

Good, James W., and Calvin B. Sawyer. *Recommendations for a Nonregulatory Wetland Restoration Program*. Corvallis, OR: Oregon Sea Grant, 1998. (Reviewed by Kyle Walker)

This 1998 report provides a broad overview of problems facing Oregon's wetlands, and then provides ten recommendations to remediate the situation. Instead of increasing further regulation of land uses to protect wetlands, the authors recommend a nonregulatory program that would encourage coordination among interested parties. The report begins with an explanation of wetland restoration, which is described as “the return of a former or degraded ecosystem to a close approximation of its condition prior to disturbance.” The authors follow with a number of reasons why Oregon needs a wetlands restoration policy, including assertions that current regulatory programs are not enough to stop wetland loss, current watershed restoration programs do not consider wetlands, and wetland losses are difficult to document.

The rest of the report details the authors' ten recommendations. Within each section, the authors evaluate each recommendation with analyses of research findings and the actions that would have to be taken to implement the plan. These recommendations, in brief, include:

- Establish a pro-active, partnership-based, nonregulatory wetland restoration program for Oregon. This would include two goals: a long-term net gain of wetland area and functions, and the establishment of partnerships that would make public-private incentives and landowner cooperation the primary methods for wetland restoration.
- Development of a “hydrogeomorphic functional assessment method” in order to assess wetland restoration planning. This involves wetland classification based on geomorphic setting, water source and transport vector, and hydrodynamics.
- In order to assess wetland restoration, the authors recommend an integrated framework at the watershed, ecoregion, and project site scales.
- Full integration of wetland restoration into Oregon's watershed enhancement programs.
- Removal of regulatory, land use, and tax barriers to nonregulatory wetland restoration.
- An increase in incentives for nonregulatory wetland restoration on private land. The authors propose a combination of financial and technical assistance, tax benefits, and education.
- Restoration of former wetlands on public lands. This recommendation emphasizes collaboration in order to control costs.
- Establishment of a “Wetland Restoration Site Inventory.” Such an inventory would serve as a data base for restoration projects, both public and private.

- Integration of regional wetland restoration priorities into the wetland compensatory mitigation process.
- Integration of wetland restoration into Oregon land use and wetland conservation planning programs.

Critique

Much talk about wetland restoration involves the implementation of laws to protect our wetlands. However, according to this report and other reports that I have read, those regulations are not always effective. Taking this into account, the ideas that the authors express in this report seem quite practical. Rather than creating more and more laws that often cannot cover the scope of wetland loss, the authors try to address the roots of the problem with nonregulatory approaches. For example, the authors emphasize the integration of wetland restoration into already existing programs like watershed enhancement, compensatory mitigation, and land use/conservation programs. These integrated programs would then consider wetland restoration from the beginning and would make decisions with wetland restoration already in mind.

The authors' proposal of a Wetland Restoration Site Inventory Database would work quite well with these integrations, as land use and watershed enhancement programs could have access to important wetland restoration data.

Furthermore, the authors emphasize cooperation among multiple levels of interested groups, and financial incentives for wetland enhancement. These recommendations appear very practical and potentially effective. According to the Oregon Department of State Lands (see “Shaich, J.A. Wetland Regulatory Compliance in the Willamette Valley, Oregon: 1982 to 1994” or my review of that document), wetland loss due to agriculture is very difficult to regulate. A nonregulatory program that would encourage education, tax breaks, and cooperation between agricultural and wetlands interests could have much more of an impact than prior regulation has had. I found all of the recommendations in this report insightful and potentially very effective.

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