



National Association of Wetland Managers  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
2023 - 2027



Dear Friends and Supporters:

I joined the National Association of Wetland Managers (NAWM) as a Policy Analyst in 2013, when it was still called The Association of State Wetland Managers, Inc. (ASWM). Although much has changed at NAWM over the past 10 years, much remains the same. I am humbled by the commitment of team members who have been with the Association for more than 30 years, and by the excitement of those who have joined us more recently with fresh new ideas. And I am honored to work alongside our passionate and dedicated volunteer Board of Directors, who represent state and tribal wetland program interests from around the United States.



In 2018, I was promoted to the position of Executive Director – the Association’s third Executive Director since its founding in 1983. It was a time of change, not only for the Association, but also for the nation. In the winter of 2018-2019, the nation experienced the longest government shutdown in American history. The Trump Administration was focused on removing many of the environmental regulations that the Obama Administration had put into place, which caused substantial delays and upheaval in state and tribal wetland programs during the several rulemaking processes which occurred between 2018-2020. The global COVID-19 pandemic hit hard in 2020, affecting all levels of government programming and services. And then the Biden Administration took office in January of 2021, with a focus on reinstating many of the environmental protections that had been removed by the previous Administration, thus more rulemakings, and further state and tribal program delays and impacts.

However, in the midst of all of this, and perhaps because of all of this – the Association decided to hold its very first strategic planning retreat in the fall of 2019 and a second one in the fall of 2021. The 2019 retreat was a time of reflection for the Board and staff; to look back on where the Association has come as an organization in serving states, tribes, and other members, to understand where we are now, and to envision how the Association can best serve its members moving forward and develop our roadmap for how we will get there. In 2021, we focused on our accomplishments since 2019 and where that positions us today, what opportunities exist within our impact areas that we want to prioritize over the next three years and develop another roadmap for enacting these priorities.

The new Strategic Plan for 2023-2027 summarizes the identified impact areas, goals, objectives, and milestones that were identified during the two strategic planning retreats. It is an exciting time to be a part of NAWM, and I invite you to learn more about how you can be a part of and support our mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Marla J. Stelk". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Marla J. Stelk  
Executive Director



## OUR HISTORY

The National Association of Wetland Managers (NAWM) – formerly known as The Association of State Wetland Managers, Inc. - was founded by Jon A. Kusler, Esq., Ph.D., and Scott Hausmann in 1983 with two goals — to support state wetland programs and to support national wetland policy reflecting sound wetland science. NAWM (also referred to as “the Association”) has tried to stay true to these goals throughout the years, during the ups and downs of funding and politics. Hundreds of symposia, workshops, publications, webpages, and webinars later, NAWM has established a national presence and is looked to by states, tribes, and other organizations for leadership in matters of national wetland policy, applying sound science, interpreting and implementing the Clean Water Act and related programs, restoring aquatic systems, and facilitating transfer of knowledge among peers and government agencies.

In 2019, the Board of Directors and staff held a two-day strategic planning retreat in Portland, Maine with a professional facilitator to: 1) reflect on what the Association has accomplished since 1983 and how the Association has changed over time, 2) envision how NAWM can best serve members and develop our roadmap for how we will get there, 3) identify what other organizations we need to maintain and strengthen partnerships with, and organizations with whom we need to forge new partnerships; and 4) to determine how we will work together to enact our plans.

In 2021, the Board and staff held a 2<sup>nd</sup> two-day strategic planning retreat to finish the work that was started in 2019 and to identify specific impact areas that fit within and further clarify our roadmap for the future, including 1) conducting policy analysis, 2) educating using sound science, 3) building climate resiliency, 4) promoting environmental justice, and 5) empowering local communities.

One of the biggest changes that came out of NAWM’s strategic planning process was the decision to change our name from The Association of State Wetland Managers, Inc. (ASWM) to the National Association of Wetland Managers (NAWM). The intention behind the change was to let our community of practice (which includes not only states, but also tribes, local agencies, federal agencies, private consultants, non-profits, universities, and more), know that everyone has a seat at our roundtable, in particular our tribal colleagues. The Association’s membership was consulted regarding the potential name change and responded with overwhelming support (90%).

NAWM will continue to robustly support state and tribal wetland programs and be a voice for state and tribal wetland programs in federal policy decisions and elsewhere. However, our impact will be greatly magnified by providing a framework for all wetland managers to collaborate, learn from each other, and improve our collective efforts to protect, restore and manage our critical wetland resources.



## OUR MISSION

The mission of the National Association of Wetland Managers (NAWM) is to build capacity for state and tribal members and foster collaboration among the wetland community of practice by encouraging the application of sound science to wetland management and policy, promoting the protection and restoration of wetlands and related aquatic resources, and providing training and education for members and the general public.

## OUR VISION

As a result of NAWM's work, the wetland community has access to and effectively uses sound science, policy, and private/public partnerships to preserve, protect, and restore the nation's precious and limited wetlands and related aquatic resources.

## OUR GOALS

- Help states and tribes develop and implement wetland regulatory and management programs.
- Improve the coordination of wetland programs and policies at all levels of government.
- Provide training and capacity building for state and tribal wetland programs.
- Facilitate the integration of wetlands into water resources and watershed management.
- Build conservation and restoration partnerships among states, tribes, local governments, nonprofits, and other interested parties.
- Translate wetland science into fair and reasonable government policies.
- Encourage minority participation in wetland protection, restoration, and management.
- Integrate wetlands into broader landscape and resource management initiatives.

