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Carnahan neglects goals set for Missouri wetlands



Last time, I wrote about the formation of the Missouri Wetlands Advisory Council and that group's efforts to set goals and recommendations for Missouri's wetlands.

The council's final report recommended that the state adopt a short-term goal to "achieve no overall net loss of the state's remaining wetland resource base by the year 1995" and a long-term goal to "increase the quantity and quality of Missouri's wetland resource base, considering acreage, functions, and values by the year 2000."

The council also made several specific recommendations for achieving these goals. It is now up to Gov. Mel Carnahan to implement the council's goals and recommendations. I wish I could report that Carnahan is taking the lead in implementing the council's recommendations, but this is not happening.

For the past several weeks, I have tried unsuccessfully to get a response from the governor's staff concerning his wetlands policy. However, I was able to obtain a transcript of the advisory council's July 22 meeting, at which Carnahan's policy director, Deirdre Hirner, spoke with the group.

Hirner characterized the advisory council's report as excellent and said Carnahan's staff would look favorably on the specific recommendations that called for state agencies to lead by example.

That statement, however, was followed by confusing dialogue in

which Hirner appeared to be asking the Wetlands Advisory Council to implement the recommendations without any further leadership from Carnahan. As several members of the council pointed out, the council has no authority to implement its recommendations.

Carnahan has had ample time to consider the goals and recommendations made by the advisory council—its final report is more than a year old. It is disturbing that the governor's office has not already taken action on this important issue and seems unsure of how to proceed.

While Missouri's wetlands policy appears to be floundering in the governor's office, President Bill Clinton's new wetlands policy is taking off.

Issued last month, Clinton's strategy seeks to resolve many controversial wetlands issues, including the issue of wetlands definition.

The Clinton proposal orders all federal agencies to use the 1987 federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands for defining wetlands until the completion of a National Academy of Sciences study that will recommend any needed changes to the 1987 manual. Clinton's proposal promises that any revisions in the 1987 manual will be subject to public review.

The Clinton plan sets an "interim goal of no overall net loss of the nation's remaining wetlands and the long-term goal of increasing the quality and quantity of the nation's wetlands resources base."

Sound familiar? The Clinton plan sets the same goals for the nation as were originally proposed for Missouri by the Missouri Wetlands Advisory Council. The White House plan states that Clinton will issue an executive order requiring federal agencies to adopt the interim goal of no overall net loss and a long-term goal of wetlands increase.

Ironically, it appears that Clinton is about to invoke the goals set forth by the Missouri Wetlands Advisory Council on a national scale before Carnahan gets around to setting these goals for Missouri's wetlands.

It is imperative that Carnahan take a leadership role on this issue. The first step he can take is to publicly endorse the goals proposed by the Missouri Wetlands Advisory Council.

More important, Carnahan needs to appoint an interagency wetlands task force composed of representatives from all relevant state agencies. This task force should be given the authority to implement the goals and recommendations set forth by the advisory council. And, if the advisory council is to continue, Carnahan should issue an executive order that redefines its mission.

If you would like to press Carnahan about his inaction on this important issue, call 1-751-3222 or write him at the Capitol Building, Jefferson City, Mo., 65101.

For a copy of Clinton's Wetlands Proposal, write to the White House Office on Environmental Policy, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C., 20500.

If you have a suggestion for a column, a gripe, a success story or whatever, write it down and send it to me, care of the Columbia Daily Tribune, PO Box 798, Columbia, Mo., 65205.