

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

8-1-1995

Review of *Restoring Prairie Wetlands: An Ecological Approach* by Susan M. Galatowitsch and Arnold G. van der Valko

John Ortmann
University of Nebraska - Lincoln

James L. Stubbendieck
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jstubbendieck@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Ortmann, John and Stubbendieck, James L., "Review of *Restoring Prairie Wetlands: An Ecological Approach* by Susan M. Galatowitsch and Arnold G. van der Valko" (1995). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 218.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/218>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Restoring Prairie Wetlands: An Ecological Approach. Susan M. Galatowitsch and Arnold G. van der Valk. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994. x+246 pp. Appendixes, illustrations, index, and bibliographical references. \$44.95 cloth (ISBN 0-8138-2499-0).

For reasons of national policy, environmental need, and funding availability, wetlands have become one of the most active areas for ecological restoration. But, as this timely and useful book points out, such projects too often have consisted of plugging the drain tile or ditch and letting nature do the rest. This approach has resulted in failure more often than recognized. Failure is obvious when a restored "wetland" remains dry because the regional water table has dropped, more subtle when natural plant communities fail to regenerate spontaneously, or nearly invisible when predation exceeds waterfowl production. Lack of planning and basic understanding of the ecosystem has often resulted in restoring wetlands in the wrong places or establishing the wrong kind of wetlands in otherwise suitable sites. Later, lack of objective evaluation standards lets the assumption of success go unchallenged.

This comprehensive "how-to" manual could raise the standards of wetland restoration considerably. The senior author is an assistant professor

in the University of Minnesota Horticultural Science and Landscape Architecture departments; van der Valk is a professor in the Iowa State University Department of Botany with over 20 years of experience in wetland research. The book is an outgrowth of Galatowitsch's Ph.D. dissertation on restoration efforts in the southern prairie pothole region. Some of the information, notably on plants and soils, is specific to that area; however, much of the information will be directly applicable to similar wetlands, such as Nebraska's Rainwater Basin. At the very least, the step-by-step process presented as a model can be locally modified.

The book is a special publication of Ducks Unlimited's Institute for Wetland and Waterfowl Research. The content, though, goes far beyond waterfowl production: equal attention is paid to other birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and the plant communities and wetland types on which they depend.

Chapters 2 through 6 guide the reader through wetland ecology, site-selection guidelines, structure design considerations for different wetland types, post-restoration evaluation and management, and active revegetation techniques. Chapter 7 provides a brief guide to financial assistance programs. Appendixes include welcome wetland plant and soil keys, procedures and forms for data collection, and a list of plant vendors. A notable deficiency is the absence of a section on budgeting. Wetland restoration can be extremely expensive. The amount of money available often limits what can be done. On the other hand, the objectives may determine the funds required.

As the authors note in their introduction, wetlands restoration, at least in the prairie pothole region, has become socially acceptable. Not only are the traditional government agencies and private conservation organizations involved, but individual landowners are conducting small restorations on their farms. Fortunately, this book is detailed enough for the professional, yet accessible enough for use by the concerned public. **John Ortmann** and **James Stubbendieck**, *Department of Agronomy, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.