

Tamora- Straightwater Wetland Management Strategy Through Watershed Planning



Tracts of land which are unsuitable for cropping are often sold to public agencies for management as wetland habitat. The Tamora WPA and Straightwater WMA are two basins tracts in Seward County owned by the NE Game & Parks Comm. and the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Wetland vegetation and water management techniques are often different than those used by neighbors on cropland. However, there are many compatible situations which can benefit both the wetlands and the neighbors if agencies and landowners have a chance to discuss the common concerns.

The Tamora-Straightwater Wetland Management Plan development was initiated by asking landowners in the watershed, citizens of the town of Tamora, and state, federal, county, and local government representatives to work together to develop a plan. The Wetland Management Plan could address issues which stretch beyond the boundaries of the wetland tracts if people would come together to share concerns, issues, strategies, and solutions.

The first meeting was well attended by farmers and landowners and raised issues concerning; Vegetation Establishment and Management; Controlling and Managing water flowing out of the basins; Weeds and Appearance; Sedimentation in the Wetlands; Fire Hazards; Water Management upstream of the wetlands; and County Road Maintenance. Each person attending the meeting was encouraged to raise their concerns. Similar issues were combined and unique concerns stood on their own. The importance of the issues to the group were determined by allowing everyone present to identify which were most important to them. The combination of votes helped the planning group determine which to work on first, but did not cause any to be removed or ignored.

Additional meetings at the Tamora Fire Hall established the goals the group adopted in order to address the issues. The sixteen goals describe the conditions which need to exist for the issues to be addressed. Some goals dealt with what needed to be done while others emphasized how the decisions should be made. The interrelationship of issues was apparent when individual goals began to address multiple issues. Planning techniques which required the large group to break into smaller working groups helped to cover a lot of ground in the three hour meetings.

The planning process has developed forty four strategies which will lead to accomplishing the goals. The group will develop actions to accomplish the strategies and will also assign timelines and accountability to assure completion. This will enable those who participated in identifying the original issues and deciding how they will be address to participate in implementing the decisions. The Public Participatory Process has brought those who have an understanding of the immediate landscape, history, and season to season changes together with those who will also be working toward managing wetlands as a part of the watershed ecology. The communication paths built through the process will carry through to an understanding of how adjacent lands can be managed differently, but also in harmony.

The partnership which participated in the plan development included landowners within the watershed and staff from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, NE Game & Parks Comm., Natural Resources Conservation Service, Seward Co. Dept. of Roads, and the Tamora Fire Dept.. The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture facilitated the planning process and organized the meetings.