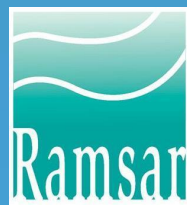


World Wetland Day and Ramsar Wetlands in the USA

William J. Mitsch, Ph.D.

Eminent Scholar and Director,
Everglades Wetland Research Park
Florida Gulf Coast University

Chair, U.S National Ramsar Committee



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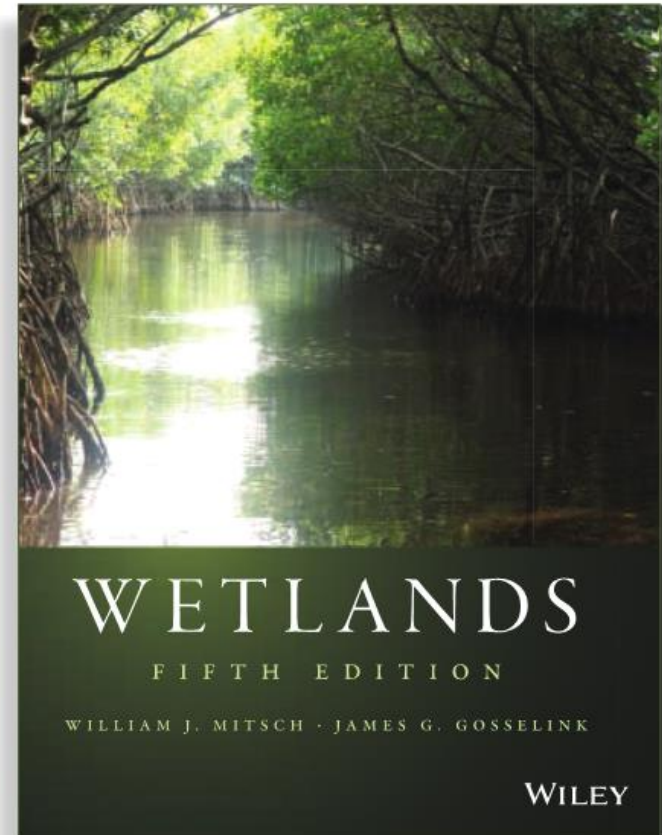
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WILLIAM J. MITSCH is Professor and Eminent Scholar at Florida Gulf Coast University and the Director of its Everglades Wetland Research Park, as well as Juliet C. Sproul Chair for Southwest Florida Habitat Restoration and Management. With Sven Jorgensen of Denmark, Mitsch was the 2004 winner of the Stockholm Water Prize.

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World Wetlands Day

2 February

HAPPY WORLD WETLANDS DAY!!



Wetlands for a sustainable urban future

Urban wetlands making cities liveable

February 2, 2008
World Wetlands Day
Olentangy River Wetlands
(soon to be a Ramsar wetland)
With OSU President Gordon
Gee and Olentangy Olga



Olentangy Olga





Welcome
to the home of
Clearing Days

HUMAN HISTORY AND WETLANDS

“The importance of wetland environments to the development and sustenance of cultures throughout human history...is unmistakable. Since early civilization, many cultures have learned to live in harmony with wetlands and have benefited economically from surrounding wetlands, whereas other cultures quickly drained the landscape.

