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"State Conservation Efforts of Seasonal Wetlands along the Mississippi River"

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Since a 2001 US Supreme Court decision that permanently altered the federal protection of non-navigable waters, scientists and policy-makers have struggled to determine whether state agencies are conserving wetlands and which wetlands no longer receive protection. Subsequent court cases have also made protection of non-navigable waters difficult as the regulatory definition of "navigable waters" continues to change. This study compares regulations and the administrative actions of ten states along the Mississippi River corridor to protect and conserve isolated wetlands. It uses GIS methodology to determine differences in wetland area change for a twenty-year period, and compares past and recent wetland destruction and wetland buffer zone loss using nationally established Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) categories. The results show that conservation of the wetlands and buffer zones have only been successful in places where agricultural area or urban sprawl did not statistically increase. The findings indicate that some biological functions and ecological values of federal wetlands have been conserved by a few state agencies and local governments that have clarified the regulations about small, ephemeral, and seasonal wetlands. The study highlights the need for trustworthy data for sensitive or at risk wetlands so that conservation stakeholders have robust evidence for developing appropriate mitigation policies and implementation strategies. (Text from authors' abstract)

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