

PROTECTION OF FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS THROUGH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Continued from previous page

- When the Wynoochee Dam was constructed in Washington State, a portion of wildlife habitat was lost under the lake and a number of elk and deer were left homeless. To mitigate the loss, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acquired 1,034 acres of land to provide replacement winter rangeland. Within each area, cultivated fields supply winter forage, while the remaining area serves as buffer and as habitat.
- Florida's Save our Rivers Program is one of several that have protected substantial acreage for habitat, water quality, watershed protection, and recreation. Land has been purchased to restore channelized or impounded rivers that feed the Everglades, to restore the Kissimmee River to its original channels, to conduct a pilot project on marsh habitat renewal, and to preserve parts of the Green Swamp.
- The Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Greenway Master Plan provides for the preservation of floodplains along more than 20 creeks for passive recreation, habitat protection, and reduction of flood damages. A network of greenways is planned that will include 4,000 acres and 60 miles of trails. As of 1986, over 1,000 acres had been acquired through donations, local park bonds, and dedications.

PROTECTION OF FLOODPLAINS AND WETLANDS THROUGH TAX ADJUSTMENTS

At least 43 states offer real estate tax incentives to leave land in agriculture, forestry, and certain other open space uses; undeveloped floodplains qualify under some of these statutes.

- A Florida program earmarks for the Water Management Lands Trust Fund the revenues from a documentary tax of \$.075 per \$100.00 on all real estate transactions. The money is used to purchase and manage floodplains and wetlands. Revenues over the next 30 years are expected to approach \$1 billion.
- Minnesota's Tax Exemption and Credit Program has two main components. Under the first, eligible wetlands are exempt from property taxes. Under the second, landowners who agree not to drain wetlands in a given year receive a tax credit. Excess credits for wetland property may be applied to the landowner's tax liability for contiguous property. The state reimburses counties for revenues lost due to the exemptions and for the value of the tax credits.



Floodplain management efforts have sometimes been unsuccessful because they are seen as benefiting only select groups at the expense of an entire community. Therefore, some jurisdictions have developed programs that combine other community objectives—the development of open space and recreation facilities, or the protection of wetlands and water quality, for example—with floodplain management.

Greenbelt park, Maryville, Tennessee

The private sector, operating largely through private, nonprofit organizations, is heavily involved in acquiring land to protect it for open space and habitat, and much of that land is wetlands or floodplain land. As of 1989 the Nature Conservancy was responsible for the protection of 3,643,352 acres in 50 states, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The Audubon Society and Ducks Unlimited have active programs to help preserve wetlands.

Information and Education

Information, education, and technical assistance are becoming more important as natural resource managers and interest groups realize the benefits of a public that is well-informed about natural systems and about the consequences of decisions that affect them. Technical information and public education about the natural and cultural resources of floodplains is provided by the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Office of Coastal Resources Management, and other federal agencies through press releases, newsletters, magazines, and television programs. Most states have active programs within their natural resources, environmental protection, and parks and recreation departments that prepare and distribute literature, films, and other materials. Many offer instructional courses to staff and officials of local communities. Natural resource inventories and mapping are major components of many state programs. Hundreds or thousands of private organizations exist across the country to inform and educate the public about natural resources, including those on floodplains. Environmental values are widely taught in schools at all levels, and popular television programs reach a wide audience. Research is an important predecessor to education and technical assistance, and the information base on natural resources is being broadened continually.

Improved documentation and quantification (including dollar values) of the value of natural floodplains are needed to improve public understanding and acceptance of the need for protection. For example, few developers seem to realize that floodplains and wetlands have great aesthetic appeal, that in their natural state they can simultaneously enhance property values and continue to fulfill their normal natural and cultural functions.

Tax Adjustments

Positive incentives for the preservation and restoration of floodplain resources can be provided through several kinds of tax adjustments, although this technique has not been widely used. Federal income and estate tax benefits, which are available to individuals and organizations who donate land and provide easements to governments and eligible nonprofit organizations, have

been a major factor in facilitating private donations of property with valuable wildlife and habitat functions or historical significance. Most conservation organizations are tax exempt, and many of them are active in protecting the natural and cultural resources of wetlands. Almost all states offer tax incentives for open space uses.

Administrative Measures

Many different administrative measures can be used specifically to preserve and restore the natural and cultural resources of floodplains, including restrictions or conditions on contracts, grants, loans, permits, and licenses; encumbrances during land conveyance, delegation of responsibility for floodplain activities to a specific authority; comprehensive planning; systematic review of agency programs to identify opportunities for preservation and restoration; and coordination among federal, state, local, and private agencies to implement unified efforts. Some of the most important administrative measures address the inventory, classification, and mapping of wetlands, wildlife, aquifers, and other natural resources. It is necessary to know what natural resources exist in the floodplain and what their individual and collective value is before making land use decisions that will sustain those values and functions.

Planning historically has been used by governments for many kinds of activities besides natural resources management. Comprehensive planning provides an opportunity for taking a holistic view of floodplain resources while also meeting other local needs, such as water supply, agricultural erosion control, recreation, and economic development. This sort of planning is getting increasing attention at the state and local level, and typically incorporates several of the tools discussed above.

