

**Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
Vermont Fact Sheet
Statement on Wetland Issues**

**WHAT ARE WETLANDS?
WHAT ARE THEY WORTH?**

You've probably heard the old saying that "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder." The same can be said about wetland areas. The value of wetlands means different things to different people.

Take the old swamp on the edge of town for example. To the youngster it's an amazing world of frogs, turtles and all sorts of neat adventures on a sunny afternoon; to the fisherman it's home for the old lunker and related fin kin silently lurking beneath the lily pads; the waterfowler sees it as a world of quiet sunrises and the whistling of passing wings; to the ecologist it's an essential ecosystem; to the developer it's a parking lot or building site just waiting to happen. How do you see it?

Simply stated, wetlands are areas which are permanently or temporarily wet. They come in a variety of sizes, shapes, depths, and characteristics. For the purposes of classification, wetlands have been placed into several categories. The following descriptions embrace the wetland types commonly found in Vermont:

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| Type 1. Seasonally Flooded Basins or Flats | Type 5. Open Fresh Water |
| Type 2. Fresh Meadows | Type 6. Shrub Swamps |
| Type 3. Shallow Fresh Marshes | Type 7. Wooded Swamps |
| Type 4. Deep Fresh Marshes | Type 8. Bogs |

The values of wetlands are numerous. A close interrelationship exists among the water, soil, vegetation and diversified animal life. The plants and animals have evolved over the centuries to fit their wetland surroundings or ecosystem. Did you know that an acre of marsh can produce more biomass (plant and animal matter) than an acre of any other type of land?

Wetlands are critical habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife species. To the muskrat, the bullfrog, the brood of mallard ducks, the northern pike and many more larger and smaller life forms, the wetland is the key element in their survival. Many wetlands serve as vital feeding, spawning and nursery areas. Economic values of fur, fin and feather resources are very high, and the aesthetic values derived through photography or nature study of wetland wildlife is important.

Have you ever thought of a wetland area as an "ecological sponge?" Marshes offer a natural, inexpensive flood control system through their storage of excess water from spring runoff and summer storms. Marshes also serve as settling basins, filtering out much of the sediment carried along by flood

waters. Throughout the growing season, aquatic plants also are busy absorbing nutrients and chemicals which would otherwise hasten the pollution of our waters.

Wetland values are coming into sharper focus today as their direct and indirect effects on the quality of life are being more fully understood. Unfortunately a major portion of our wetland heritage has been irreplaceably destroyed or permanently damaged in the name of "progress." Draining and filling have been the principal adversaries. And it's continuing today although progress is being made to save what remains.

Recognizing the resource value of our state's wetlands, the Vermont Fish and Game Department initiated a Wetlands Survey to locate and classify major remaining wetlands. The necessary field work was completed in 1971, cataloging 789 wetland areas (93,669). The tabulated information is valuable for acquisition and management purposes and is also a useful tool for assisting resource planning efforts at the local level.

You have a part to play too. Take a little time to get acquainted with varied flora and fauna of the wetland scene. It's a great show, with something for everyone who takes the time to tune in. Secondly, get involved in the decision making efforts which ultimately decide the fate of local wetland areas. Insist that an intelligent balance be achieved between necessary new developments and the retention of valuable natural areas. The responsibility to wisely use and protect our wetland heritage rests with each of us. Our achievements will be measured by those who follow.

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-- In cooperation with the Information
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