



Crayfish burrow in seasonal wetland—Ken Powell



Wetland Professionals Association

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Inside this issue:

Wetlands Conference	1
Treasurer's Report	2
Wetland Buffers	2
News Flashes	3
Economics, Ethics, Wetlands	4
Wetland Training	5
Botany Corner	6

4th Annual MN Wetlands Conference Held in January

by Ken Powell, MN Board of Water & Soil Resources

The 4th Annual Minnesota Wetlands Conference was held on January 17, 2011. Once again, turnout exceeded 200 attendees. The conference stuck to the one-day format that has been well-received in the past. Several longer presentations (40+ minutes) were intermixed with shorter ones (~20 minutes) and another "rapid-fire" segment where multiple speakers conducted back to back 5 to 10 minute presentations in succession. Ample break time was incorporated into the schedule to allow for the all-important professional networking and communication that is an important component of professional conferences.

Topics were again widely varied and included peatland ecology, restoration seedling identification, wetland hydrology indicators, hydric soil indicators, wetland vegetation studies, wetland project updates, wetland legal issues, delineation history, and others. This commitment to topic diversity is a key in my opinion to continuing to keep this conference relevant and useful to most wetland professionals in Minnesota.

Again, the WPA Board, WDCP, and the Wetland Conference committee did a great job of organization and planning to pull off another successful conference. Evaluation results from attendees were overwhelmingly positive. The MN Wetlands Conference occupies a unique

niche in the world of Minnesota conferences. Unlike most other conferences, the wetland conference brings diverse groups of professionals together—public and private sector, restoration specialists and regulatory specialists, soils specialists and vegetation specialists, hydrologists and geologists, academics and practitioners, and likely others I cannot think of. It is this diversity of individuals, interests, and perspectives that makes the conference unique and useful.

Planning for the 5th Annual conference is set to begin this spring. Several individuals on the conference committee including Jyneen Thatcher and Doug Norris have dedicated their time and energy for all of the conferences. It is time for others to step up and continue the success. Contact WPA president Jed Chesnut or any of the WPA Board members to volunteer for the 2011 conference committee.



WPA members at the March winter plant identification training forum in Saint Paul. Photo by Scott Milburn

Association News

- In December 2010, the membership voted to reduce the WPA Board from 9 to 7. Two new Board members were elected to replace the 4 members whose terms had expired.
- The WPA was a non-profit sponsor and exhibitor at the Wisconsin wetlands conference held in Baraboo on February 17 & 18.
- WPA training forums were held in November & December 2010 and March 2011. Topics were:
 - Nov.—Soil texturing & hydric soils
 - Dec.—Wetland delineation rpts. and data forms
 - March—Winter plant identification
- The WPA website has been reformatted and is currently managed by the Board.

Treasurer's Report

by Megan Lennon, WPA Treasurer, MN Board of Water & Soil Resources

The WPA ended the 2010 budget year with a balance of \$15,526.63. The WPA received income from membership dues, fieldtrip fees and the annual Minnesota Wetland Conference (proceeds from the conference are split with the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center). In 2010 income totaled \$6,548.37 and expenses totaled \$6,261.75. The largest expenses for the WPA in 2010 include website development, transportation for the summer fieldtrip, conversion of forum videos to DVD, and development and purchase of marketing materials. A majority of the WPA's 2010 income came from conference proceeds (64%) and the remainder from membership dues and fieldtrip fees.

2010 Account Balance	\$15,526.63
2010 Income	\$6,548.37
Membership dues	\$1,780.00
Fieldtrip fees	\$580.00
Conference	\$4188.37
2010 Expenses	\$6,261.75
Website	\$1,324.80
Forum/Fieldtrip	\$2,233.94
AV	\$631.53
Business expenses	\$584.76
Marketing	\$1,486.72

Wetland Buffers

By Jed Chesnut, WPA President, WSB Associates

Buffers. What comes to mind? A nice looking vegetated area around wetlands, a bunch of weeds around a pond, perhaps water quality protection, phosphorus removal, or maybe a waste of valuable real estate, additional restrictions to development, a maintenance nightmare, what about the last bit of "natural" environment in a sea of houses and bituminous?

