Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act

Wetland Value Assessment Methodology

Swamp Community Model

Prepared by:

Environmental Work Group

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I. Introduction

The CWPPRA Environmental Work Group (EnvWG) developed a fresh swamp community model in 1991. However, the Environmental Work Group abandoned use of that model and began using a swamp community model developed by the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (LDNR). The LDNR model was developed to quantify the impacts of permitted activities and compensatory mitigation proposals in the Louisiana coastal zone and contained a more complete list of variables to characterize habitat quality of swamp in the coastal zone. Because that model was developed for regulatory purposes, it contained some variables which were not being impacted by candidate CWPPRA restoration projects. Therefore, in 2001, the EnvWG decided to modify that model so that it would be more sensitive to the impacts of proposed restoration projects. The following sections describe the process and assumptions used in the initial development of the swamp model.

The swamp model was developed to determine the suitability of swamp habitat in providing resting, foraging, and nesting habitat for a diverse assemblage of wildlife species. The model is generally applied to areas supporting or capable of supporting a canopy of woody vegetation which covers at least 33 percent of the area's surface, and with at least 60 percent of that canopy consisting of any combination of baldcypress, tupelogum, red maple, buttonbush, and/or planertree. The LDNR model stated that if woody canopy cover is less than 33 percent, then a fresh marsh model should be applied. However, the EnvWG recognized that some areas with less than 33% canopy cover provide functions and values more closely associated with a swamp than a fresh marsh. Therefore, the EnvWG agreed that the 33% canopy cover criterion should be treated as a general “rule of thumb” for model application, with some exceptions. If greater than 40 percent of the woody vegetation canopy consists of species such as oaks, hickories, American elm, green ash, sweetgum, sugarberry, boxelder, persimmon, honeylocust, red mulberry, eastern cottonwood, American sycamore, etc., then a bottomland hardwood model should be applied.

II. Variable Selection

Variable selection for the original swamp model developed by the LDNR was based on a review of; 1) Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) models, published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for wood duck, barred owl, swamp rabbit, mink, downy woodpecker, and gray squirrel, 2) a community model for forest birds, published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 3) "A Habitat Evaluation System for Water Resources Planning", published by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and 4) a draft version of "A Community Habitat Evaluation Model for Bottomland Hardwood Forests in the Southeastern United States", coauthored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Several habitat variables appeared repeatedly in the various models. In general, it was concluded that those variables which occurred most frequently in the various models were the most important for assessing habitat quality. The species-specific (i.e., HSI) models concentrated on assessment of site-specific habitat quality features such as tree species composition, forest stand structure (understory, midstory, overstory conditions), stand maturity, and hydrology. Other models reviewed concentrated on how a site fits into the overall "landscape". The original swamp model incorporated variables which addressed habitat quality (e.g., stand structure) and landscape function (e.g., the size of the contiguous

forested area). The final variables selected were reviewed by representatives of the LDNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The final list of variables included; 1) stand structure, 2) stand maturity, 3) hydrology, 4) size of contiguous forested area, 5) suitability and traversability of surrounding land use, and 6) disturbance.

After using the LDNR model for several years, the EnvWg recognized that several of the model variables were not being impacted, thus model sensitivity and project benefits were being compromised. Values for the non-impacted variables (i.e., size of the contiguous forested area, suitability and traversability of surrounding land uses, and disturbance) were the same under future without-project and future with-project conditions. In an effort to improve model sensitivity, those variables were omitted. In addition, the stand structure, stand maturity, and hydrology variables were revised and a salinity variable was included in the model. A salinity variable was included in the original swamp model developed by the CWPPRA EnvWG and was recognized as an important variable in characterizing the habitat quality of swamp ecosystems. Therefore, the final list of variables includes; 1) stand structure, 2) stand maturity, 3) water regime, and 4) mean high salinity during the growing season.

III. Suitability Index Graph Development

Suitability Index (SI) graph development was very similar to the process used for other community models such as the emergent marsh community models. A variety of resources was utilized to construct each SI graph, including the HSI models from which the final list of variables was partially derived, consultation with other professionals and researchers outside the EnvWG, published and unpublished data and studies, and personal knowledge of EnvWG members. An important "non-biological" constraint on SI graph development was the need to insure that graph relationships were not counter to the purpose of the CWPPRA, that is, the long term creation, restoration, protection, or enhancement of coastal vegetated wetlands. The process of SI graph development was one of constant evolution, feedback, and refinement; the form of each SI graph was decided upon through consensus among EnvWG members.

