

# Wetlands

## Wetlands – What are they and what do they do for us?

Habitats for Healthy Waters-Fact Sheet #1

### Wetlands

Wetlands are areas of land covered by water for all or part of the year and have three distinct characteristics: a water source, poorly-drained soils and wetland vegetation. There are four main wetland types: Marsh, Swamp, Bog and Fen. In the upper Grand River watershed, marshes and swamps are the most common wetland types.

Wetlands provide habitat for hundreds of wildlife and plant species, and also serve many functions important to the health and sustainability of rural landscapes. Wetlands have a positive impact on water quality and quantity by filtering surface runoff, providing groundwater recharge, reducing flooding and erosion and maintaining soil moisture periods. These wetland functions are important for the many headwater and

source areas  
upper Grand  
Proper wetland  
requires that wetlands are in a “healthy” state. Healthy wetlands have a grassed or treed buffer (at least 3 metres wide), undisturbed wetland soils, unrestricted water supply and no waste dumped in or near the wetland.



*Marsh*



*Swamp*

during drought  
extremely  
groundwater  
occurring in the  
watershed.  
function

Wetlands can be non-permanent or permanent in nature.

*Non-permanent Wetland*



*Permanent Wetland*



*Wetlands are  
nature's water  
purification system.*

### What is the status of wetlands in the south western Ontario?

Prior to European settlement, southern Ontario had two to three times the wetland area it does today. Over the last 100 years, clearing and drainage for agricultural expansion has resulted in significant wetland loss. Unregulated peat extraction is also a threat to wetlands because it reduces the ability of wetlands to function properly. Wetland degradation and loss still occurs today because many wetlands are not well protected by provincial policy or official plans. However, more and more landowners are realizing the benefits of wetlands and are taking actions to conserve them.



*Municipal surface  
ditches  
have drained  
many wetlands  
in southern  
Ontario.*



*Peat extraction degrades  
wetland function.*



*Tillage into wetlands reduces their  
ability to filter surface runoff and ac-  
celerates sedimentation of the basin.*

## What can you do to preserve, enhance or restore wetlands?

Here are some things you can do as an individual (whether you have wetlands on your property or not) to conserve, enhance or increase the number of wetlands.

- Contact a local municipal councilor or participate in official plan public consultations to express your interest in wetland conservation.
- Join a wetland conservation group like Ducks Unlimited Canada.
- Support your local MNR Stewardship Council
- Ensure wetlands on your property are in a “healthy” state.
- For “unhealthy” wetlands: increase buffers, restrict livestock access, restore water levels and remove garbage.
- Install nest boxes to improve cavity nesting opportunities.

Drained wetlands may be restored using various methods depending on the basin size and catchment area. Smaller basins with low inflow may be restored by constructing a small berm (dam) and installing a “Hickenbottom” to regulate water levels (see photo). Larger wetlands with higher flows will require more engineering and planning and may require expert advice or funding assistance from agencies

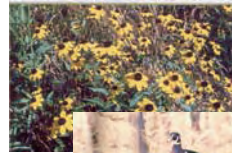


*This simple “Hickenbottom” can be a cost-effective method for restoring small wetland areas.*



*Restricting livestock access to wetlands and providing an alternative watering source maintains shoreline vegetation while improving herd health.*

*for wood ducks, mergansers, greater flycatchers, tree swallows*



*Planting native shrubs or wildflowers around your wetlands adds habitat diversity which increases wildlife value. Installing wood duck boxes improves cavity nesting opportunities and screech owls.*



The “Habitats for Healthy Waters” program is a three-year (2005-2007) initiative to raise the awareness of wetland values among residents of Elgin, Oxford

This project will also help landowners implement wetland stewardship practices that provide benefits to agriculture and the rural community through a series of demonstration sites, workshops and educational material.

and Middlesex Counties.

### Other sources of information:

- Ducks Unlimited Canada Website : [www.ducks.ca/](http://www.ducks.ca/)

**For more information on wetlands or “Habitats for Healthy Waters”, please contact:**

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