

Position Statement on Floodplain Connectivity
By
The Illinois Chapter of The Wildlife Society
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WHEREAS, the floodplains of the rivers within and bordering Illinois provide significant habitat for a multitude of floral and faunal species; and

WHEREAS, the drainage of much of these floodplains has removed or negatively influenced the various wetland and riverine habitats associated with these rivers and affected surface floodplain connectivity; and

WHEREAS, the ecological status of these major river systems are constrained by the effects of nonpoint pollution from municipalities and agricultural practices as well as other human activities, including development and alteration of hydrology; and

WHEREAS, the tiling of farm fields, the channelization of streams, intensive agricultural practices and the lack of coordinated land management have enhanced runoff and the flow of tributary streams while facilitating instream erosion in the watersheds; and

WHEREAS, sedimentation, unnaturally fluctuating water levels and abundant nonnative species, particularly Asian and European carp, are currently primary threats to the ecological integrity of the wetland and riverine habits associated with these floodplains; and

WHEREAS, much of the remaining unleveed floodplains of these systems are passively managed and subject to inundation at levels of floodstage or above; and

WHEREAS, past and current floodplain connectivity of floodplain lakes and wetlands through passive management, particularly in the Illinois River valley, has resulted in environmentally degraded habitats with little opportunity for significant biological recovery; and

WHEREAS, there exists limited opportunities to acquire partial or entire unique drainage and levee districts within these floodplains with the management objective of restoring and

maximizing biodiversity through intensive management with internal water level manipulation;
and

WHEREAS, successful accomplishment of management objectives to restore significant bottomland freshwater marshes and lakes are likely limited and challenging with passive management given the present and projected perturbations of our watersheds; and

WHEREAS, the restoration of wetlands, marshes and lakes have been successful with a high degree of biological integrity and diversity within agricultural drainage and levee districts in the Illinois River floodplain without surface connectivity facilitated by control structures situated in the protective levees; and

WHEREAS, the habitats provided by these intensively managed sites create a mosaic of wetland types that maximize floodplain biodiversity while complementing passively managed areas;

THEREFORE, the Illinois Chapter of The Wildlife Society considers the most economical and ecological successful means of restoring richly diverse aquatic floodplain habitats, particularly clear water marshes in unique and critical locations, is to forego surface floodplain connectivity and its associated negative complicating factors while managing subsurface connectivity and internal hydrology within biologically prioritized drainage and levee districts until connectivity of surface waters through levee control structures has been unequivocally demonstrated to be more economical, practical and ecologically successful in achieving the management objective of maximizing floodplain biodiversity.