The Suitability Index graphs were developed according to the following assumptions:

Variable V_1 - Stand structure. Most swamp tree species do not produce hard mast; consequently, wildlife foods predominantly consist of soft mast, other edible seeds, invertebrates, and vegetation. Because most swamp tree species produce some soft mast or other edible seeds, the actual tree species composition is not usually a limiting factor. More limiting is the presence of stand structure to provide resting, foraging, breeding, nesting, and nursery habitat and the medium for invertebrate production. This medium can exist as herbaceous vegetation, scrub-shrub/midstory cover, or overstory canopy and preferably as a combination of all three. This variable assigns the lowest suitability to sites with a limited amount of all three stand structure components, the highest suitability to sites with a significant amount of all three stand structure components, and mid-range suitability to various combinations when one or two stand structure components are present.

Variable V_2 - Stand maturity. Because of man's historical conversion of swamp, the loss of swamp to saltwater intrusion, historical and ongoing timber harvesting, and a reduced tree growth rate in the subsiding coastal zone, swamps with mature sizeable trees are a unique but ecologically important feature. Older trees provide important wildlife requisites such as snags and nesting cavities and the medium for invertebrate production. Additionally, as the stronger trees establish themselves in the

canopy, weaker trees are out-competed and eventually die, forming additional snags and downed treetops that would not be present in younger stands. The suitability graph for this variable assumes that snags, cavities, downed treetops, and invertebrate production are present in suitable amounts when the average diameter-at-breast height (DBH) of canopy-dominant and canopy-codominant trees is above 16 inches for baldcypress and above 12 inches for tupelogum and other species. Therefore, stands with those characteristics are considered optimal for this variable (SI = 1.0).

Another important consideration for this variable is stand density, measured in terms of basal area. A scenario sometimes encountered in mature swamp ecosystems is an overstory consisting of a very few, widely-scattered, mature baldcypress. If stand density was not considered, and average DBH only, then those stands would receive a high SI for this variable without providing many of the important habitat components of a mature swamp ecosystem, specifically a suitable number of trees for nesting, foraging, and other habitat functions. Therefore, the SI for this variable is dependent on average DBH <u>and</u> basal area which is used as a measure of stand density.

Variable V_3 - Water regime. This variable considers the duration and amount of water flow/exchange. Four flow/exchange and four flooding duration categories are described to characterize the water regime. The optimal water regime is assumed to be seasonal flooding with abundant and consistent riverine/tidal input and water flow-through (SI=1.0). Seasonal flooding with periodic drying cycles is assumed to contribute to increased nutrient cycling (primarily through oxidation and decomposition of accumulated detritus), increased vertical structure complexity (due to growth of other plants on the swamp floor), and increased recruitment of dominant overstory trees. In addition, abundant and consistent input and water flow-through is optimal, because under that regime the full functions and values of a swamp in providing fish and wildlife habitat are assumed to be maximized. Temporary flooding is also assumed to be desirable. Habitat suitability is assumed to decrease as water exchange between the swamp and adjacent systems is reduced. The combination of permanently flooded conditions and no water exchange (e.g., an impounded swamp where the only water input is through rainfall and the only water loss is through evapotranspiration and ground seepage) is assumed to be the least desirable (SI=0.1). Those conditions can produce poor water quality during warm weather, reducing fish use and crawfish production.

Variable V_4 - Mean high salinity during the growing season. Mean high salinity during the growing season (March 1 to October 31) is defined as the average of the upper 33 percent of salinity measurements taken during the specified period of record. Although baldcypress is able to tolerate higher salinities than other swamp species, species such as tupelogum and many herbaceous species are salinity-sensitive. Optimal conditions are assumed to occur at mean high salinities less than 1.0 ppt. Habitat suitability is assumed to decrease rapidly at mean high salinities in excess of 1.0 ppt.

IV. Habitat Suitability Index Formula

In developing the HSI formula for this model, the EnvWG agreed that variables V_1 and V_3, stand structure and water regime, were the most important variables in characterizing the habitat quality of a swamp. Therefore, those variables were given greater influence in the model than the remaining variables. Variable V_2, stand maturity, was given slightly less weight than stand structure and water regime. Variable V_4, salinity, was deemed the least important. All variables are grouped to produce a geometric mean and variable influence is only controlled by the weight (i.e., exponent) assigned to each variable.

HSI Calculation: $HSI = (SIv_1^{3} \times SIv_2^{2.5} \times SIv_3^{3} \times SIv_4^{1.5})^{1/10}$

V. Benefit Assessment

Calculation of HUs, AAHUs, and net AAHUs follows the same procedure as indicated in the Wetland Value Assessment Methodology Introduction.