A buffer is many things to many people and a consensus on what a buffer is, what should grow there, how big it should be, etc. may never be truly achieved. However, my perception at least is that many people see the value in buffers and they are definitely here to stay. A quick review of city ordinances, watershed district rules, or State rules will reveal a multitude of buffer definitions, sizes, and standards. The one aspect that is consistent across all of these documents is the simple fact that some type of buffer requirement is written into rule.

A brief recollection of buffer presentations in the recent past brings back memories of x% reduction in phosphorus per linear foot; or "based on our data the minimum buffer width to reduce nutrient loads is "x" feet"; or complex graphs of percentages, loads, time, distance, etc. Much of the attention, it seems to me, is focused narrowly on the water quality benefits that buffers provide and therefore ordinance and rule requirements may be missing some of the larger landscape ecological benefits that buffers can provide. While a 40-foot wide buffer ring may do much to reduce nutrient loads to the buffered wetland, is it providing any real benefit to the fauna that use and depend on the wetland and its surrounding habitats?

The research presented at the Wetland Buffers Symposium as part of the Wisconsin Wetland Conference suggested that these buffer rings of 40, 50, even 75 feet are doing little to provide core habitat for many wildlife species. In fact, there were many presentation slides that showed minimum core habitat buffers of 400 feet or greater. Now, is a 400

Wetland Buffers (cont. from page 2)

foot buffer really reasonable or realistic in an urban environment? I presume that a proposed 400-foot buffer requirement would receive a LOT of comments during a public comment period!

The main point I took home from the Wetland Buffers Symposium is that a simple buffer ring may not be the most appropriate form of buffer in some situations, especially when looking at a site on a landscape level. Consider a series of relatively closely spaced, isolated wetlands within a

site proposed for development. Imagine that the site is designed to buffer each wetland to meet permitting requirements - let's say a 50-foot wide buffer around each wetland and allowing some buffer averaging. Roads are constructed between the wetlands, eliminating any natural connection that existed, but each wetland still has its buffer ring. Would it make more sense to have a narrower buffer in some places around each wetland, but maintain the natural connection between

them? Obtaining a permit for this "connection" scenario may not be possible based on existing rules and ordinances.

Connectivity seems to be key and if there is an opportunity to maximize connectivity in the landscape of a development site by utilizing existing natural landscape features, should buffer rules and ordinances with minimum and average width requirements hinder such an opportunity? I would hope not.

NEWS FLASHES

WPA Videos—All WPA videos from 1997 to the present have been archived to DVD format. If you are interested in sponsoring a regional meeting of WPA members, contact the AV coordinator (Carol Strojny) for a list of available DVDs from the archive. Note that for receiving continuing education credits for wetland delineation certification, only videos from the current forum season (2010-11) are eligible for credit. Check with the Wetland Delineator Certification Program for assigned crediting of specific forums.

Wetland Banking—The Corps has developed a new internet-based bank tracking system that will provide electronic record keeping and file sharing for regulators, bankers, and consultants. The system (RIBITS) will be used for Federal and State wetland banking in Minnesota. Two introductory sessions on RIBITS are scheduled for April 12 (Baxter) and April 13 (Minneapolis). All Technical Evaluation Panel members involved in wetland bank site review, approval, and oversight will need to learn how to use the RIBITS system. Specific information on the training sessions can be found on the wetlands page of the Board of Water & Soil Resources website.

Wetland Conservation Act—The state legislature introduced a bill to make changes to the state's wetland law. This bill will likely evolve over time. The following is a link to the current bill <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/bldbill.php?bill=H0908.0.html&session=ls87>.



