Vol. 5, No. 2
Feb. 8, 1996

Water Quality Update

Update on the President's Wetlands Plans

Shortly after coming into office, the Clinton Administration convened an interagency group to address concerns about federal wetlands policy. With input from farmers, environmental interests, developers, the states, Congress, and scientists, the group released the Administrations Wetlands Plan in August 1993. The 40-point plan identified actions to enhance wetlands protection while making wetlands regulation far more flexible.

The White House Interagency Wetland Working Group has issued a short summary of the progress made in the two years since the Wetlands Plan was formulated. Among the achievements it claims:

- A final rule has been published clarifying that "prior converted croplands" are not subject to regulations under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. This applies to nearly 53 million acres that have been in agricultural use) since before passage of the Farm Security Act in 1985.
- Farmers with wetlands on their property can now rely on a single wetlands determination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for both Food Security Act and Clean Water Act programs.
- Agencies have been directed to ensure that the level of review of projects proposed in wetlands is consistent with the size of the project. Small projects with minor impacts now require far less review than larger ones or those affecting "high-value" wetlands.
- The State Wetland Grant Program grew from $1 million in FY1990 to $15 million in FY1995. It helps states and tribes develop comprehensive wetland programs.
- The number of wetland mitigation banks has doubled since August 1993, from 100 to 200.
- The Wetland Reserve Program has been expanded to all 50 states. Since 1990 this program has enrolled 125,000 acres of wetlands and buffer areas for restoration by about 60 farmers. The USDA expects to enroll another 118,000 acres with 1995 funds.
- Over 40,000 students, teachers, landowners, state and local officials, and others have obtained information from the toll-free Wetlands Information Hotline (1-800-832-7828).♦

-*News & Views*, Assoc. of State Floodplain Managers, Dec. 1995, Vol. 8(6)

Anti-grazing group plans to sue New Mexico for rejecting land bid

An anti-grazing group in Northern New Mexico is planning to sue the state over the cancellation of bids that would have allowed Forest Guardians to lease more than 4,000 acres of land and reserve them for the wildlife.

John Horning, director of the group's watershed protection program, said the government decided to declare their bids invalid, which would have paid $1.25 per acre -- more than double the current rate.

The lands are school trust lands, with revenues that are divided among the state's school district. The land office that manages the lands is required by law to maximize their value, and therefore accept the highest bid, he said.

But in this case, the highest bid – the one made by the forest Guardians – was rejected. The cattle

ranchers that also bid on the land were allowed initially to up their bid from 52 cents per acre to match the environmentalists' bids. But now that those bids have been invalidated, the ranchers have been allowed to lower their bids again.

"We were surprised the land office would go so far to let them (ranchers) get away with paying a lower rate when they were willing to pay more," he said. "We didn't think they'd stoop so low."

The lands in question were given in trust of the state for revenue for the school districts by the federal government. Any breach of trust, such as this could prompt the U.S. Attorney General to sue the state, but Horning doesn't think this will happen.

That is why Forest Guardians will bring a suit against the land office and the state as a group in standing on behalf of parents who have lost revenue in their school districts as a result of the rejection of higher bids.

Most parents, he said, have strong ties to the cattle industry and have chosen not to join the environmental group in the suit.

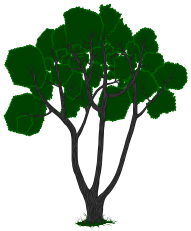
Horning explained that the conflict stems from the quality of the lands both for cattle grazing and for environmental protection. "These are biologically important areas, that are suffering severe and drastic changes."

He and other environmentalists who are also involved in the ungrazing movement believe that New Mexico is too arid to support cattle.

"It's time we recognize we live in an arid land," Horning said. "Rather than wishing the land is something it is not, we should limit it to sustainable development, not abusive livestock grazing."♦

-*Texas and Southwest Environmental News*, Dec. 1995, Vol. 5(9)

Riparian Protection in the Southern Ozarks



The Buffalo River Stewardship Foundation, based in Harrison, Arkansas, is buying conservation easements along the tributaries to the Buffalo River. The easements pay landowners to grow trees on land within 100 feet of the channels, instead of grazing cattle or growing crops, both of which tend to increase surface runoff and erosion. The group aims to create a forested riparian corridor and thereby maintain the Buffalo River (America's first National River) as a pristine waterway.

