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Natural Resource Information
Division



Fact Sheet

Water Resources Division Wetland Program

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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 habitats, control erosion, maintain stream flow, enhance water quality, accommodate recreation, and perform many other important functions. They also 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 Water Resources Division of the National Park Service initiated a new program designed to enhance its wetland protection, restoration, inventory, applied research, and education. This program is implemented primarily with project funding and technical assistance from the 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 basic information about the locations and types of wetlands in its care, the National Park Service entered a 50:50 cost sharing agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to produce National Wetland Inventory maps for the National Park System. During 1991-96, the Water Resources Division provided more than \$500,000 (including matching money from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) for wetland inventories on Blue Ridge Parkway and in Acadia National Park, 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 1991-96 for higher resolution inventories, tailored to specific needs of several units including Capitol Reef National Park, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, North Cascades National Park, Pecos National Monument, and Sequoia National Park.

Restoration and Protection of Wetlands

The National Park Service is mandated to protect wetlands from degradation and to restore natural wetland functions and values where they have been disturbed by human activities (National Park Service Organic Act; 16 U.S.C. 1 et seq. [1988], Aug. 25, 1916, ch. 408, 39 Stat. 535). During 1991-96, the Water Resources Division wetlands program provided \$597,000 for wetland

restoration and protection. Several smaller wetlands were restored and seed money was provided for larger restorations on Cape Cod National Seashore and in 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 with 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 on Cape Lookout National Seashore, resolution of an alleged Clean Water Act (Federal Water Pollution Control Act; 33 U.S.C. 1251-1376 [1988], June 30, 1948, ch. 758, 62 Stat. 1155 as amended) violation on the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, quantification of drainage effects from a proposed housing development on wetlands on Gulf Islands National Seashore, and wetland restorations at Dinosaur National Monument, on the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, and on Moores Creek National Battlefield.

Servicewide 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 field area offices and in the *Natural Resources Fundamentals* course at the Albright Training Center. The Water Resources Division periodically sponsors courses in wetland delineation, classification, regulatory compliance, and related topics and also arranges

placement of National Park Service employees in similar courses by other federal agencies. In addition, the Water Resources Division staff is 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 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 and by interpretive programs, public affairs offices, and 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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Muskrat (Ondatra zibethicus) in emergent wetland.

Artwork by Jennifer Phoemaker.