

ASSESSING WETLAND VALUES IN
LANDSCAPES DOMINATED BY HUMANITY

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As the character of the landscape changes through development actions the values placed on undeveloped lands undergo change as well. Recent history shows that wetlands once considered worthless are now considered to have very high value. Changing value systems may be the result of heightened awareness brought on by scarcity. Basic micro economic theory has as its foundation the "law" of supply and demand, where, as the supply of any commodity diminishes, the demand and thus value increases. With changing values comes the need for strategies to protect that which is valued and may be threatened. Wetlands are now preserved and protected in many parts of the country, and new legislation is being introduced in other areas as wetland values are perceived.

As the first wave of public awareness and resulting protective strategies begins to subside, a second more clearly defined set of policies and regulations may be needed to reflect the values of wetland ecological systems in landscape mosaics that are dominated by humanity. Strategies for wetlands management may be needed that are based on maximizing benefit to both nature and society. Wetlands management may best be thought of, first, as landscape management where the entire landscape is considered as one system and not dissected into parts for management by various state and local agencies.

The management of landscapes for the benefit of nature and society requires that those in management positions approach their task with a certain amount of creativity and insight. In some areas, control of landscape development may take the form of fairly strict prescriptive regulations, while in other areas, control may be more management oriented, where planners and regulators seek to develop a wholistic