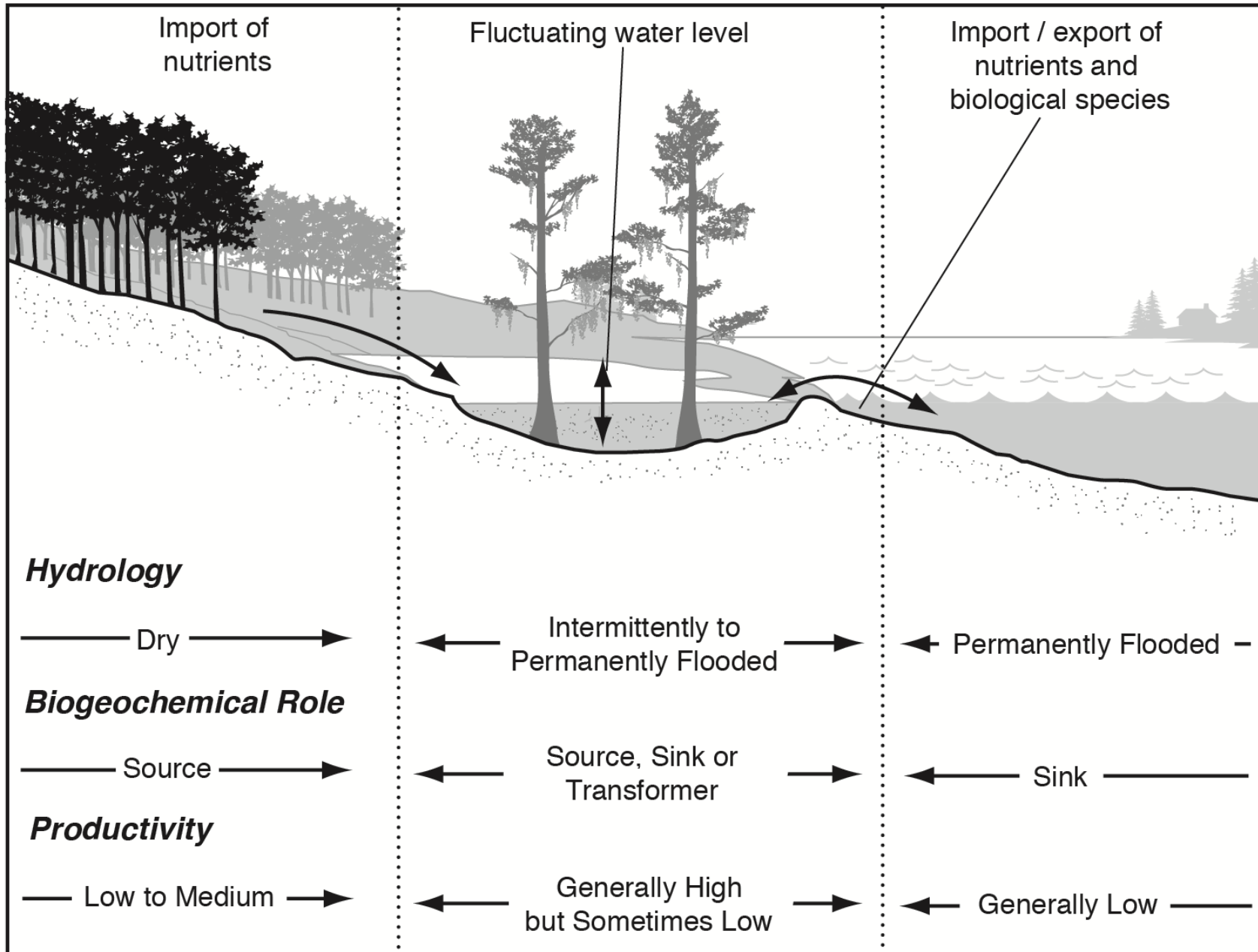
[We refer] to the people who live in proximity to wetlands and whose culture is linked to them as *wetlanders*.”

