

EARTH DAY 2014

WETLANDS / Vital link between land and water

Wetlands are known by many names: marshes, swamps, bogs, wet meadows, seasonal ponds and wet woodlands.

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For scientists, wetlands are areas that are periodically flooded or saturated enough to affect plant growth and soils. Wetlands receive water from tides, rain, surface water runoff and groundwater discharge. Some, such as tidal marshes and floodplain wetlands, are flooded all year; others are never flooded but the water table is at or near the surface for a few months, keeping soils wet.

Tidal and nontidal wetlands are natural filters that absorb water runoff. They maintain water quality by trapping sediments and filtering pollutants – but that's not all.



RON MACARTHUR PHOTOS

WETLANDS, like these in Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, are critical to the ecology of the Cape Region.

FACTS, FIGURES

320,000 acres of wetlands in Delaware

25 percent of Delaware is covered by wetlands

64 percent of wetlands are palustrine forests; meaning nontidal, inland marsh*

47 percent of the state's wetlands are in Sussex

42 percent of wetlands are within the Delaware Bay Basin

17 percent of wetlands are within the Inland Bays Basin

3,126 acres of vegetated wetlands were lost from 1992 to 2007; 2,670 were palustrine wetlands

2,600 acres of palustrine wetlands were lost in Sussex County; 89 percent of the total throughout the state

* Palustrine nontidal wetlands include swamps, bogs and floodplains that are covered with emergent vegetation such as shrubs, trees and moss. These types of wetlands can also include small bodies of water and mudflats that could be devoid of vegetation most of the time.

WETLANDS PROVIDE:

- ▶ Flood control, protecting property from the full effects of storms, floods and erosion
- ▶ Recreation with areas to fish, hunt, canoe, kayak, hike and watch wildlife
- ▶ Recharge, holding water in times of drought, helping to sustain aquifers
- ▶ Habitat for many species, including rare and endangered plants and animals
- ▶ Nurseries for many species of fish and shellfish

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- If you live near a pond, bay or other waterway, maintain a buffer of at least 25 feet planted with native trees and shrubs. Keep areas near wetlands as open space
- Plant a rain garden. For more information on the Center for the Inland Bays program, go to inlandbays.org
- Limit runoff as much as possible and control erosion on your property
- Delaware has an active Adopt-A-Wetland program involving thousands of people caring for more than 100 wetland sites in the state. For information, go to: <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/Admin/DelawareWetlands/Pages/AdoptaWetland.aspx>.

REGULATION - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulates nontidal wetlands while Delaware regulates tidal wetlands. Any work within tidal wetlands – if approved – requires a permit from the state

ISSUES - Court action and changes in federal regulations; development; ditching; excessive timber harvest; invasive plants; lack of vegetated buffers; storms

MORE INFORMATION - For ways to get involved, go to http://assets.worldwildlife.org/publications/480/files/original/108_Things_To_Do.pdf?1350305833 For more information on wetlands, go to inlandbays.org



Wetlands are vital habitats for birds, animals and fish, and help maintain a balance in the food chain.



Wetlands not only provide habitat and water quality control, but also offer protection to property from flooding.