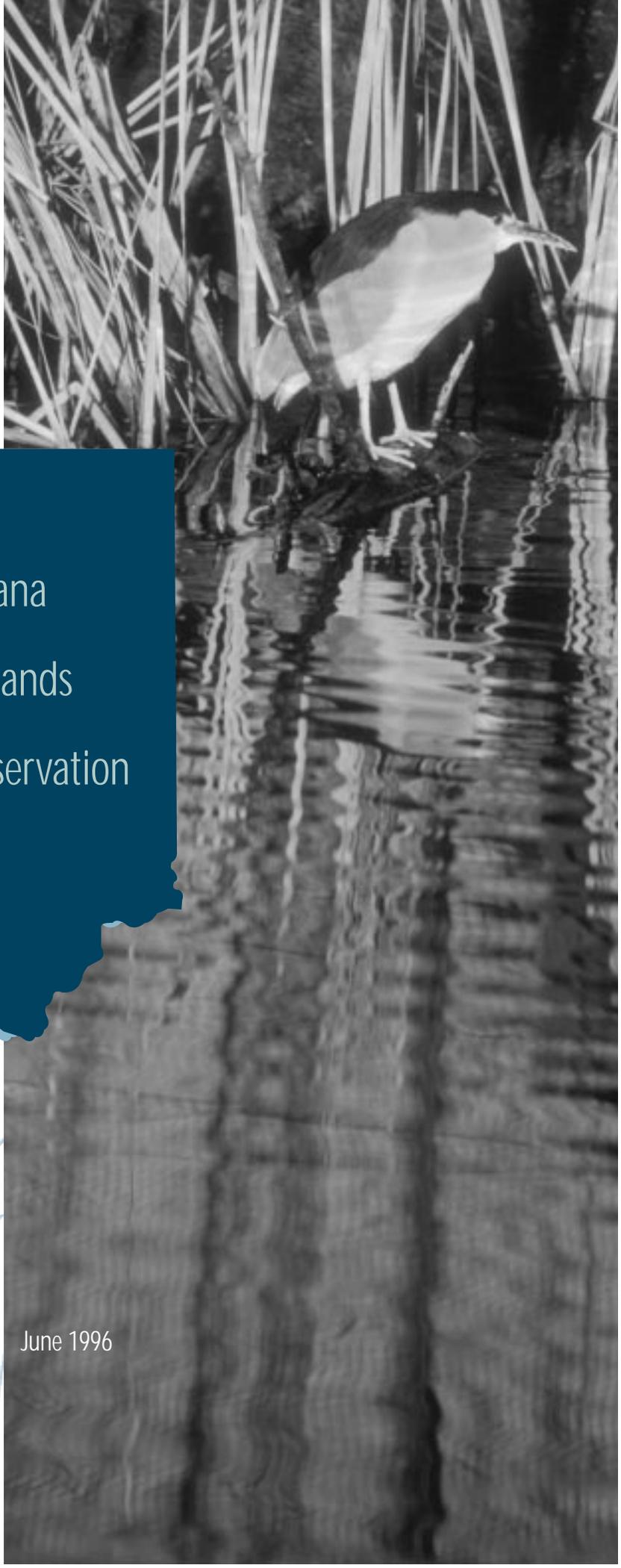


Black-crowned night heron



Indiana
Wetlands
Conservation
Plan



June 1996

Executive Summary

Wetlands, like soils, trees, fields, rivers, hills, and other natural resources, are vital components of the Indiana landscape. Wetlands serve important functions, both in human benefits such as maintaining the quality of the water we drink and controlling flooding, and in environmental benefits such as providing habitat for endangered species of wildlife and plants. The fact that the majority of the wetland resources once present in Indiana have been lost or converted to other uses makes wetlands especially critical resources for conservation.

Although wetlands conservation has at times been a controversial topic, there is broad agreement among diverse interests on many aspects of wetlands conservation and public responsibility. The purpose of the *IWCP*, and the long-term, intensive planning process used to develop it, is to achieve that conservation in ways that are beneficial to all Hoosiers. It establishes common ground on which progress in wetlands conservation can be made, and it sets forth specific actions designed to achieve that progress.

