

MARITIME MARSHLANDS REHABILITATION ACT

The marshlands of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are among the more productive soils in Canada when protected and properly cultivated. They are composed of deposits laid down by tidal waters and are, for the most part, adjacent to the Bay of Fundy.

The initial areas were reclaimed as early as 1630 and since that time about 80,000 acres have been protected by dykes and aboiteaux. These structures prevented flooding by tide water and permitted cultivation after drainage had been carried out. The original structures were made by hand labour and simple tools. Earth-moving equipment was not used until after 1940.

Through a variety of circumstances, i.e., loss of cattle markets, loss of hay markets and the increase in labour costs, maintenance of the protective structures was not adequately carried out and, in many cases, deterioration of the structures resulted. Because the marshlands, when protected, can play such an important role in the agricultural economy of the provinces concerned, the Government of Canada and the Provincial Governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick passed legislation permitting them to carry on a program of reclamation and rehabilitation of these lands. The federal Act, the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Act, was passed in 1948. Complementary provincial marshland reclamation Acts were passed by both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 1949. These Acts permitted agreements to be signed whereby the Government of Canada would construct or reconstruct the protective works, normally called dykes, aboiteaux and breakwaters, and also would assume the responsibility of maintaining these works until such time as they could be turned back to the provinces. The Federal Government is responsible also for any engineering work in connection with the complete program. The provinces are responsible for the organization of the marsh areas, the fresh-water drainage and acquisition of any land required. They are responsible also for the instigation and follow-up of a suitable land-use program.

In 1949 an administrative and operational group was established in the Maritimes by the Federal Department of Agriculture and the program of reclamation was initiated. Modern design and construction principles will be used for the building of protective structures, bearing in mind the basic principles of the older methods used. It is estimated that 70,000 or 80,000 acres, well drained and well farmed, will eventually be protected from the tide.

By Mar. 31, 1951, the provinces had asked to have 92 areas considered for reclamation purposes. These comprised 19,240 acres of marshland in New Brunswick, 22,570 acres in Nova Scotia and 250 acres in Prince Edward Island. It is estimated that the 42,060 acres of marshland in the three provinces constitute an integral part of 300,100 acres of farm land.

By the end of the 1950 construction season, protective works of a major type had been carried out on a total of 21 projects. In addition, 45 areas had received work on protective structures to some extent, placing them in a position to withstand the action of tidal waters until major reconstruction could be carried out.

Investigations to determine the advisability of constructing a large structure to eliminate the need for many miles of dyke and many aboiteaux were being carried out on the Annapolis River in Nova Scotia and on the Tantrammar and Shepody Rivers in New Brunswick.