

**National Academy Press. 1995. Wetlands: Characteristics and Boundaries. National Academy Press. Washington D.C. xvii + 307 pp. Hardcover Price: Unknown.**

In the past twenty-five years, the canons upon which the federal regulations for wetlands rest have been taken to task for several reasons. One of the outcomes of the challenges of the principles of the regulations has been an undermining of the regulatory practice with regard to wetlands.

The credibility problems facing the regulatory practices linked to wetlands forced the United States Congress to direct the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to request the creation of a committee to undertake the extensive and proper research related to the scientific basis for characterization of wetlands. The monumental task was given to the National Research Council (NRC).

In 1993, the committee was organized by NRC's Water Science and Technology Board and its Board on Environmental Studies and Toxicology. The committee was charged with the responsibility of reviewing, and evaluating the alternative methods for differentiating among wetland types and to provide brief and succinct scientific ways of understanding the important functions of wetlands.

The book is thus a result of the committee's collective effort in carrying out its charge on the issues related to (1) the definitions of wetlands, (2) the structure and functions of wetlands and (3) the regional differences among wetlands. A reader of this book is forced to critique the book from this standpoint—understanding fully well that the book is an outcome of a completed report based on the expertise of the committee members and the field trips that they took to all the sites. The book is made up of ten chapters which cover a broad range of topics such as: ecology and wetland ecosystem; wetland definitions: history and scientific basis; wetland delineation: past and current practice; wetland characterization: water substrate, and biota; especially controversial wetlands; regionalization; maps, images, and modeling in the assessment of wetlands; regulation of wetlands: administrative issues; functional assessment of wetlands and an introduction chapter.

In essence, the report sets a tone for the definition of wetlands by presenting a reference definition of wetland so that readers and researchers can re-examine the existing regulatory definition and other germane or confusing issues surrounding wetlands.

Although a researcher on the subject of wetlands or reader of this book will move away with the impression that the book is mainly written to serve the purposes of fulfilling a technical necessity, it must be said that the committees' task was clearly performed and that its work vindicated the professionalism and credibility of the federal expertise in the characterization and delineation of wetlands. This book is recommended as a reference book for libraries. Although the book focuses on the United States, scholars all over the world would find it interesting and informative. This reviewer thinks that it is important for African scientist and development experts to examine wetland issues very seriously as development is causing the disappearance of wetlands all over the continent. These precious resources must be preserved at all cost.

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