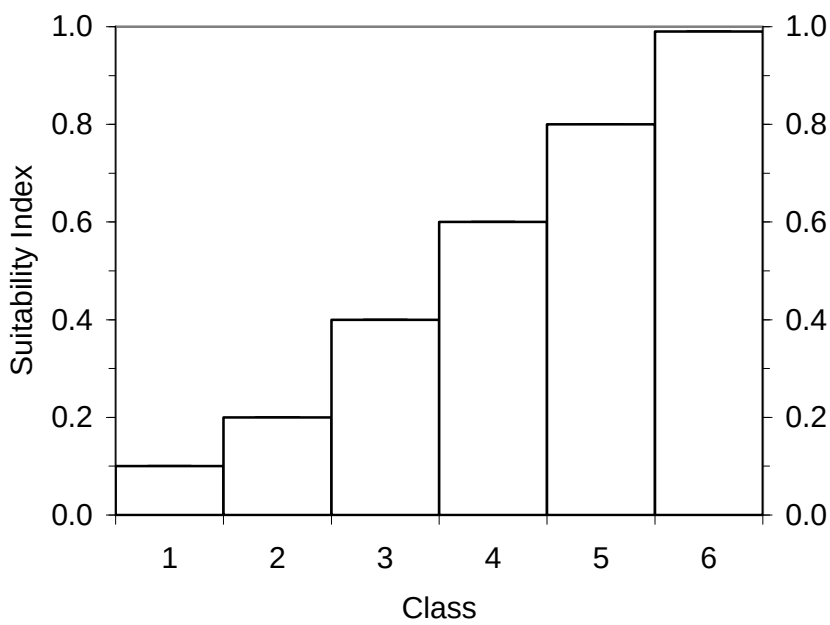
SWAMP

Variable V_1 Stand structure.

Each component of stand structure should be viewed independently to determine the percent closure or coverage.

	Overstory Closure		Scrub-shrub/ Midstory Cover		Herbaceous Cover
Class 1.	<33%				
Class 2.	33%<50%	and	<33%	and	<33%
Class 3.	33%<50%	and	>33%	or	>33%
Class 4.	50%-75%	and	>33%	or	>33%
Class 5.	33%<50%	and	>33%	and	>33%
Class 6.	≥50%	and	>33%	and	>33%
			OR		
	≥75%	and	>33%	or	>33%

Suitability Graph



SWAMP

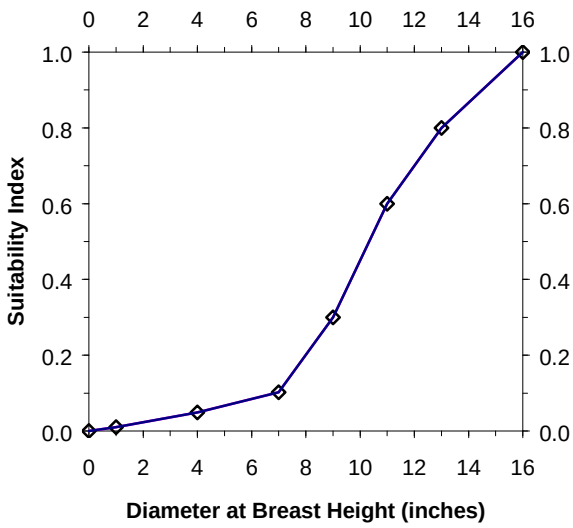
Variable V_2 Stand maturity.

Average dbh of canopy-dominant and canopy-codominant trees.

Notes:

1. Canopy-dominant and codominant trees are those whose crown rises above or is an integral part of the overstory.
2. For trees with buttress swell, dbh is the diameter measured at 12" above the swell.
3. The SI for this variable is multiplied by the factors in the table below depending on stand density.

Suitability Graph



Suitability Index Line Formulas for baldcypress:

