SALINE WETLANDS


Photo: NEBRASKAland Magazine / Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Saline wetlands are ecosystems that are distinguished by four basic characteristics:

- Recurrent, sustained saturation at or near the soil surface
- Saline conditions due to saline groundwater, springs or mineral deposits
- Hydric soils
- Water-tolerant vegetation that is adapted to saline conditions

IMPORTANCE:

- Eastern Nebraska saline wetlands are rare
- Saline wetlands provide unique habitat for numerous threatened and endangered species
- Saline wetlands provide essential biological functions such as water filtration
- Saline wetlands provide flood control
- Saline wetlands provide an important, rare educational opportunity
- Saline wetlands exhibit unique hydrology and geology
- Saline wetlands receive regulatory protection under Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act
- Saline wetlands were important in the historical settlement of Lancaster County

HUMAN IMPACT/THREAT:

- Saline wetlands are sometimes drained and removed in the interest of development and agriculture
- Additional runoff from a developed area into a saline wetland can alter the magnitude of salinity in the wetland
- Saline wetlands can be converted to freshwater wetlands with the introduction of additional runoff or altered hydrology
- Saline wetlands are sometimes perceived as public health nuisances
- Many Lancaster County residents are not aware of the distinctiveness of Saline wetlands
- Saline wetlands can be affected by the altered hydrology from the downcutting of streams due to channelization

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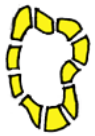
LEGEND



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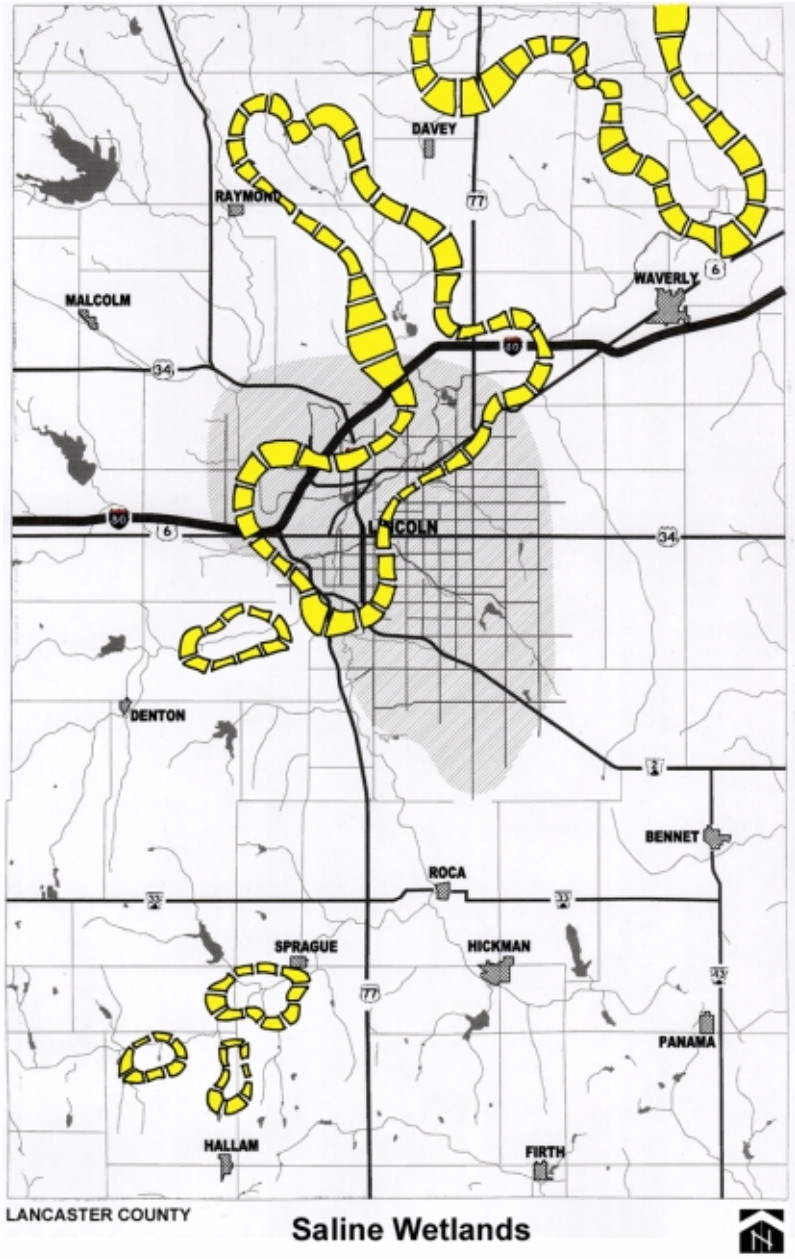

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

- Opportunities for conservation and restoration of saline wetlands exist
- Saline wetland banks should be considered to enhance conservation activity
- Connectivity among adjacent or contiguous saline wetlands should be maintained
- Saline wetlands should be recognized and utilized as natural flood control areas
- Management of saline wetlands is desirable
- Education about saline wetlands is desirable
- Comprehensive thinking regarding watershed planning is required
- Buffers up to ¼ mile in width are required at the perimeter of saline wetlands to reduce the impact of increased runoff, sedimentation and other pollutants
- Storm water management practices should consider both the quantity and quality of water discharged into saline wetlands