Mitsch and Gosselink (2015) Wetlands, 5th ed., J.Wiley

TERRESTRIAL SYSTEM

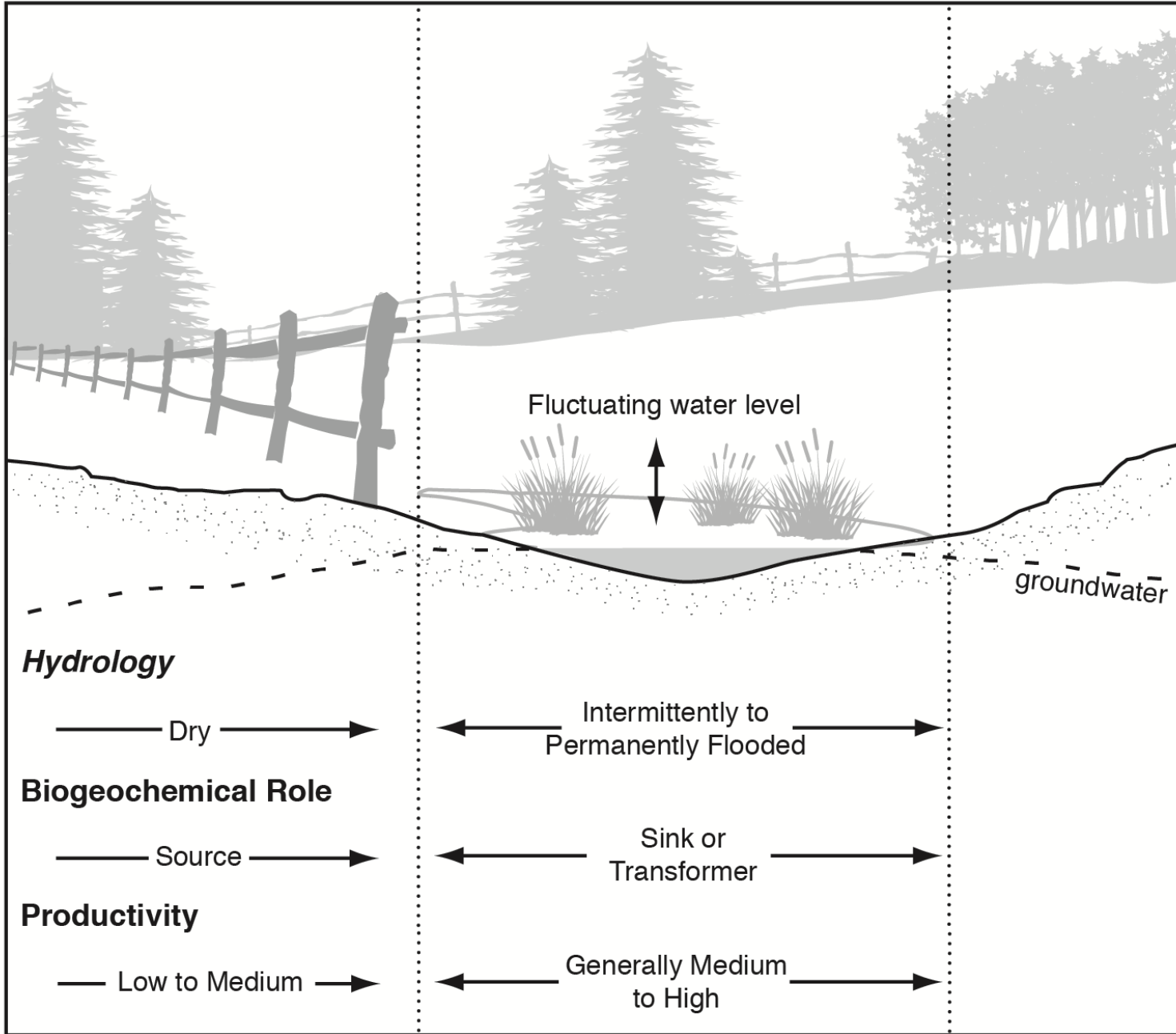
WETLAND

DEEPWATER AQUATIC SYSTEM



TERRESTRIAL SYSTEM

WETLAND



panorama of Miccosukee Indians Florida Everglades



Eco conservation and ecotourism Okavango Delta, Botswana



Creating and restoring wetlands can lead to valuable ecosystem services:

- Water purification
- Flood regulation
- Biodiversity islands and corridors
- Climate regulation (Carbon sequestration)
- Cultural services (Locations for human relaxation and nature observation/education)



DEFINITIONS OF WETLANDS

6. *Legal definition - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act* (33 CFR323.2(c); 1984)

The term “wetlands” means those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally included swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

Since 1989, the term jurisdictional wetland has been used for legally-defined wetlands.

DEFINITIONS OF WETLANDS

5. *Ramsar International Definition*

Ramsar Convention

(Navid, 1989)

... areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish, or salt including areas of marine water, the depth of which at low tide does not exceed 6 meters. [Wetlands]... may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands and island or bodies of marine water deeper than six meters at low tide lying within the wetlands.

THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

- Established in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971 for waterfowl protection
- Now a global treaty for protection of wetland habitats
- Specific objectives for member countries (the three pillars):
 - should promote wise use of wetlands
 - should have at least one “Wetland of International Importance”
 - should cooperate over shared species and development assistance affecting wetlands

U.S. National Ramsar Committee

- Mission: Support the goals and objectives of the Ramsar Convention within the U.S. and internationally
- Members: NGOs that have an interest in Ramsar issues
- Observers: Representatives of U.S. agencies (USFWS, State Dept., USEPA, Forest Service, NOAA)
- Meetings: Until recently, annual meetings in Naples Florida on World Wetlands Day, with phone connections for those who could not attend in person



as of February 2, 2018

169 contracting parties have registered
2,299 wetlands of international importance
covering **225 million ha (556 million acres)**



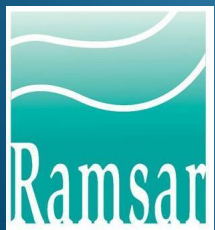
<http://www.ramsar.org/>

USA Wetlands of International Importance

- **38 Wetlands of International Importance in USA** ranging from 21 to 610,000 ha (has not changed since Feb 2 2016)
- By comparison, United Kingdom has 174; Mexico has 142; Denmark has 43
- In 24 states (4 East, 8 Midwest, 7 South, 5 West)
- First Ramsar sites in USA (3) were designated in Dec 1986; 38th announced in late 2015.



meeting only one criterion of 8 is
necessary to become a Ramsar
wetland of international importance



What Ramsar Does/Does Not Do

Ramsar **Does**:

- Provide wise use guidelines, training opportunities, and access to financial resources
- Encourage nations to promote wetland conservation and list wetlands of international importance

Ramsar **Does Not**:

- Impose restrictions on nations and landowners
- Act as a regulating entity or a UN convention
- Affect sovereignty rights – site listing is voluntary



What Has Happened to Ramsar Wetland List in USA and Florida recently

- Nationally, mostly nothing since the new administration has come in place in January 2017 and in Florida since our current administration was elected several years ago.
- In 2016 the State of Florida blocked designation of Charlotte Harbor as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance that was years in development by The Nature Conservancy.
- Ramsar sites being discussed for many USA sites, some for years including Fakahatchee Strand, has been blocked by a ban on new sites imposed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Reston VA.

What Has Happened to Ramsar Wetland List in USA and Florida recently

- The Florida Everglades remains on the Montreux List, a relatively short list of Ramsar wetlands that are seriously threatened by human or other impacts and “where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur.” It is the only USA wetland on that list.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife recently withdrew themselves from any participation in the USNRC (December 15, 2017) thereby prohibiting the USNRC from proposing any new Ramsar sites in the USA.



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



DEC 15 2017

U.S. National Ramsar Committee
1220 L Street NW, Ste. 100, #134
Washington, DC, 20005-4018

Dear Chairman Mitsch,

As you know, the mission of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the U.S. National Ramsar Committee (USNRC) have partnered for a number of years on stakeholder outreach and community engagement as the Service and the U.S. Department of State have implemented the Ramsar Convention in the United States.

The Service's focus moving forward is on capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) activities, including outdoor recreation, as well as expanding access to currently designated Ramsar sites. As such, we have re-evaluated our partnership with the USNRC and believe our priorities have diverged sufficiently that it is appropriate for the Service to withdraw at this time.

We appreciate the work the USNRC and the Service accomplished together in the past, including efforts to engage with members of the public at a number of Ramsar sites across the United States to share experiences, discuss collaborative opportunities, and consider opportunities to get communities involved with their local wetlands. However, over the last several years our partnership has not resulted in the kind of on-the-ground conservation and community involvement we believe is necessary to strengthen Ramsar Convention implementation in the United States. In addition, we have become aware that USNRC is no longer registered with the IRS as a 501(c)(3).

For these reasons, we believe the activities of the USNRC in its current composition are not aligned with the U.S. government's priorities regarding the implementation of our obligations under the Convention. As such, we are looking to engage with private and public partners who share our priorities, and are withdrawing from our participation with the USNRC effective immediately.

We would like to thank the members of the USNRC for their commitment to wetlands conservation in the United States and wish the USNRC well in its future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Gregory J. Sheehan
Principal Deputy Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Happy World Wetland
Day, I think!

wmitsch@fgcu.edu

<http://usnrc.net/>