From a traditional Western perspective, wetlands are considered marginal, dangerous, and unhealthy and made productive only through expensive drainage and conversion to dry land. For contemporary conservationists and natural scientists, wetlands are examples of pristine aquatic environments worth protection because of their rich biodiversity and wilderness. For many cultures in the world, wetlands are prime real estate for intensive hunting, gathering, fishing, aquaculture, and terrestrial agriculture rather than marginal, unproductive landscapes or wilderness. Pre-Columbian native peoples of the Amazon region of Bolivia transformed and expanded natural wetlands into highly productive domesticated landscapes to support large populations. Native peoples manipulated seasonal passive flooding and practiced active water management through earthwork construction within the wetland margin at a regional scale. Wetland ecology was well understood and appropriated for human use. Built wetland landscapes of settlements, raised fields, dikes, causeways, canals, reservoirs, fisheries, and fish weirs are often of comparable scale, labor mobilization, and complexity to the more traditional urban environment of urban architecture and monuments in other world regions. This valuable cultural heritage of pre-Columbian engineering and knowledge has an applied potential for contemporary conservation and management of the environment.

For more information see: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cerickso/