

Foreward

Wetlands and deepwater habitats are essential breeding, rearing, and feeding grounds for many species of fish and wildlife. They may also perform important flood protection and pollution control functions. Increasing National and international recognition of these values has intensified the need for reliable information on the status and extent of wetland resources. To develop comparable information over large areas, a clear definition and classification of wetlands and deepwater habitats is required.

The classification system contained in this report was developed by wetland ecologists, with the assistance of many private individuals and organizations and local, State, and Federal agencies. An operational draft was published in October 1977, and a notice of intent to adopt the system for all pertinent Service activities was published December 12, 1977 (42 FR 62432).

The Fish and Wildlife Service is officially adopting this wetland classification system. Future wetland data bases developed by the Service, including the National Wetlands Inventory, will utilize this system. A one-year transition period will allow for training of Service personnel, amendment of administrative manuals, and further development of the National Wetlands Inventory data base. During this period, Service personnel may continue to use the old wetland classification described in Fish and Wildlife Service *Circular 39* for Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act reports, wetland acquisition priority determinations, and other activities in conjunction with the new system, where immediate conversion is not practicable.

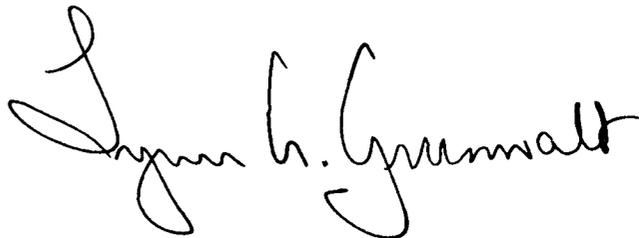
Upon completion of the transition period, the *Circular 39* system will no longer be officially used by the Fish and Wildlife Service except where applicable laws still reference that system or when the only information available is organized according to that system and cannot be restructured without new field surveys.

Other Federal and State agencies are encouraged to convert to the use of this system. No specific legal authorities require the use of this system—or any other system for that matter. However, it is expected that the benefits of National consistency and a developing wetland data base utilizing this system will result in acceptance and use by most agencies involved in wetland management. Training can be provided to users by the Service, depending on availability of resources. Congressional committees will be notified of this adoption action and will be encouraged to facilitate general adoption of the new system by amending any laws that reference the *Circular 39* system.

This is a new system and users will need to study and learn the terminology. The Service is preparing a document to aid in comparing and translating the new system to the Service's former classification system. In the coming year, the Fish and Wildlife Service, in conjunction with the Soil Conservation Service, also plans to develop initial lists of hydrophytic plants and hydric soils that will support interpretation and use of this system.

We believe that this system will provide a suitable basis for information gathering for most scientific, educational, and administrative purposes; however, it will not fit all needs. For instance, historical or potentially restorable wetlands are not included in this system, nor was the system designed to accommodate all the requirements of the many recently passed wetland statutes. No attempt was made to define the proprietary or jurisdictional boundaries of Federal, State, or local agencies. Nevertheless, the basic design of the classification system and the resulting data base should assist substantially in the administration of these programs.

This report represents the most current methodology available for wetland classification and culminates a long-term effort involving many wetland scientists. Although it may require revision from time to time, it will serve us well in the years ahead. We hope all wetland personnel in all levels of government and the private sector come to know it and use it for the ultimate benefit of America's wetlands.



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