

Federal Wetlands Mapping Standard Approved

—Vanessa Kauffman

Digital mapping projects in the wetlands have received a boost with the new Wetlands Mapping Standard announced by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar on August 18th. The standard is designed to guide current and future wetlands digital mapping projects and enhance the overall quality and consistency of wetlands data. Quality data on wetlands are considered critical for planning effective conservation strategies to benefit fish and wildlife resources now and in the future.

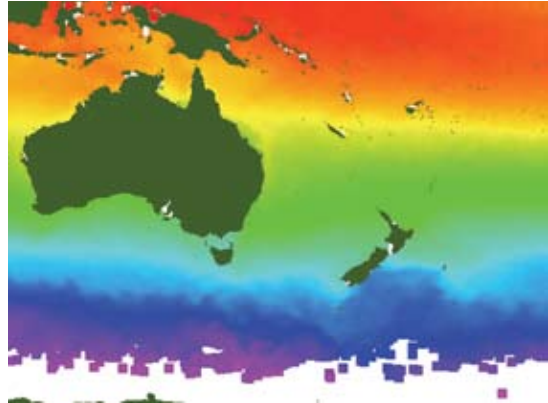
Wetlands are among the Nation's most biologically productive and economically important habitat types. Major emerging conservation issues, such as changing temperatures, sea-level rise, increasing storm severity, drought, energy development, and species declines are making the need for contemporary geospatial resource information even more important. Wetlands cover approximately five percent of the surface of the conterminous United States and are abundant in certain states and rare in others.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the federal agency responsible for developing and overseeing the digital mapping of wetlands nationwide and providing that information to the public and other agencies. Wetland map products are currently maintained and served by the National Wetlands Inventory. The Service uses this wetlands information in its habitat restoration and remediation activities, as well as efforts to formulate policy and conservation planning.

The Wetlands Mapping Standard was developed by a working group under the FGDC Wetlands Subcommittee (www.fws.gov/wetlands/wetlandslayer/wetlandssubcommittee.html) in response to the need for a higher degree of wetlands data. The standard was formally endorsed by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC).

Use of the standard will help to paint a more complete and accurate picture of wetland resources in the United States. Wetlands are inextricably tied to water levels. Changes in climatic conditions affecting water availability will greatly influence the nature and function of specific wetlands, including the type of plant and animal species within them. In developing this mapping standard, an effort was made to identify and accommodate technology and map-scale enhancements that will ensure its long-term usability and minimize the need for revisions and updates.

The mapping standard applies to all wetlands mapping activities funded or conducted by the federal government. Federally funded projects that began prior to the mapping standard's effective date will be exempt. Also exempt are federally funded



projects for which contracts have been finalized prior to the effective date—even if the actual work has not begun.

In summary, the mapping standard will enable federal, state, tribal, and local agencies to:

- Map and efficiently input data into the Service's National Wetlands Inventory geodatabase;
- Facilitate mapping layers that can be used across geopolitical and watershed boundaries;
- Provide updated information to the wetlands layer of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure; and
- Support future national wetlands assessment efforts.

The following list contains a few practical examples of efforts and activities that stand to significantly benefit from the adoption of a standard. A completed wetlands map will assist:

- State wildlife agencies to integrate improved wetlands mapping for conservation and restoration efforts in their respective states and include in State Wildlife Action Plans.
- Businesses and private landowners in implementing development planning and conservation actions.
- Universities and non-governmental organizations in conducting wetlands research and conservation.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency in providing for floodplain assessment and management.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in managing coastal zone conservation.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in planning and facilitating regulatory reviews in wetlands conservation.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in performing quality assessment and monitoring for clean water.

Nothing in the standard precludes the use of ancillary or collateral data, such as soil data, radar or topographic maps, to enhance wetlands mapping. For activities which include wetlands mapping as a subset, any new, updated, or revised wetlands mapping shall conform to this standard. For a list of complete guidelines, refer to the FGDC Wetlands Mapping Standard document online at: www.fws.gov/wetlands/_documents/gNSDI/FGDCWetlandsMappingStandard.pdf