

# WETLAND & RIPARIAN MANAGEMENT

Fact Sheet No. 19

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Kansas Water Office

Concern for the protection, restoration or enhancement of wetland and riparian areas have increased in response to greater public understanding of their ecological and economic value. Riparian corridor protection is now even more important as the State begins to address Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) impairment from pollutants in many of the state's streams. Wetland and riparian areas are lands transitional between aquatic and upland locations. Wetlands include areas with hydric soils where standing water or wet soil conditions predominate. Riparian areas include streamside and floodplain areas where the vegetation, soils, or topography are distinguishable from that on adjoining uplands.

The primary policy of the state regarding wetland and riparian management is the facilitation of the protection of such areas from conversion or channel modifications, and in stabilizing streams which have been adversely affected by channel modification activities. The goal of such rehabilitation is not to restore the stream to its pre-development condition, but rather to assist the stream in achieving a new state of dynamic equilibrium, one in which the amount of sediment that comes into the system is equal to that which goes out, so that excessive erosion of the channel does not occur. The state also has the responsibility to preserve or enhance existing riparian and wetland areas as needed to maintain or maximize benefits.

Benefits derived from riparian areas include erosion and sediment control, timber production, wildlife habitat, water quality protection, recreation, and aesthetic values. Wetlands in Kansas provide unique wildlife habitat, floodwater detention, groundwater recharge, and water quality benefits. See related policy issues on Flood Management, Water Quality, and Water Based Recreation.

Estimates by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicate that Kansas has lost more than 400,000 acres or nearly one-half of its wetlands since the 1780's. The vast majority of these were

shallow and often ephemeral wetlands drained for agricultural use since 1950. There is a National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that contains useful information on Kansas wetlands.

Loss of riparian areas to channel modifications in many parts of the state has also been extensive, but these impacts have not been inventoried overtime to the same extent as wetland conversion, making trends more difficult to document. Channel modifications include channel widening, deepening or straightening, clearing debris and vegetation from the channel, construction of levees and dikes, and bank stabilization practices.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has recently completed a statewide Riparian Inventory using ortho photography. This inventory is being used in conjunction with the identified TMDL areas in determining priority areas for riparian restoration or improvements.

The FY 2003 *Kansas Water Plan* sets out in the Policy section entitled Wetland and Riparian Management the applicable programs and policies to address riparian and wetland management. The individual basin sections set out targeted priority areas for wetland and riparian management in each of the basins that include that subject as a priority. The main focus of wetland and riparian management in the individual basin sections is preservation of public water supply lakes, (targeting areas above those lakes to reduce siltation and agricultural runoff), and targeting rivers and lakes identified as high priority in total maximum daily load (TMDL) implementation. The direction to state agencies having riparian and wetland implementation responsibilities in the *Kansas Water Plan* states:

The Kansas Water Office should take the lead in coordinating state riparian and wetland programs of the Kansas Forest Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, State Conservation Commission and the Kansas Department of Health

and Environment. Focus of coordination activities should be on targeting rivers and/or lakes identified as high priority for water quality improvements (TMDL implementation), and on water quality protection above public water supply lakes; (The Kansas Water Office will also coordinate with appropriate federal, local and private entities in developing the Implementation Plan, including but not limited to: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, the Kansas Wetland and Riparian Areas Alliance)

#### **Additional Information**

Further information on this subject or on many other *Kansas Water Plan* related programs can be obtained from: Kansas Water Office, 901 S. Kansas Avenue, Topeka, KS 66612-1249, phone (785-296-3185), toll free (888-KAN-WATER) or check our WEB site at [www.kwo.org](http://www.kwo.org).