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Review of Northern Prairie Wetlands

Jack Deforest

Fairfax County, Virginia

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posium in North Dakota that aimed to review the "state of knowledge" concerning various elements of the region's wetland ecology. Because of the subject's complexity, the book's content is limited to select areas: geology and hydrology, water chemistry, fauna and flora, food chains, wildlife habitat, etc.

Although the editor intended the essays to be accessible, policymakers lacking a scientific background will need help interpreting elements of the material geared to wetland professionals. Nevertheless, the bottom line is clear. Much additional research (read: dollars and personnel) is needed if practical "answers" are to be forthcoming in the policy arena.

Wetland values contribute to biosphere productivity and stabilization in many ways, including aquifer recharge, water quality enhancement, flood mitigation, wildlife habitat, agricultural production, and recreational opportunities. An understanding of trade-offs in a multiple-use context is required for optimum output from a wetland resource.

The prairie wetlands encompass 300,000 square miles in five states and three Canadian provinces. Over 50 percent of North American waterfowl are produced in the region. The large expenditures associated with waterfowl hunting alone suggest preservation and restoration of this valuable resource is warranted, and Federal "Swampbuster" legislation is helping to limit wetland destruction. At the local level, however, narrow-gauged mindsets often promote agricultural development at the expense of other environmental values. So long as wetlands are viewed as a nuisance rather than an asset, this "tyranny of small decisions" whereby small acreages are drained will continue.

As in most symposium volumes, some chapters are more technical and/or readable than others. All are rich in reference sources for the reader who wants to explore further. An essay by Jean Novacek on the Nebraska Sandhills is particularly rich in data needed to modify irrigation practices.

Papers devoted to socioeconomic considerations, relevant laws, levels of public and pri-

Northern Prairie Wetlands. Edited by Arnold Van Der Valk. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989. Maps, photographs, figures, tables, index. xiv + 400 pp. \$34.95.

Evidence of human disruption of ecosystems often generates a "crisis response," but fortunately we are finally learning that a base of solid scientific information is crucial for effective policymaking. This useful book provides such information for a type of wetland that is little known and poorly understood, the prairie pot-hole region. It developed out of a 1985 sym-

vate expenditures for prairie wetlands research and preservation would have been worthwhile additions. The focus on hard science is good, but efforts to educate the public require more. "We do not need to spend much more time plotting the course of a sinking ship; we need to stop it from sinking" (p. 12). This book is another useful contribution to the knowledge pool required to support this conservation imperative.

JACK DEFOREST
Fairfax County, Virginia