

All About Wetlands

What are wetlands?

Wetland are areas that are inundated (ponded) or saturated (soaked) by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

Other names for wetlands are **marsh, swamp, wet meadow, willow carr, bog, and fen.**

How do you identify a wetland?

Wetlands are wet, but not all wet areas are wetlands! Wetlands can often be identified as the 'green zone' adjacent to a river or lake. To be a wetland you generally need three things:

1. *Wetland hydrology* – water occurs there long enough to support wetland vegetation. This usually means a minimum of about 7 to 14 days a year in the Jefferson Valley.
2. *Hydrophytic vegetation* – wetlands have 'water-loving' plants such as reed canarygrass, willows, cattails, bulrush, and sedges. These plants have adapted to life with little to no oxygen in the soil for long periods of time. (Plants that haven't adapted to saturated soil conditions get yellow and then die if their roots stay wet for too long.)
3. *Hydric soils* – soils that formed under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic (lack oxygen) conditions in the upper part of the soil.

If you see willows or cattails or other types of hydrophytic vegetation, then the site could be wetland.

The image to the right is the symbol used to depict wetlands on topographic maps.



How are wetlands impacted?

Wetlands can be impacted by placing materials (i.e., fill) directly into them. They can also be affected by draining them. For example, digging a ditch through a wetland can cause the water to drain out and for the wetland to dry up. Wetlands can also be impacted by changing the amount of water that arrives at it by altering how the water flows. Increases or decreases in the amount of water can change how the wetland works and what lives there.

Types of wetlands

Riverine – occur next to streams and rivers. The main water source is overbank flow from the river. Examples: floodplains, sloughs, abandoned meanders, and river and creek margins.

Depressional – occur in low spots in the landscape. The main sources of water are groundwater, precipitation, and surface runoff from adjacent uplands. Examples: glacial and prairie potholes, saline basins, wet meadows, and ephemeral ponds.

Lacustrine Fringe – occur adjacent to lakes. The main source of water is overbank flow from the lake. Examples: cattails or sedges on the edges of a lake or reservoir.

Slope – occur on hillslopes where groundwater is close to, or discharges to, the soil surface. Examples: seeps, fens, sloping wet meadows.

Flats – occur in flat areas. The main source of water is precipitation. Examples: flat areas dominated by saltgrass.

Tidal Fringe – occur along coasts and estuaries and are under the influence of the sea level.

Why are wetlands important?

Wetlands perform functions that are valuable to humans and wildlife. The **primary functions** that they perform are:

Flood Attenuation – slow and spread out flood waters

Water storage – store water during high flows that are then released during drier times of the year.

Water quality improvement – Filter and clean the water kind of like our liver and kidneys do for us.

Wildlife/bird/amphibian/fish habitat – The majority of animals found in Montana use wetland or riparian habitat for some part of their life cycle. Beaver, moose, sandhill cranes, ducks, frogs, raccoons, mink, turtles, and dragonflies are some creatures that are often found in wetlands.

Because wetlands are so important to humans and wildlife you need to get permits from the government (Federal and State) before doing any work in them. Talk with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and your local Conservation District before doing any work in a wetland.

WETLAND WORDSEARCH

Directions: Answer the questions using the "All About Wetlands" information sheet then search for these words in the box below. Words in the box are spelled in any direction; diagonally, upwards, downwards, or across from left to right, or right to left.

1. Plants that love water are called _____.
2. Hydric soils lack oxygen, this is called _____.
3. Other names for wetlands are: swamp, _____, and bog.
4. To be a wetland a site needs to have three things. Hydrophytic plants, wetland _____, and _____ soils.
5. The different types of wetlands are _____, lacustrine fringe, _____, and tidal.
6. Common hydrophytic plants are _____ s, willows, _____ es, and _____ s.
7. The general functions that wetlands perform are wildlife _____, _____ attenuation, and water _____ improvement.

