The Wetland Conservation Act and how it is being administered in the City of Ham Lake and Anoka County

In 2005, the Metropolitan Airports Commission proposed to extend Runway 09/27 at the Blaine airport. In accordance with the Wetlands Conservation Act, Anoka County watershed officials determined that the area to be extended was a wetland and as such, would be destroyed by the runway extension. The Wetland Conservation Act requires that any wetland that is destroyed requires “mitigation”. Under wetland rules, mitigation requires that for any wetland that is destroyed, a wetland double the size of the wetland that was destroyed must be created in the same watershed and municipality of that destroyed wetland. However, instead of creating a new wetland in the Rice Creek watershed and the City of Blaine, the mitigation occurred in the Coon Creek watershed district and the City of Ham Lake.

The parcel selected for mitigation was 130 acres of prime farm land along with small parcels of wooded upland. The Metropolitan Airport Commission paid in excess of $3,000,000 for this parcel of land. Heavy construction equipment was brought in and the farm land was destroyed. Since the Metropolitan Airport Commission now owns the property, the City of Ham Lake and Anoka County has lost the tax revenue and the ability to use the land for any other purpose. At one time there was a proposal to use part of that land to create ball fields and soccer fields for youth sports.

The City of Ham Lake has lost 130 acres of its city. Is there any way Ham Lake can be compensated for this loss? I am not aware of any city or county officials that are looking for answers. No one is contesting this supposedly legal transaction. If nothing is done, feckless administrators can continue to use Ham Lake as mitigation for agencies or municipalities who have wetlands which they would wish to utilize without paying a penalty to mitigate.

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