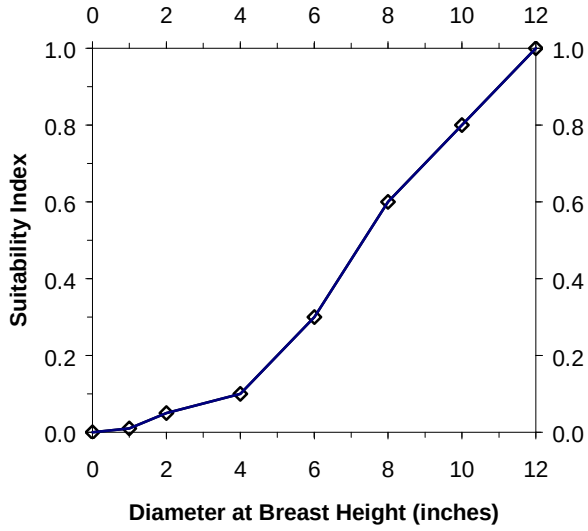
If dbh = 0 then SI = 0
If 0 < dbh ≤ 1 then SI = .01 * dbh
If 1 < dbh ≤ 4 then SI = (.013 * dbh) - .003
If 4 < dbh ≤ 7 then SI = (.017 * dbh) - .017
If 7 < dbh ≤ 9 then SI = (.1 * dbh) - .6
If 9 < dbh ≤ 11 then SI = (.15 * dbh) - 1.05
If 11 < dbh ≤ 13 then SI = (.1 * dbh) - .5
If 13 < dbh ≤ 16 then SI= (.067 * dbh) - .067
If dbh > 16 then SI = 1.0

Suitability Index Line Formulas for tupelogum et al.:

If dbh = 0 then SI = 0
If 0 < dbh ≤ 1 then SI = .01 * dbh
If 1 < dbh ≤ 2 then SI = (.04 * dbh) - .03
If 2 < dbh ≤ 4 then SI = .025 * dbh
If 4 < dbh ≤ 6 then SI = (.1 * dbh) - .3
If 6 < dbh ≤ 8 then SI = (.15 * dbh) - .6
If 8 < dbh ≤ 12 then SI = (.1 * dbh) - .2
If dbh > 12 then SI = 1.0

Density	Basal Area	Factor
Open	$<40ft^2$	0.2
Moderately Open	$40ft^2 \leq BA \leq 80ft^2$	0.4
Moderate	$81ft^2 \leq BA \leq 120ft^2$	0.6
Moderately Dense	$121ft^2 \leq BA \leq 160ft^2$	0.8
Dense	$>161ft^2$	1.0

Suitability Graph



SWAMP

Variable V_3 Water regime.

		Flow/Exchange			
		High	Moderate	Low	None
Flooding Duration	Seasonal	1.00	0.85	0.70	0.50
	Temporary	0.9	0.75	0.65	0.40
	Semi-Permanent	0.75	0.65	0.45	0.25
	Permanent	0.65	0.45	0.30	0.10

Flooding Duration

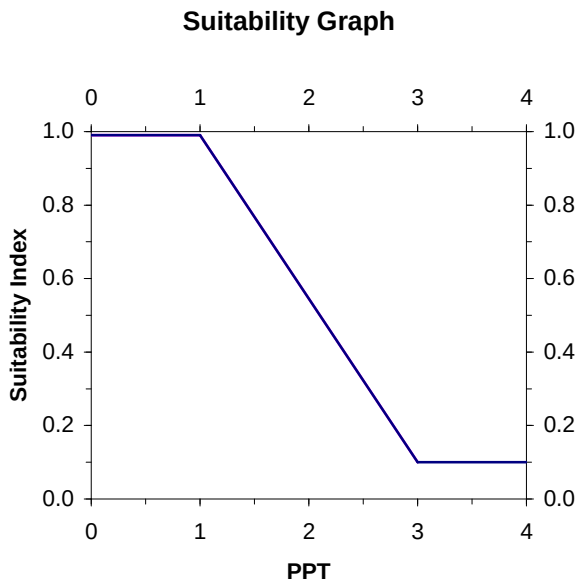
1. Permanently Flooded: Water covers the substrate throughout the year in all years.
2. Semipermanently Flooded: Surface water is present throughout the growing season in most years.
3. Seasonally Flooded: Surface water is present for extended periods, especially in the growing season, but is absent by the end of the growing season in most years.
4. Temporarily Flooded: Surface water is present for brief periods during the growing season, but the water table usually lies well below the surface for most of the season.

Flow/Exchange

1. High: Receives abundant and consistent riverine input and through-flow.
2. Moderate: Moderate water exchange, through riverine and/or tidal input.
3. Low: Limited water exchange, through riverine and/or tidal input.
4. None: No water exchange (stagnant, impounded).

SWAMP

Variable V_4 Mean high salinity during the growing season.



Line Formulas

If $0 \leq ppt \leq 1.0$, then SI = 1.0

If $1.0 < ppt < 3.0$, then SI = (-0.45 * ppt) + 1.45

If $ppt \geq 3.0$, then SI = 0.1

Mean high salinity during the growing season is defined as the average of the highest 33 percent of consecutive salinity readings taken during the period of record (March 1 through October 31).