

Endangered Species & Wetlands

By Jim Beers,
Refuge Manager, Special Agent, & Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, retired.

All the ongoing hoopla about wetlands and the need for “more” federal authority, “more” public funds, “more” government land acquisition, and “less” Constitutional protection for private property owners, is like the endangered species con game.

The Endangered Species Act was sold to the politicians and the public by socialists, bureaucrats, and university professors, on false assumptions. Critters, like isolated minnows (snail darters), and birds (spotted owls) in reputed need of vast un-logged woodlands, and warm and fuzzy creatures like elephants, whales, and eagles were touted (irresponsibly) as on the verge of disappearing forever.

Draconian new federal authorities, massive government expenditures, and bloated bureaucracies were created to “save” species. Today, we list as endangered: species, also endangered subspecies, races, populations, distinct populations, and distinct population segments. The concept of species was only a sales pitch, and it worked. Today, billions of dollars, and thousands of lost citizen’s rights later, no species can be shown to have been saved by fettering the rights of American citizens, and taking millions of dollars worth of property rights without compensation. But hey, it has created lots of government jobs. Thousands of bureaucrats have retired

with bigger pensions. Universities have stopped graduating natural resource managers, and now churn out regiments of “evaluators,”

“planners,” and researchers capable of utilizing satellites and computers to justify everything from government land acquisition, to centralized control of human activities, and global warning. Federal jurisdictions and authority have quadrupled, while state, local, and property owner authorities have dwindled, and in some cases, disappeared. It has become the same with “saving” wetlands.

Wetlands are low spots (basins) that are moist or wet, most or all of the time. They are either isolated (no outlet), or flood at a certain level, or they vary with water levels in connected creeks, rivers, lakes, or salt water bodies. They flood and cover unimaginable acreages in wet periods (think Mississippi floods.) They disappear in dry periods (think the Midwest in the Dust Bowl 1930’s.) They usually have certain plants that distinguish them, but many like cattail, for instance, grow on wet soft spots on sheer cliffs below seeping springs on the cliff face. While their benefits are indisputable (bird and fish production, ground water recharge, welcome relief in developed landscapes) they are like

“endangered” species, misrepresented as on the verge of extinction, and justification for new government powers and spending.

The federal government has had jurisdiction over “navigable waters” for some time. This is the authority used to dredge interstate waterways and dam western rivers for power, irrigation, and recreation. Extending current federal jurisdiction to wetlands is a scam, just like endangered species. There are hundreds of millions of acres of wetlands already in the federal landholdings. When private wetlands are tilled, ditched or filled, the water that formerly accumulated there is often simply diverted to other basins or associated waterways. Today, when

housing areas or business sites are built, water-settling basins (a new feature that slows runoff after storms) are common and used by nesting birds. Drained agricultural fields’ temporary



wetlands often divert the water to government wetlands, such as state wildlife areas. Wetlands change as they get less water or more water from nearby watersheds that may see a road constructed, homes built, or a periodic climate change. To say that wetland X ought to always have the same acreage or the same plants, is just like saying wolves ought to be in all the places they were 100 or 200 years ago. Both are silly assertions. But, if the Endangered Species Act is any fair indication of what is being perpetrated by calling for increased federal authority over another amorphous (wetlands) portion of the environment of the United States, we should all be skeptical and resist all but those most highly justified.

Use of government acquisition as only a last resort – with the consent of the state affected. Other authorities should remain with state governments, and local authorities.

Biologically, you cannot freeze the environment, anymore than a transplanted Californian can freeze the view from

his new mountain retreat in Idaho or New Mexico. Stop the logging, and eventually it all burns. Stop the hunting, and gradually big mammals decrease in numbers, and predators become more common and dangerous to men and their animals. Stop the roads and trails, trapping, horseback riding, and all kinds of recreation, and eventually, public land management withers, because no one supports higher taxes for it. Taxes from logging, grazing, hunting, fishing, trapping, etc. disappear. Stop the grazing, and ranches and rural communities wither as well – to the detriment of all.

The government owns enough wetlands. Government wetlands, more often than not, are either closed to or restricted for the very human activities they claim to “save” them for. Government wetlands bought with millions of dollars in hunters’ Duck Stamp dollars, for waterfowl production, were threatened with being changed into “Pre-Columbian, Native Ecosystems” under the last administration. That meant slowly stopping the water management for marshes on refuges and in parks, instead, using that money for playing with endangered species humbug, or other such “priorities,” and allowing the government-purchased wetlands to revert to dry or semi-dry uplands covered with whatever happened to grow there. That is how government conservation policies today, can be changed into tomorrow’s nightmare.

Government is no more reliable as a savior of wetlands than they are as a designator and caretaker for endangered species. The hidden agenda behind federal wetland authority is the same as the one behind endangered species authority. It is being pushed by the same environmental and animal rights sects that incorporate the same silent conservation partners in Washington, the same politicians, bureaucrats, and professors.

The ultimate goal remains an all-powerful federal government, eliminating all the rights and freedoms that are the focus of environmental and animal rights radicals. Endangered species, wetlands, proposed invasive species authority, and continuing massive government land acquisition, are all intended to implement everything from Wildlands to Buffalo Commons, to

a United States free of hunting, fishing, trapping, ranching, logging, farming, and on, and on.

So the next time a news story murmurs about the need for more federal wetlands authority, or your politician says he supports more such authority, or they run an article in a magazine showing some pretty upper Midwest marsh in summer flowers surrounded by a band of trees, as an example of why we need more federal authority over wetlands, write a letter to the editor, and tell everyone you know, how dangerous and unnecessary it is to grow the federal estate and federal authority like this. Up until



now, saying things like this has been akin to criticizing affirmative action or questioning why we cannot manage whales and elephants like all other wildlife. Don’t let this topic of wetlands authority remain a sacred cow. Challenge it when it comes up, and try to make everyone think critically about what is going on, with both endangered species and wetlands. 🌍