The Foundation also conducts economic studies and produces educational material about the Buffalo watershed, as well as studying the efforts of other watershed-based groups throughout the nation. ♦

For more information, contact the Buffalo River stewardship Foundation, P.O. Box 5003-161, Harrison, AR 72602, (501) 741-1750; e-mail:brsf@wildfire1.com

-*News & Views*, Association of State Floodplain Managers, Dec. 1995, Vol. 8(6)

Biosolid Videoconference

On April 9, 1996, the Cornell Waste Management Institute will broadcast a satellite videoconference on the application of biosolids (sewage sludges and the products made from sludges) to agricultural lands. The videoconference is aimed at increasing understanding of practice and public policy discussion, with both the benefits and concerns being addressed. The targeted audience includes local officials, sewage treatment operators, farmers, environmental groups, Cooperative Extension staff and other interested professionals.

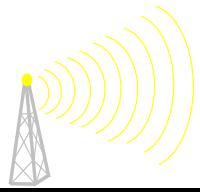
Agenda items will encompass an overview of biosolid use including:

- Benefits to soil
- Nutrient Management
- Health & environmental concerns

If you are interested in further information, e-mail or call Lauri Wellin at the Cornell Waste Management Institute: e-mail: lew4@cornell.edu

(607) 255-1187, or fax: (607) 255-8207

From the Editor...



☒ ☒ ☒River Wrangling Below Zero...??!!.

Whether it stretches the bounds of common sense or not, forty-two intrepid engineers, hydrologists, and biologists recently found themselves in Cherokee County's Spring Creek, in the coldest weather in recent memory. Wind chills brought temperatures below zero, but the enthusiastic group were seemingly undaunted, although slightly numb. I was lucky (?) enough to be one of the good, the blue, and the frozen. But why were we all out there, you ask?...not to become charter members of the Polar Bears Club, or because our bosses made us, but all in the name of science!

The group was assembled to learn the principles of stream classification, protection, and restoration from hydrologist and river guru Dave Rosgen. Participants came from Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arkansas, and Texas as part of an EPA-sponsored short course put on by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Cherokee County Conservation District.

A few of you might remember Rosgen from the November 1993, *National Geographic* special edition on Water, where he was pictured astride a bulldozer during a restoration project. Rosgen, dressed in jeans and cowboy hat, was quite a character as well as an informative instructor who skillfully shared his 30-plus years of study and experience in river restoration.

The week-long short course was divided into both class and field work sessions. At the heart of the course was Rosgen's central tenant: "the river must take care of itself." To achieve this end, we learned how to determine stable river configuration given such criteria as width/depth ratio, entrenchment, sinuosity, channel materials, and slope. We also traveled to various sites around north-eastern Oklahoma, and viewed several impacted river reaches while discussing possible restoration options.

Interspersed with our instruction were several interesting tales, which at times took on mythic proportions. We learned of Rosgen's surprise encounter with a grizzly, and of the time a former student was attacked by a mountain lion while performing a stream assessment. She was saved by a pair of tweezers (I'm not kidding)!

Several people including myself, learned a whole new vocabulary, or at the very least picked up more colorful pronunciations. We learned proper installation of "rut wads on criks," and after a few days were all mumbling about "pinheaded snarfs" and how we were "a-lye-kin" this or were "not a-lye-kin" that.

It was an exciting and informative week. Rosgen's vivacity was contagious, and many of us left with renewed enthusiasm. Incidentally, plans are being drafted to employ Rosgen's theories of fluvial geomorphology to a restoration project on the Illinois River. We visited the site towards the end of the week. An occasional snow flake fell as we listened. The margins of the river were frozen and clear blue water flowed over the gravel bottom. And as we watched a bald eagle flying over the barren treetops in the distance, I thought that the snow and cold wasn't so bad after all.♎

— by Anna Fallon

If you need a copy of any articles, contact "Hannah" Barbara Fulton: (405) 744-5653

Michael D. Smolen, Water Quality Coordinator; Dept. of Biosystems & Agricultural Engineering 218 Ag Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078-6021(405) 744-5653 or FAX (405) 744-6059
Editor: Anna Fallon, Asst. State Extension Specialist