The *IWCP* has been developed through an extensive process of information gathering, input, and review by a variety of interests across the state. Development of the *IWCP* was guided by the Wetlands Advisory Group (people representing diverse stakeholders in Indiana wetlands conservation—from environmentalists to county surveyors; from farmers to coal mine operators) and the Technical Advisory Team (technical representatives from the state and federal agencies that have regulatory or oversight roles in wetlands conservation).

The *IWCP* includes a wetlands definition, goal, guiding principles, wetlands conservation priorities, and case studies of wetland conservation partnerships already up and running. The *Hoosier Wetlands Conservation Initiative* is the heart and soul of the *IWCP*. It provides a strategic approach to conserving Indiana's wetlands resources. The *Initiative* has six components:

1. The cornerstone of the *Initiative* is an emphasis on planning and implementing the *IWCP* through local wetland conservation partnerships called **focus areas**.
2. Obtaining **increased scientific information on Indiana's wetland resources** is critical to identifying and implementing long-term wetland conservation strategies and policies that are both effective and cost-efficient.
3. The *Initiative* emphasizes **positive incentives** that motivate people to voluntarily conserve and restore wetlands.
4. The *Initiative* calls for increased wetlands **education** for technical staff, people who own/work the land, school children, and other audiences.
5. The *Initiative* seeks the **acquisition** of permanent protection for the highest priority wetlands from willing owners.
6. **Continued work of the Wetlands Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Team** in implementing the *Initiative* is critical to conserving Indiana's wetland resources.

Specific objectives and actions for each of the six strategic components are outlined. Monitoring and evaluation of the *IWCP* are described.

Preface

In April 1994, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources initiated a process to develop the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan (IWCP)*.

This document represents the culmination of that process—a process that involved more than 900 individuals across Indiana. Some of their comments and observations on wetlands conservation and the *IWCP* are found throughout the document.

Although development of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* has been coordinated by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the *IWCP* is intended as a guide for all wetlands conservation efforts in the state. The *IWCP* is designed to serve as a framework for discussing and problem-solving wetland conservation issues. It establishes common ground on which progress can be made, and sets forth specific actions to be accomplished.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources is committed to implementation of the *IWCP*. On April 23, 1996, the Natural Resources Commission passed a resolution confirming that commitment (see page 3).

For additional information on the *IWCP*, contact:

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The cooperative process involving diverse interests that was used to develop the *IWCP* is as important as the printed document itself. We invite you to review the *IWCP* and join us in using it to conserve Indiana's wetland resources.

**RESOLUTION BY THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE
INDIANA WETLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN**

WHEREAS, wetlands are valuable natural resources that provide many benefits to the citizens of Indiana, including water quality, flood control, erosion control, groundwater recharge, economic benefits, recreation, and aesthetics.

WHEREAS, the majority of Indiana's wetlands have been altered or lost so as to provide for other valuable land uses but at the cost of important functions and benefits.

WHEREAS, the Department of Natural Resources has sought and encouraged (and subsequently received) the participation and support of many diverse stakeholders in wetlands conservation issues for the development of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan*.

WHEREAS, the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* provides strategic guidance for wetlands conservation efforts throughout the state, focused primarily on voluntary efforts at the local level.

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

- (1) The Natural Resources Commission adopts the Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan.
- (2) The Department of Natural Resources is to use the Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan to guide wetlands conservation efforts throughout the state.
- (3) The Department of Natural Resources is to pursue full implementation of the Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan.

Dated: April 23, 1996

Attest:

