

## A GOVERNMENT LOOKS AT ITS WETLANDS

*Our Nation's Wetlands: An interagency task force report.* 1978. Coordinated by the Council on Environmental Quality. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. 70 pages (paper).

Although authored by a task force consisting of representatives from seven federal agencies, this report is neither a typical committee product nor a compendium of bureaucratic jargon. It is instead a well written and current status report on the wetlands, not of the nation, really, but of the 48 contiguous states. It is lavishly illustrated by color photographs, drawings, and maps.

A chapter entitled "defining wetlands" tells it like it is: defining a wetland is not a trivial task. Some of the common kinds of wetlands are described, including the freshwater marshes so characteristic of the northern plains. A brief discussion of the water cycle concludes this chapter.

The chapter on wetland functions covers the food web associated with wetlands; wetland productivity; and the value of wetlands for wildlife, pollution control and flood protection. Two particular wetland systems are featured in case reports. The story on the Kissimmee River tells how it was channelized for flood protection, but the major result was accelerated eutrophication of Lake Okeechobee and resultant endangering of the drinking water supply for south Florida. Although the canal is only a decade old, plans are now underway to restore the river and its associated marshlands.

One chapter describes how wetlands have been altered by agriculture and forestry. Several case reports, including one on the Prairie Pothole Region, illustrate the impacts of these activities. The subsequent chapter tells of effects related to human residences, transportation systems, industry, and recreation.

Following the final chapter, entitled "Today and Tomorrow," are some useful appendices, including descriptions of federal agency functions related to wetlands and highlights of laws and executive orders protecting wetlands.

Staff