***“NAWM is one of the most effective and important organizations I am involved with.”***  
***~ Joanna Lemly, Wetland Ecologist, Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Colorado State University***



# OUR IMPACT AREAS & STRATEGIES

## TO GUIDE OUR WORK OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS

# 1

### Conducting Policy Analysis

NAWM has over 40 years of experience in providing analysis of wetland-related policy and law. NAWM has developed issue papers and reports on a variety of topics including compensatory mitigation and other wetland permitting topics, analyzing federal rulemakings, facilitating knowledge transfer on federal rulemakings, permit issuance, guidance development, jurisdictional determinations, CWA Section 401 certification processes, and assumption of the CWA Section 404 permitting process. As such, state and tribal wetland staff across the country rely on NAWM's ability to comprehensively analyze and communicate complex wetland policy and law.

#### Goals for the next 3-5 years include:

- Continue to excel in providing policy and legal analysis of Clean Water Act rules and regulations and other federal rulemakings that impact wetland and other aquatic resources.
- Expand policy focus areas to include agriculture, mitigation for multi-purpose projects, and nature-based infrastructure.
- Invest in a tool to track the lifecycle of relevant federal policies and executive orders.
- Hire a fellow.
- Identify and develop capacity building opportunities (e.g., open regional offices)

# 2

### Educating Using Sound Science

NAWM is passionate about knowledge sharing and for more than forty years, its mission has focused on encouraging the application of sound science to wetland management and policy. NAWM has made it a priority to provide free, open-access training and education for our members and the public in order to build robust and effective state and tribal wetland programs and to protect wetlands resources throughout the Nation. All of NAWM's projects involve some peer to peer sharing component, building on the years of experience and lessons learned within NAWM's expansive community of practice and breaking down institutional silos. Much of this been led by NAWM's long-standing goal for integrating wetlands into the Nation's broader landscape and resource management initiatives and practice.

#### Goals for the next 3-5 years include:

- Hire a staff scientist
- Build out NAWM's online training portfolio with tiered access
- Explore adding field training opportunities for online training modules
- Develop formative & summative evaluations for all projects



# 3

## Building Climate Resiliency

Wetland managers face a new set of challenges when addressing the impacts from global climate change. Wetlands are at risk of rapidly declining in quantity and quality due to impacts associated with climate change. However, wetlands also provide an effective strategy for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

NAWM has long recognized the unique challenges that wetlands and wetland managers face due to climate change, with several issue papers written on the topic by NAWM's founder, Jon A. Kusler, PhD, Esq. Given the critically important role that wetlands play in climate change mitigation efforts and the dramatic increase in extreme climatic events, additional resources and time will be focused on building a community of practice that can effectively integrate the various levels of government policies, funding, data, and outreach.

### Goals for the next 3-5 years include:

- Create a communications plan focused on climate change & wetlands
- Update website information on climate change & wetlands
- Document case studies from states, tribes, and other partners of local projects and efforts for climate resiliency

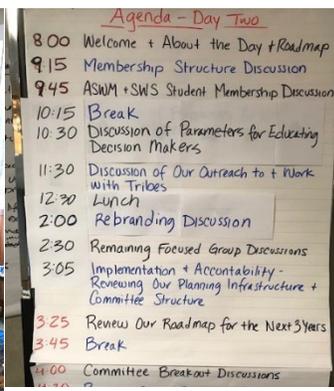
# 4

## Promoting Environmental Justice

For decades, NAWM has had a goal of encouraging minority participation in wetland protection, restoration, and management. However, the topic of environmental justice has generated much greater interest over the past few years. The U.S. EPA defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” Recognizing that disadvantaged minority, low-income, tribal, and other vulnerable communities in both urban and rural “poverty pockets” face some of the worst environmental conditions nationwide, NAWM is expanding its focus on promoting environmental justice inwardly and outwardly.

### Goals for the next 3-5 years include:

- Develop Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice (DEIJ) training for all Board and staff
- Provide meaningful opportunities for tribal input and partnerships on projects
- Advance the mentorship program initiative (MARSH)
- Identify and initiate opportunities to connect with disadvantaged communities



# 5

## Empowering Local Communities

Local governments are often best suited to fill wetland regulatory protection gaps because they are better situated to recognize wetland value in the local context. Many cities and towns have already taken steps to provide additional protection for wetland resources by adopting wetland ordinances and incorporating wetland management into smart growth initiatives, stormwater management, flood control, and climate resiliency goals. These actions can result in tangible ecological, sociological, and economic benefits for those communities. Although NAWM's focus for the last forty years has primarily been on state, tribal, and federal wetland programs, NAWM recognizes that local communities are where the "rubber hits the road." Local communities face significant barriers to protecting and restoring wetlands since most municipal budgets are heavily dependent on property tax revenues to support public safety and public education. NAWM's impact will be greatly magnified by providing policy and technical support to local communities.

### Goals for the next 3-5 years include:

- Reach out to states and tribes to identify existing community outreach tools & resources
- Create a national framework for the various state wetland associations to share information on best practices and resources for local communities
- Update and expand NAWM's local wetland programs webpage
- Explore partnerships with local land trusts, businesses, campgrounds, etc.





***Over 35 Years of Protecting the  
Nation's Wetlands***

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