Northern spruce bog, Cass County, MN

Photo by Scott Milburn

Economics, Ethics, and Wetlands

By Ken Powell, MN Board of Water & Soil Resources¹

Heard anything about the economy lately? Silly question these days as we are bombarded with economic news at every level – federal, state, local. How much of it is real versus “sensationalized journalism” is up for debate. However, there is no denying our economic woes. Everything is affected, including wetlands, their protection and conservation. Like many things in our society, in hard economic times, wetland conservation takes a hit. It’s a luxury. We can’t afford it, people need to eat you know, or at least buy the latest video game or cell phone. I don’t buy it. In fact, I argue that we need it more than ever. And I think that we need to take a hard look at how we are going about this business of wetland conservation and protection.

The unfortunate thing for wetlands conservation and protection is that we have not figured out a good way to put a price tag on them yet. That seems to be the key these days. What does it cost and how much money is it worth? Added to that is the fact that wetlands function collectively (the benefits they provide are generally due to their collective influence on the landscape) and the loss of any one generally does not produce an observable difference to the general public. Instead incremental losses and degradation produce a magnified effect that only manifests itself years later. This makes it all the more difficult for our “what can you do for me now!” society to invest in.

It’s not to say that we are not pursuing wetland conservation and protection. We have active programs for those at work here in Minnesota. But if we take a hard look at them, much of the effort to conserve and protect wetlands on private lands amounts to essentially bribery. Let me explain. For conservation projects on private lands we essentially pay landowners to do things that are for the public good. We buy an easement, we buy the land, we give a tax break, etc. When it comes to regulation, we have to be careful that the rules don’t cost people too much money or infringe on their “god-given” property rights. Agencies are pushed every year to find more loopholes and make decisions that cost private landowners

less. Permit decisions are made based more on economics rather than the environmental effects, but we do a good job of “couching” those decisions in terms of them having negligible or no effect environmental effects. No where do we ask or demand that wetlands be conserved and protected because it is the right thing to do for our society. There is no sense of duty or obligation to others. Instead we just pull out the public check book and pay them off directly or indirectly.

Wetlands are a classic example of where the misdirected, self-serving interests of a few can adversely affect the interests of the many. I think many would agree that clean water to drink, swim, fish, and recreate in is in the interest of us all. But my question is when will individuals start taking personal responsibility for the common good without an obvious economic gain?! We certainly teach ethics in just about everything else such as sports, work, school, etc., but there is no such equivalent when it comes to the very environment that we live in. As the great conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote, “everybody worried about getting his share, nobody worried about doing their bit.” But Leopold in his inimitable pragmatism also clearly recognized that humans need to make a living off of the land, and that this need inevitably conflicts with conservation. However, he saw wetlands and other features of the land as part of the entire system that includes us. He simply stated that “the oldest task in human history is to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.” That inevitably involves some economic sacrifice. Unfortunately, our purely economic-driven system has the tendency to destroy and replace anything that cannot be sold, that includes wetlands, streams, ponds, etc. So, where are our ethical concerns? Can we actually be stewards of the land, and accept wetlands as part of the system that ultimately keeps us all sustained? When will we make some small sacrifices for the common good without an accompanying check?

I find it fascinating that our society places a huge ethical emphasis on something like sports, but nothing even comparable to that we it comes to the very landscape that we

¹The opinions and viewpoints in this article are those of the author alone and are not intended to represent any agency or group.

Economics, Ethics, and Wetlands (cont. from page 4)

live on and sustains us. In sports we tell everyone to hold back, don't run up the score, don't take unfair advantage of the other team, show respect for the other team, and of course praise their efforts even if you beat them. We tell them to do this not because it makes them better athletes or helps them win more games, no we tell them to do this because it is the right (ethical) thing to do. But when it comes to preserving or enhancing something on the landscape that benefits the public good, we just say, how much are you going to pay me to do it?

Deep down I think that many of us know that it is not right. But we all have ways of justifying it. Some tell themselves that others will do it, so I don't have to worry. Others will look at their land and tell themselves that their little piece of the pie won't make any difference. And oth-

ers will take the attitude that it is all headed for disaster anyway, so I might as well get my share while I can (I like to call this one the "rearranging chairs on the titanic" justification). I think they are just cop-outs to avoid the hard ethical choice that should be faced.

