IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA
Fact Sheet

Isolated Wetlands

Isolated wetlands are wet areas that are not connected by surface water to a river, lake, ocean, or other body of water (they may be connected to other water bodies through groundwater). Isolated wetlands generally get their water from rain and snowmelt that is trapped in these shallow depressions because of clay-like soils that hold water. Often these wetlands are small – less than one acre – and many fill up during times of heavy rainfall or snowmelt and dry up during warmer parts of the year. There are many types of wetlands that are not connected to larger water bodies through surface water. These include prairie potholes, vernal pools, pocosins, playas, and cypress domes. Bogs and wet tundra fall into this category as well, usually relying only upon rain and snowmelt to replenish their water levels. Fens and wet meadows, on the other hand, are examples of wetlands that are often connected to other waterways through subsurface water.

Benefits of Isolated Wetlands

Isolated wetlands are oases for wildlife. They provide shelter, food, and spawning and nesting sites for birds, fish, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates. Although all types of wetlands, including isolated wetlands, make up only 5 percent of the nation's land, these lands are vital habitat for almost 43 percent of the federally listed threatened and endangered animal species, 190 amphibian species, and one-third of all birds species.

Because small isolated wetlands, such as playas and prairie potholes, attract wildlife, they also attract people who hunt, fish, birdwatch and otherwise enjoy wetlands. These people

support local communities by spending money on food, equipment, gasoline, ammunition, and other supplies. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 3.1 million people hunted migratory birds such as ducks, geese and doves in 1996. During the year, they spent $720 million on equipment and $576 million on food, lodging and land use fees.

In addition to wildlife habitat, isolated wetlands provide many other benefits. Wetland plants and soils absorb excess water and then slowly release the excess over time. This function allows wetlands to store water, which reduces flooding during heavy rainfall and replenishes water supplies during times of drought. A study in North Dakota found that small wetlands could retain 72 percent of the runoff from a small storm and 41 percent of the runoff from a larger flood. Wetland plants and soils also trap pollutants and purify water for drinking, swimming and fishing.

While many people think that larger wetlands can provide these benefits better and more efficiently than scattered small wetlands, scientific research has shown that wetlands provide the most benefits when there are a variety of wetland types, sizes, and depths (including small, isolated wetlands) near each other. In addition, location of the wetlands is very important to their ability to provide benefits to people and wildlife. For example, if a small isolated wetland in the Mississippi flyway is destroyed and is then “replaced” by a larger wetland in another place, the birds that rely on that small wetland for food and rest have to fly further to find a rest stop, and may not survive.

Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America is dedicated to common sense conservation that protects America's hunting, fishing, and outdoor heritage relying on solution-oriented conservation, education, and the promotion of outdoor recreation for the benefit of our citizens. The League has more than 40,000 members and supporters in 21 state divisions and more than 300 local chapters in 32 states.