

What exactly is a wetland?

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Long regarded as wastelands, wetlands are now recognized as important natural resources in the landscape which provide numerous beneficial services for people, fish and wildlife. The US Army Corps of Engineers defines a wetland as “those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water 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. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas”. What this is saying in simpler terms is wetlands are areas covered by water, or are areas where soils have been wet enough long enough to support vegetation that does not need oxygen to thrive.

Wetlands have many unique functions and values that we take for granted every day. One important function a wetland does is store water. Think of a wetland like a sponge; in drought years, wetlands hold precious water that plants and animals need. In a wet year, wetlands soak up excess rain water until they are at full capacity, holding the water back from causing flood damage to our roads and homes. Another function of wetlands we take for granted is filtration. Wetlands filter out sediment and particles, including nutrients from fertilizer application, manure, leaking septic tanks, and city sewage. These nutrients and particles are often absorbed by plant roots and microorganisms in the soil. Think of wetlands like our kidneys, they both help control water flow and cleanse the system.