

# WETLANDS

What is a wetland? Having often been referred to as “too wet to plow and too dry to swim,” wetlands are transitional lands that lie between the water and dry ground. Most people think of wetlands as marsh-like areas filled with cattails. However, there are many types of wetlands such as swamps, marshes, bogs and fens, and seasonal wetlands such as wet meadows, sedge meadows and wet prairies.

Wetlands are areas where water either covers the soil or is at or near its surface at least part of the year. This saturation alters the development of the soil, resulting in an organically rich, special class of soils known as hydric soil. Wetland’s importance to the protection of our lakes and streams cannot be overstated, as these unique environments act as natural filters, settling sediments and absorbing nutrients and other pollutants from runoff before they reach open water. They are also home to a diverse range of aquatic and terrestrial species. For this reason, many wetlands, particularly larger ones and those bordering the Great Lakes, are protected by state and federal laws. Several communities also regulate smaller wetlands. Some of the many benefits we derive from wetlands include:

- Flooding and storm water control. Wetlands help to stabilize soil and reduce erosion by soaking up excessive surface water runoff. They can then slowly release this excess water either into groundwater or into the lake or stream.
- Protecting water quality by filtering and breaking down sediments, nutrients, and toxins and then slowly releasing the water to recharge the groundwater.
- Providing habitat for many different species of wildlife including fish, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. This habitat is used for breeding, nesting, feeding and cover. Many threatened or endangered species depend on wetlands.
- Providing numerous recreational opportunities for fishing, bird watching, canoeing, hiking and hunting. In addition, there are other economic benefits such as farming for blueberries, cranberries, wild rice, and timber.
- Treating pollution by serving as a biological and chemical oxidation basin.
- Controlling erosion by serving as a sedimentation area and filtering basin for silt and organic matter.

You can play a role in protecting our vital wetland resources by helping to restore wetlands, promoting wetland stewardship and permanent protection through conservation easements, and educating yourself and others about the importance of wetlands and how to protect them.

