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## PROFESSIONAL WETLAND SCIENTISTS

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### *Society of Wetland Scientists Professional Certification Program*

#### **Why Professional Wetland Scientist Certification Matters to Public Sector Employees**

As certified Professional Wetland Scientists (PWS) employed by public agencies, we are often asked by colleagues why we bother to seek and pay the cost of professional certification. After all, there is no requirement to be certified, and there's certainly no financial incentive for us or our employers. Perhaps it all boils down to a strong desire to support the profession we have chosen, and the professionalism of all of us who work with wetlands programs or regulations.

Unlike some professions that have well-established curricula and degree programs, wetland scientists come from a wide variety of educational programs and backgrounds. We may have a degree in botany or soil science, in geography or geology, in wildlife management or even education. We often cobble together relevant course work and obtain wetland-specific training where we can find it or on the job. A certification program provides a framework for educational standards, necessary skill sets and ethical standards for the profession.

The Society of Wetland Scientists Professional Certification Program (SWSPCP) is the only widely available wetland scientist certification program. SWSPCP works to meet the needs of professional ecologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, educators, agency professionals, consultants, and others who practice wetland science. The program also is aimed at serving the public's need to identify qualified individuals to assess and manage the Nation's wetland resources.

As agency staff, we are confronted regularly by landowners or developers who assume that whomever they hired to conduct a wetland delineation or assessment for their property or develop a wetland mitigation plan not only has the specific skill set, but must be licensed or certified. They are sometimes shocked to discover otherwise, which is usually when something goes awry. The public may or may not have that same expectation of natural resource agency staff, but professional certification encourages continued skill development and can lend credibility to agency decisions.

Certification signifies that the academic and work experience of a Professional Wetland Scientist meets the standards expected by his or her peers of a practicing wetland professional and provides acknowledgment of adherence to standards of professional ethics with regard to the conduct and practice of wetland science. We believe that the SWSPCP plays an important role in establishing standards for the profession to the benefit of all—the public, communities, and our wetlands resources.

What can we, as public employees, do to encourage and support PWS certification in the private and public sectors? Here are a few suggestions:

- First, if you are not a certified PWS and you meet the requirements, become certified! Then, encourage PWS certification by other staff in your agency or agencies you work with.
- If you develop Requests for Proposals for wetlands work, require or establish a point preference for certified PWS. Note the requirement or preference for a PWS on the agency web site, if allowed.
- It's usually not possible to require certification for government positions, but you may be able to include in the recruitment a preference for a certified PWS or Wetland Professional in Training (WPIT).

- Refer to the Body of Knowledge that was recently developed by SWSPCP as a training guide for staff development. It may also be useful in developing position descriptions. It's on the SWSPCP web site: <http://www.wetlandcert.org/bok.html>
- When contacted by students for information about course work or getting into wetlands work, refer them to the Body of Knowledge and the educational requirements for PWS certification as a guide. Let them know about the Wetland Professional in Training certification for persons who have completed the academic requirements but do not yet have the required experience.
- If you are active in your SWS Chapter, talk about why PWS certification is important! Hold a session on professional ethics, sponsor trainings that may be used for continuing education credits for certification renewal, or contact a SWSPCP Board member about providing information about certification at a chapter meeting.

PWS certification has enhanced our professional lives and relationships. We encourage other public employees who meet the education and experience requirements to set a positive example by becoming certified, and to support PWS certification for the benefit it provides to the public, the profession and the public trust.

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