

MENDENHALL WETLANDS BOUNDARY CONSENSUS – 1973

In considering the question of a boundary for the Mendenhall Wetlands area, League members noted the dynamic nature of the forces at work on the land. The Mendenhall River changes its course imperceptibly but constantly, and deposits material on the wetlands as the river's current decreases at its mouth. The land is also rising at the same subtle, imperceptible rate as glaciers recede. Tidal effects and long shore currents also affect land boundaries. Land accretion as affected old surveys and has clouded the boundary question. The League notes the need for new surveys.

One of the great values of the wetlands area is its diversity of habitat with tidal mudflats, salt marshes rich in vegetation, especially sedges, and in its higher reaches, freshwater marsh. In an ecological sense, one particular tidal level will not serve as a boundary throughout the entire area.

The 22.7' tide line is acceptable in most areas, but the League would like to urge inclusion of land and this line in two areas. These are the marshy area (both salt and freshwater marsh) west of

Mendenhall River and the pocket of marshy land above the present Switzer Creek bridge. We believe that the boundary should be drawn according to botanical guidelines. In the latter area we believe that the spruce-hemlock tree line is a better boundary than a tidal level could be. These two areas are important for their value as fish and wildlife habitat and for their value as outdoor laboratories for biologists and students of all ages from elementary school on. One provision of the

Coastal Zone Management Act calls for establishment of outdoor laboratories for study of the coastal zone. (However, authorized funding has been frozen at the present time.)

The League also points out the need for access areas to the wetlands at, or adjacent to, the 22.7' tide line.

Some of the area within the 22.7' line has been altered by development and no longer retains its estuarine nature. Specifically, this includes the areas on the east bank of the Mendenhall River in the vicinity of the small-plane tie-down area.

We feel that retention of the Mendenhall Wetlands area at the 22.7' tide line except in special areas as noted above, should be considered as a long-term savings to Juneau. The area is used by hunters, especially by young hunters who are not able to visit areas farther away. Family groups enjoy recreation on the wetlands during all seasons. Overlook areas with interpretive signs would be appreciated by tourists. The value of the area to students and teachers has already been noted.

All avenues of land acquisition should be explored that will be fair to property owners. The concept of land swapping has precedence here in our borough and has been an important tool for coastal zone management in other areas of the United States. The Juneau League of Women Voters is willing to work for equitable and reasonable funding measures based on national expression.