



WETLANDS **(1992, R2000, R2001, R2007)**

Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects recognizes the critical and functional role of wetlands as essential to the quality of life and the well being of the earth's ecological systems. The Society supports the immediate protection, conservation, rehabilitation and enhancement of wetland resources, and accordingly, the Society supports governmental policies, strategies, and interventions that promote the wise use of wetlands.

As development pressure on wetlands continues to increase, the Society encourages careful and site-specific development and management efforts that allow for compatible land uses while preserving the ongoing function of wetland resources.

Rationale

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reports that wetlands deliver a wide range of ecosystem services that contribute to human well-being, such as fish and fiber, water supply, water purification, climate regulation, flood regulation, erosion control, coastal protection, recreational opportunities, and, increasingly, tourism. Non-material benefits include spiritual and religious values, inspiration, and aesthetic.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971) defines "wise use" as "the maintenance of their ecological character within the context of sustainable development, and achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches."

Population growth and increasing economic development have caused wetland ecological systems to decline at a rate that is threatening the quality of life and well being of all life forms. The primary direct drivers of degradation and loss include infrastructure development, land conversion, water withdrawal, eutrophication and pollution, over harvesting and overexploitation, and the introduction of invasive alien species. The degradation and loss of wetlands is more rapid than that of other ecosystems.

Global climate change is expected to exacerbate the loss and degradation of many wetlands and the loss or decline of their species and to increase the incidence of vector-borne and waterborne diseases in many regions. Excessive nutrient loading is expected to become a growing threat to wetlands.

Development of adjacent uplands also threatens wetland resources. A no-net loss policy may not be sustainable over the long term without the restoration of existing or the creation of new wetlands, due to natural eutrophication and modifications to natural drainage patterns and processes.

Further, wetlands are not always wet. Many ecologically important wetlands contain water for as little as seven consecutive days in a year. They are dependent on a wet-dry cycle as in the case of playas, vernal pools, flood plains, wet meadows, cypress ponds, perched depressions and potholes. Many wildlife and native plant species depend on this cycle for survival.

Project designers often create water-based features in their designs, including storm water impoundment systems, ponds and similar bodies with some characteristics of wetlands. While these features may not be required to meet the standards of replacement wetlands, the designers should use best efforts to develop ecologically functioning wetlands with these features.

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Replacement should not be allowed as a means of mitigation, except as a last alternative. Where mitigation is allowed through construction of replacement wetlands, federal and state agencies should allow experimentation and require long term monitoring and remediation, where necessary, to achieve the best approximation of natural wetlands while advancing our understanding of these processes.

Many of the responses designed with a primary focus on wetlands and water resources will not be sustainable or sufficient unless other indirect and direct drivers of change are addressed. These include actions to eliminate production subsidies, sustainably intensify agriculture, slow climate change, slow nutrient loading, correct market failures, encourage stakeholder participation, and increase transparency and accountability of government and private-sector decision-making.

The Society supports:

- Federal and state legislation and policies for wetland protection, conservation, rehabilitation and enhancement.
- Increased transparency and accountability of government and private-sector performance in decisions that affect wetlands.
- Governmental wetlands determination, classification and mitigation processes based on science, not politics.
- Protection, preservation and restoration of ephemeral or dry end wetlands because of their ability to sustain many wildlife and native plant species.
- Research of methods to create ecologically functioning wetlands.
- Wetland system assessment at the watershed planning level and preservation, restoration and creation of these systems.
- Programs to improve ecological literacy and responsibility through education for professionals, members of the general public and in elementary and secondary schools and colleges.
- A national program to restore existing wetlands that have been degraded to a point of declining functional value.