



Ohio Wetlands

Since the late 18th century, 90 percent of Ohio's wetland resources have been destroyed or degraded through draining, filling or other modifications. Because of the valuable functions the remaining wetlands perform, it is imperative to ensure that all impacts to wetlands are properly mitigated.

Why are wetlands valuable?

Wetlands have been called "nature's kidneys" because of their ability to filter impurities from water. Sediment settles out of runoff and dissolved contaminants bind to plant surfaces or are transformed, resulting in improved water quality. Wetlands perform other valuable functions including reducing flood flow and shoreline erosion control.

Wetlands provide a haven for rare and endangered plants, and one-third of the all endangered species depend on wetlands for survival. Many wetlands are important fish spawning and nursery areas, as well as nesting, resting and feeding areas for waterfowl. Wetlands also provide recreational opportunities such as canoeing, fishing, and bird watching.

How are wetlands identified?

Depending on their location and characteristics, wetlands are known by many names. Some of these include swamp, marsh, bog, fen, wet prairie, farmed wetland and wet meadow. Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water often enough to support plants adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. An undisturbed area must have all of the following to be considered a wetland:

- Wetland hydrology — Wetlands have either saturated or flooded soils for some time during the growing season.
- Hydric soils — Wetlands have poorly drained soils that are low in oxygen due to saturation or flooding.
- Hydrophytic vegetation — Wetlands are dominated by vegetation that is adapted to life in saturated or flooded soil. The familiar cattail is just one of more than 1,000 plant species that commonly occur in Ohio's wetlands. Others include trees, annual and perennial herbaceous plants, shrubs, vines and grasses, such as maple trees, rushes and buttercups.

What must you do before performing work in wetlands?

According to the federal Clean Water Act, anyone (including private citizens, federal, state and local agencies) who wishes to discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the State, including wetlands, must obtain a permit from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and, if the wetland is determined to be jurisdictional, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps).

Examples of activities that may require a permit and a water quality certification include:

- boat ramp construction;
- placement of riprap for erosion control;
- filling, grading, dredging, ditching or mechanically clearing a wetland;
- building in a wetland;
- constructing dams or dikes;
- stream channelization; and
- stream diversion.

If the county hydric soils list (available from your natural resources conservation district or online at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>) indicates you have hydric soils on your property, or you suspect there are wetlands on your property, and you plan to fill or dredge or conduct any other activity noted above in these areas, you should contact the appropriate Corps district office.

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If the Corps determines that a permit is needed, you may need to hire personnel trained to identify wetlands and define wetland boundaries.

Wetlands should be identified and delineated by a person familiar with the current delineation manual. This person should have knowledge of soil science and wetland plant identification as well as experience in wetland delineation.

What federal and state agencies review permit requests?

There are three Corps districts with jurisdiction in Ohio: Buffalo District (Lake Erie Basin), the Pittsburgh District (Mahoning River Basin and Central Ohio River tributaries) and Huntington District (Muskingum, Hocking, Scioto, Little Miami and Great Miami River basins).

As part of the permit review process, other state and federal agencies also are consulted. These include Ohio EPA, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Need more information about wetlands?

- Wetland Delineation Manual (1987) and regional supplements — www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Regulatory-Program-and-Permits/reg_supp/
- National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps — produced by the U.S. FWS, these maps can be used for initial indication of wetland locations and types. Available at fws.gov/wetlands/Data/Mapper.html
- Wetland Plants of the State of Ohio — a list of plant species that occur in Ohio wetlands is available at <http://rsgisias.crrel.usace.army.mil/NWPL/>

Contacts

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Huntington District

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Pittsburgh District

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Ohio Department of Natural Resources Office of Real Estate and Land Management

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