John T. Costello

Michael J. Kiley
Michael J. Kiley, Chair
Natural Resources Commission

Patrick R. Ralston
Patrick R. Ralston, Secretary
Natural Resources Commission

APPROVED THIS 23 DAY OF APRIL, 1996

Great blue heron

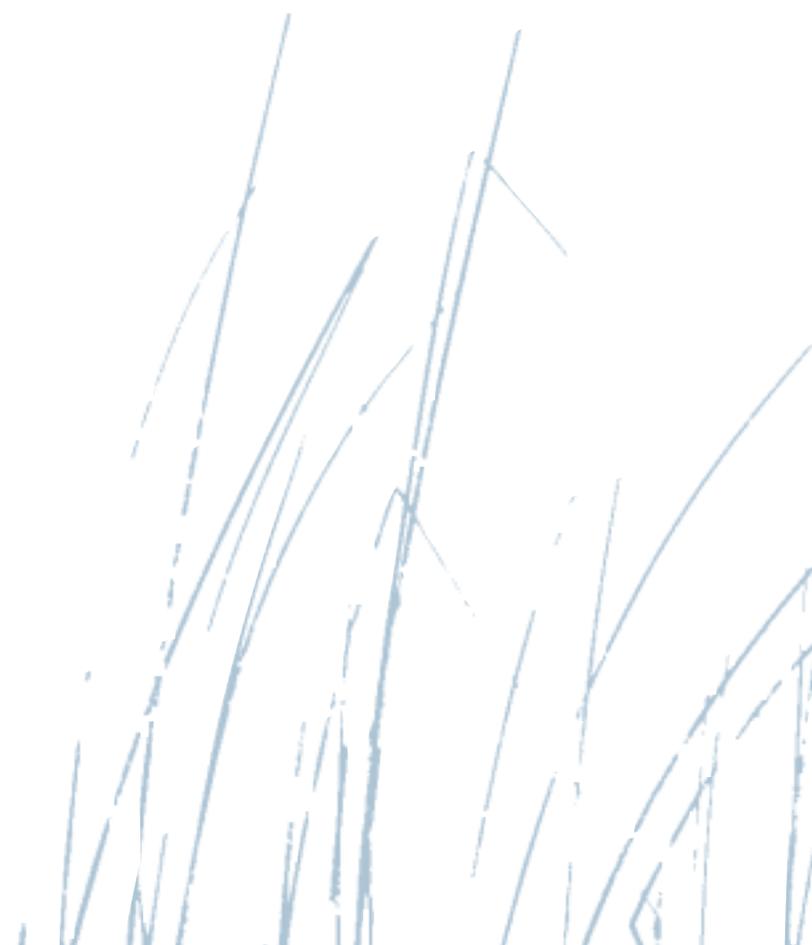


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White-tailed deer

Introduction



Introduction

Wetlands—Vital Resources

Wetlands, like soils, trees, fields, rivers, hills, and other natural resources, are vital components of the Indiana landscape. From these rich natural resources, Hoosiers have raised and provided for generations of families, and produced products to feed, clothe, shelter, and enhance the quality of life for people in Indiana and around the world. The continued health and vitality of Indiana is dependent on conservation of these precious natural resources.

Wetlands serve important functions, both in human benefits such as maintaining the quality of the water we drink and controlling flooding, and in environmental benefits such as providing habitat for endangered species of wildlife and plants. The fact that the majority of the wetland resources once present in Indiana have been lost or altered makes wetlands especially critical resources for conservation.

A Controversial Issue

Poll after poll indicates that the citizens of Indiana and the United States strongly support efforts to provide a healthy environment in which to live.

People also depend upon and demand opportunities for economic growth, the ability to raise food for an ever-increasing world population, and the ability to do these things without undue restrictions of the freedoms on which this country was founded.

The difficulty in balancing these many considerations is nowhere more apparent than in wetlands conservation efforts. Wetlands provide myriad benefits to society (many of which are not fully understood), are part of large, complex ecosystems found throughout the state, and affect or are affected by almost everyone in the state. Add to this, the web of state and federal wetlands-related laws and regulations, and the historic conflict over wetlands management is no surprise.

What Is the IWCP?

In spite of the controversy surrounding wetlands conservation, there is broad agreement among diverse interests on many aspects of wetlands conservation and public responsibility. These interests do not agree on everything, but they do agree that what is at stake (livelihoods and the environment) is too important and intertwined to be driven by confrontational debates between extreme viewpoints on the issue.

The *IWCP* is dedicated to conserving wetlands. It is based on the assumption that wetlands are important to Hoosiers and that conserving them is a conservation priority. It looks at the big picture and identifies big steps. The purpose of the *IWCP* and the long-term, intensive planning process used to develop it, is to achieve that conservation in mutually beneficial ways.

“The Plan is not slanted toward the environmental side or the construction side. It’s a middle ground type of plan that everyone can live with.”