Making self-sacrifices for the greater good is hard. But wetland conservation can't be solved by government alone. Leopold recognized this 80 years ago. The government can't buy up all of the land we need to keep our water clean and our landscape healthy. There is already backlash about the government owning too much land. We can't regulate our way to clean water either. We already have a backlash to that. We need another "prong" in the solution. That is an ethical obligation to the land that involves personal responsibility and sacrifice.

Wetland Training in 2011

June 2—Hydrology Indicators, Twin Cities, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

June 6-10—5-Day Basic Wetland Delineation, Farmington, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

June 13-16—Wetland Plants of MN, Twin Cities, Midwest Natural Resources, Inc.

June 21-22—Advanced Plant Identification, Twin Cities, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

June 27-July 1—5-Day Basic Wetland Delineation, St. Cloud, St. Cloud State U.

July 6-7—Basic Plant Identification, Farmington, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

July 12-13—Hydric Soils, Farmington, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

July 25-29—5-Day Basic Wetland Delineation, Little Falls, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

August 2-3—Hydric Soils, Cloquet, Wetland Delineator Certification Program

August 9-10—Basic Plant Identification, Cloquet, Wetland Delineator Certification Program



Botany Corner

by Scott Milburn, Midwest Natural Resources, Inc.

The cotton-grasses are a favorite of folks due to their showy nature. This cotton-like appearance is displayed in two sedge genera, *Eriophorum* and *Trichophorum*. There are seven different *Eriophorum* species and three species of *Trichophorum* in Minnesota. This cotton-like appearance is found in all seven *Eriophorum* species and only *T. alpinum* (Hudson Bay bulrush). All of these species are wetland plants occurring in such habitats as wet prairies, fens, acid peatlands, wet meadows, and forested peatlands. The perianth bristles when mature have the cotton-like appearance which can be seen from a distance. Features to look for when identifying to species can be whether the plants are single-spiked or with multiple spikes, stoloniferous or tufted, and if the spikes are erect or nodding. Three of the easier *Eriophorum* species to identify are *E. chamissonis* (Chamisso's cottongrass), *E. vaginatum* (tussock cottongrass), and *E. virginicum* (tawny cottongrass), which all have erect spikes. The first two species here are single spiked, whereas the latter may appear so, but closer examination will reveal multiple spikes. One other clue would be the time of year when the cotton tufts appear. The first two species flower and fruit well before *E. virginicum*, which appears later in the season. The key difference for the first two species is that *E. chamissonis* is stoloniferous while *E. vaginatum* is tufted, appearing in large clumps. Another difference is the color of the perianth bristles where *E. chamissonis* has a brownish white appearance and *E. virginicum* is pure white. The following photos are by Scott Milburn:



E. virginicum (tawny cottongrass)



E. virginicum (tawny cottongrass)



E. vaginatum (tussock cottongrass)



T. alpinum (Hudson Bay bulrush)



E. virginicum (tawny cottongrass)



E. chamissonis
(Chamisso's cottongrass)



Wetland
Professionals
Association

We are on the web

www.mnwetlandprofessionals.org

Submission of wetland-related articles, opinions, pictures and news items are welcome. Please forward all submissions to the newsletter editor Ken Powell at ken.powell@state.mn.us.

CODE of ETHICS

Each member, in striving to meet the objectives of the WPA, pledges to:

- 1) subscribe to the highest standards of integrity and conduct;
- 2) recognize research and scientific methodology of wetland science;
- 3) disseminate information to promote the understanding of and appreciation for wetland science;
- 4) strive to increase knowledge and skills to advance the practice of wetland science;
- 5) promote confidence in the field of wetland science by supporting high standards of education, employment, and performance;
- 6) encourage the use of scientific information in regulatory decisions; and
- 7) support fair and uniform standards of employment and treatment of those professionally engaged in the practice of wetland science

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