regions/Watersheds for Wetland Restoration/Acquisition (Cont.)

| Area | Rationale/Criteria |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Serpentine Bogs | Rare habitat with high number of rare plant species. Impacts from historic and current mining and water diversion. Mining pressure is increasing. |
| EPA Priority Basins | Water quality problems. |
| Tier 1 | Lots of data, research. |
| Tillamook Bay | |
| Willamette River | |
| Grand Ronde | |
| Tier II | Moderate amount of data, research. |
| John Day | |
| Coos and Coquille River Bays | |
| Tier III | Candidates—more information needed. |
| NOMINATED— Illinois, South Umpqua | |
| DEQ Critical Basins | Water quality problems. |
| Tualatin | |
| Garrison Lake | |
| Bear Creek | |
| Clear Lake | |
| Yamhill River | |
| Columbia River | |
| Willamette River | |
| Pudding River | |
| Coquille River/Estuary | |
| Klamath River | |
| Columbia Slough | |
| Grande Ronde River | |
| South Umpqua River | |
| Rickreall Creek | |
| Umatilla River | |
| Riparian Areas | |
| John Day River | Salmon and steelhead, water quality and quantity, loss of riparian community types. |
| Grande Ronde | Salmon and steelhead, water quality and quantity, loss of riparian community types. |
| Sycan River | Important wetland habitat, tributary to Klamath River, water quality and quantity issues. |
| Crooked River | |
| Upper Deschutes | |
| Grande Ronde | |

Restoration Program Recommendations

Building on one of the recommendations in the Wetland Conservation Strategy, the Division of State Lands obtained EPA funding to develop a restoration strategy for Oregon. As with the conservation strategy, the effort involved facilitated workshops with numerous interest groups. The final report, Recommendations for a Nonregulatory Wetland Restoration Program for Oregon, was endorsed by the State Land Board and subsequently published by Oregon Sea Grant (ORES-U-98-001).

The report outlines 10 specific recommendations that are accompanied by specific implementation actions. Several of the recommendations address setting priorities for restoration and protection.

Coastal Bog Priority Wetlands

Recently, the Oregon Natural Heritage Program completed an updated inventory of low-elevation Sphagnum mires in Western Oregon (December 2001, unpublished report). The report describes 26 plant associations in 43 sites. The site inventory includes description, location, rare elements, conservation significance, ownership and conservation status (protected or not protected). Unprotected sites with high conservation significance are priorities for acquisition.

Oregon's Greatest Wetlands Project

Oregon's Greatest Wetlands project is in progress and should provide new statewide acquisition priority information. This project is led by The Wetlands Conservatory, headquartered in Tualatin, Oregon, and is funded by a combination of federal (EPA) and state (OWEB) funds.

Joint Venture Implementation Plans

The Oregon Joint Venture, a coalition of groups and agencies involved in cooperative efforts to protect and restore important wetland habitats for native fish and wildlife, is developing implementation plans that identify specific high priority sites for restoration and/or protection. For example, the Willamette Valley plan (in final draft form) includes 15 target areas (see Table L.2). Similarly, the Klamath Basin plan identifies 15 target areas within Oregon (see Table L.3). These target areas are described in detail in the implementation plans.

Table L.2. Habitat Conservation Objectives (in acres) For Target Areas in the Willamette Valley*

| Target Areas | Protect (acres) | Restore (acres) | Wetland/ Floodplain/ Riparian (acres) | Oak Savanna & Woodland/ Grassland (acres) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| Willamette Forks | 3,000 | 4,000 | 3,000 | 1,000 |
| West Eugene-Long Tom | 2,500 | 4,000 | 2,500 | 1,500 |
| McKenzie Confluence | 4,000 | 3,000 | 2,500 | 1,500 |
| Mid-Willamette Floodplain | 20,000 | 20,000 | 20,000 | 0 |
| Coburg Hills | 3,000 | 3,000 | 500 | 2,500 |
| Muddy Creek | 1,500 | 2,500 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Marys River | 2,500 | 2,500 | 1,000 | 2,000 |
| Calapooia River | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 0 |
| Buena Vista | 4,500 | 4,500 | 3,500 | 1,000 |
| North Santiam Flats | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 0 |
| Baskett Slough | 2,500 | 2,500 | 1,000 | 1,500 |
| South Yamhill | 5,000 | 5,000 | 3,000 | 2,000 |
| Lake Labish-Pudding River | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 0 |
| Mission-Champoeg Bottoms | 10,000 | 10,000 | 10,000 | 0 |
| Tualatin Basin | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 | 0 |
| Total | 68,500 | 71,000 | 58,000 | 14,000 |

* From the Pacific Coast Joint Venture Implementation Plan for the Willamette Valley (July 2002 Draft).

Table L.3. Wetland habitat objectives (in acres) for Target Areas in the Klamath Basin**

| Oregon Target Areas | Protect (acres) | Restore (acres) | Enhance (acres) |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Aspen, Buck, Long and Round Lakes | 3,000 | 20 | 0 |
| Hog and Jack Creeks, Winema NF | 8,300 | 5,710 | 0 |
| Klamath Marsh NWR | 20,000 | 20,000 | 0 |
| Klamath River Floodplain | 1,000 | 1,000 | 500 |
| Klamath Wildlife Area | 1,000 | 0 | 1,850 |
| Langell, Poe, Swan Lake, & Yonna Valleys | 35,000 | 35,000 | 0 |
| Sprague River & Lower Sycan River | 15,000 | 16,000 | 3,000 |
| Spring Lake Valley | 1,500 | 0 | 0 |
| Sycan Marsh | 10,100 | 17,250 | 2,700 |
| Upper Klamath Lake | 5,000 | 5,000 | 0 |
| Upper Klamath NWR | 5,000 | 5,000 | 0 |
| Upper Williamson River | 8,400 | 8,445 | 0 |
| Williamson River Delta | 0 | 6,300 | 0 |
| Wood River Valley | 8,400 | 6,000 | 0 |
| Wood River Wetland | 0 | 3,000 | 400 |

** From the Joint Venture Klamath Basin Implementation Plan (March 2001 Draft).