*—John McNamara,
St. Joseph County Surveyor*

“This process was an opportunity to bring a lot of people together to work toward a common goal.”

*—Tim Maloney,
Hoosier Environmental Council*

“The Indiana Department of Environmental Management is pleased to have been a part of the Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan process. It is encouraging to participate in a project where diverse interests work together to find common ground and mutually beneficial solutions to issues and concerns.”

—Kathy Prosser,

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

The *IWCP* does not, and is not designed to, address every issue surrounding wetlands conservation today. It does not seek to resolve every dispute or modify every program. What it has been designed to do is serve as a framework for discussion and problem-solving. It establishes common ground on which progress in wetlands conservation can be made, and it sets forth specific actions to achieve that progress.

The *IWCP* has four sections:

1. **Status.** An assessment of wetland resources and wetland conservation in Indiana.
2. **Setting Direction.** A description of what the *IWCP* is designed to accomplish and how—definitions, goals, guiding principles, priorities, and case studies.
3. ***Hoosier Wetlands Conservation Initiative.*** The action portion of the *IWCP*—strategic components, what will be accomplished, how it will be accomplished and when, and how it will be funded.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation.** Measuring progress.

Development of the *IWCP* offers a tremendous opportunity. This process and the resulting *IWCP* may well become key points in the history of conservation in Indiana.

The Process—How the *IWCP* Was Developed

Although development of the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan* has been coordinated by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the *IWCP* is intended as a guide for all wetlands conservation efforts in the state. Funding for the project was provided through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

The *IWCP* has been developed through an extensive process of information gathering, input, and review by a variety of interests across the state.

The major components of this process include:

1. **Technical Advisory Team.** This group includes technical representatives from the state and federal agencies that have regulatory or oversight roles in wetlands conservation (Appendix A).
2. **Wetlands Advisory Group.** A group of people representing diverse stakeholders in Indiana wetlands conservation—from environmentalists to county surveyors; from farmers to coal mine operators (Appendix B). Through a series of full-day working sessions, the Group has developed much of what is contained in the *IWCP*.

“This project brought together a wide range of divergent interests to focus on wetlands conservation. I think it was a valid process and one we were happy to participate in.”

—Jim Barnett,

Indiana Farm Bureau

3. **Project reviewers.** This is a group of several hundred stakeholders that have been solicited for input on the *IWCP* by telephone and through the mail throughout the planning process (Appendix C).
4. **Public opinion survey.** A public opinion survey was conducted in November 1995 to determine Indiana residents' opinions on and attitudes toward wetlands and wetlands conservation.
5. **Facilitators.** In addition to facilitating the planning process, project facilitators also compiled information on various aspects of wetlands conservation in Indiana and the U.S. for use in developing the *IWCP*.
6. **Public review process.** Two drafts of the *IWCP* were made available for public review so all Hoosiers would have an opportunity to comment and make recommendations. A December 18, 1995 draft of the *IWCP* was distributed for public review and comment to 350 people, 60 of which had requested the draft based on publicity about its availability. A March 8, 1996 draft was distributed for public review and comment to 357 people, and 175 sets of comments on various drafts of the *IWCP* have been received. These comments have been compiled and are part of the public record.

“The IWCP is a long needed guide to understanding and managing wetlands for the people of the state of Indiana.”
—Thomas R. Anderson,
Save the Dunes Council

How You Can Be Involved

Successful conservation of Indiana's wetland resources will depend on the interest and involvement of citizens in the State. There are several things you can do to help achieve wetlands conservation in Indiana:

1. Review the *IWCP*—if you have questions, contact the Indiana Department of Natural Resources or any of the people, agencies, or organizations listed in the appendices of this document.
2. Encourage agencies, private conservation organizations, and businesses to support and help implement the *Indiana Wetlands Conservation Plan*.
3. Participate in local focus area efforts to conserve wetlands where you live.
4. Distribute accurate information about wetland functions and benefits. Most people do not realize how valuable wetlands are to society. Providing accurate information to people who own or impact wetlands can have far-reaching conservation benefits.

“Local involvement is one of the key parts of this Plan that I think is extremely important.”
—Pat Ralston,
Director, Indiana Department of Natural Resources