

(H.B. 2576)

**(No. 31)**

(January 14, 2000)

## **AN ACT**

To add a subsection (p) to Section 5 of Act No. 23 of June 20, 1972, as amended, known as the “Organic Act of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources,” in order to authorize the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources to regulate the protection, management, and conservation of the wetlands of Puerto Rico.

### **STATEMENT OF MOTIVES**

The wetlands of Puerto Rico constitute a natural resource of high value which should be preserved for the benefit of the present and future generations. They are defined as transitional areas between aquatic and land systems, frequently flooded or saturated by superficial and underground waters during periods of time long enough to allow for changes in the soil to begin taking place, which allows them to grow a type of vegetation especially adapted to live in these conditions.

In Puerto Rico, the existence of seven different types of wetlands has been recognized: the marine aquatic, salt water coastal plains, salt water swamp, salt water marshes, fresh water aquatic, fresh water swamp, and fresh water marsh. These serve as habitats for a great variety of species of fish, birds, and mammals which are of great importance to the Island’s ecology.

One of the most important and abundant wetlands in the Island are the mangroves. These are important for commercial fishing and for recreational and educational purposes. Species of water fish of great commercial value spend part of their life cycles in the mangroves. Research has revealed that mangroves, in their function as evapotranspirators, supply humidity to the atmosphere and become a source of natural cooling for the neighboring communities, produce large quantities of oxygen, and protect the coasts from hurricane winds, among other benefits. However, the economic progress that is developing in our coasts is not compatible with the preservation of this vital natural resource.

The conservation and preservation of wetlands is a matter of high importance which merits regulation from the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. Their function as fish hatcheries, habitats for wildlife, their contribution in the mitigation of floods, and the reduction of contamination, make them attractive places for passive recreation, scientific research, education, and tourism.

This Act intends to authorize the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources to regulate the protection, management, and conservation of the wetlands of Puerto Rico, recognizing their incalculable value as another of our Island's natural resources.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF PUERTO RICO:**

Section 1.- A subsection (p) is added to Section 5 of Act No. 23 of June 20, 1972, as amended, to read as follows:

“Section 5.-

The Secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources shall have, in addition to those transferred hereby, the following faculties and duties:

(a) ...

(p) the faculty to regulate the protection, management, and conservation of the wetlands of Puerto Rico.”

Section 2.- This Act shall take effect immediately after its approval.

**CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following Act No. 31 (H.B. 2576) of the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Legislature of Puerto Rico:

**AN ACT** to add a subsection (p) to Section 5 of Act No. 23 of June 20, 1972, as amended, known as the “Organic Act of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources,” in order to authorize the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources to regulate the protection, management, and conservation of the wetlands of Puerto Rico,

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, today 14<sup>th</sup> of May of 2003.

Elba Rosa Rodríguez-Fuentes  
Director