



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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FIRST-TIME WETLANDS CONSERVATION AWARDS PRESENTED TO SIX STATES

To acknowledge exemplary state programs for wetlands conservation, restoration, and enhancement, the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has, for the first time, awarded State Wetlands Conservation Awards.

Six states have been chosen to receive the new award for their long-term records in wetlands conservation. The initial recipients are California, Louisiana, Minnesota, New York, North Dakota, and Texas. The governor of each state will receive a plaque in recognition of that office's support of, and cooperation with, state wetlands programs, and the six states' wildlife agencies will receive special citations for their roles.

The disappearance of America's wetlands is a nationwide problem with enormous implications for wildlife resources. Wetlands are essential habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife species. They also help control flooding and soil erosion, recharge groundwater, and filter pollutants.

Alarmed over the continuing loss of wetlands and a related decline in populations of wetland species such as ducks and other migratory birds, President Bush issued a national challenge of "no net loss of wetlands." Many states had, however, recognized the severity of the problem and developed ways to help stem wetland losses long before the plight of wetlands received national attention. This awards program was established to recognize those invaluable efforts undertaken at the state level.

The awards will be presented on October 1 in Washington, DC, in a ceremony held as part of the National Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Conference sponsored by the Service's Federal Aid Program. Service Director John Turner praised each state's commitment to wetlands restoration and preservation.

"The outstanding accomplishments we are honoring were achieved through foresight, perseverance, and plain hard work. Not only did these states realize the severe threat to their wetlands, but through dedication and creativity, they set about to stem the loss of vital ecosystems through the development of innovative programs," Turner said.



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Facts

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EXAMPLES OF THE AWARD-WINNING STATE PROGRAMS

California

With continuing support from the governor's office, the California Department of Fish and Game has adopted an agency policy of no net loss of wetlands on any development project. Legislation was enacted creating sources of substantial funding earmarked for wetland acquisition and preservation. In addition, a Senate Resolution has established the goal of increasing state wetlands 50 percent by the year 2000.

At present, California's resource agencies own and manage more than 60,400 acres of wetlands and additional acreage is managed through various cooperative agreements. Approximately \$1.7 million of Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson/Wallop Breaux funds are used annually for this purpose.

Louisiana

Primarily through oil and gas royalties, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has, since 1968, invested nearly \$70 million to acquire more than 252,000 acres of forested wetlands and 78,000 acres of coastal marsh. Much of the acquisition has been to prevent conversion of irreplaceable wetlands to croplands.

On its own land holdings, the department has been aggressive in converting acquired croplands back to wetlands. It has also pioneered methods of wetlands restoration in the Mississippi River Delta by installing sediment fences to develop new areas of marsh. The state has made extensive use of Pittman-Robertson funding, as well as Ducks Unlimited, Inc.'s "Matching Aid to Restore State Habitat (MARSH)" program. Louisiana has established a "Coastal Restoration Trust Fund" and its governor has taken steps to develop and implement a plan

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to use the funds for wetlands. The state's Priority Wetlands Conservation Plan earned a 1988 "Take Pride in America" award.

Minnesota

The Minnesota legislature has approved three noteworthy state programs for wetlands conservation. Under "The Save Minnesota's Wetlands" program, enacted in 1951, Minnesota has acquired 650,000 acres of wetlands and associated uplands. In 1979, the state legislature passed the Protected Waters Inventory to delineate all wetlands on a county-by-county basis. By 1984, this mapping effort was completed and nearly 5 million acres of basins were given legal protection. "Reinvest in Minnesota" is a 1986 law that created a continuing program for obtaining wetland easements. Currently, the pending "Wetlands Heritage Act of 1990," the intent of which is to further protect and enhance the state's wetlands resources, demonstrates a continuing commitment by the state's lawmakers and citizens.

New York

The New York State Division of Fish and Wildlife has been actively involved in wetlands preservation and restoration for nearly 50 years and currently manages 45,000 acres of wetlands and 7,200 acres of open water. Much of this land was acquired through Federal Aid funding. Perhaps even more impressive have been the state's accomplishments resulting from wetlands regulation. Literally thousands of development projects (private and government) have been effectively monitored to ensure wetlands protection.

New York has also pioneered a unique and innovative approach to wetlands management utilizing beavers. By regulating harvests, the state has allowed beavers to create many acres of wetlands while at the same time keeping that population in check. In addition, over the past two decades, the governor's office has shown its continuing dedication by supporting multi-million-dollar land acquisition bond programs with wetlands as a priority.

North Dakota

North Dakota has been actively involved in wetlands conservation since 1938, and, in 1987, its legislature enacted landmark legislation establishing a statewide policy of no-net-loss of wetlands. This bill, the first of its kind in the Nation, was the prototype for President Bush's challenge.

In addition, because of the state's critical geographic position, the Game and Fish Department has utilized several different programs to secure wetlands habitat. Using Pittman-Robertson funds, the state has acquired 28,500 acres of wetlands for waterfowl management. The Interest Money Program, which diverts interest generated by the Game and Fish Department's operating budget into a fund to restore and enhance habitat for resident and migratory wildlife, the state Habitat Stamp Program, begun in 1981, and the 1983 state Water Bank Program have resulted in the preservation of many thousands of acres of wetlands.

Texas

The passage of the Texas Waterfowl Stamp Act in 1981 signalled the beginning of an aggressive state campaign to preserve wetlands. Since that time, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has committed more than \$13.3 million (\$4.6 million of which is Pittman-Robertson money) to wetland preservation and development.

By the end of 1991, acquisition or contractual commitments will have been completed for more than 88,000 acres. Texas has participated in seven Ducks Unlimited MARSH projects and is a partner in three joint venture projects of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.