

Wetlands 101

A brief introduction to wetlands and their importance

Overview

Wetlands are areas of land that occasionally become saturated with or covered by water. They are considered transitional spaces between dry land and water, including marshes, swamps, forested wetlands, vernal pools and bogs.

Currently, wetlands cover about 5.5% of the contiguous United States land (lower 48 states), and these critical spaces provide many benefits such as flood mitigation, water purification and erosion control. Additionally, wetlands are carbon sinks, which means they store carbon, preventing it from entering the atmosphere and contributing to climate change. Also, they are an essential source of biodiversity as they provide crucial habitats for a variety of plants and animals. Commercial fishing, shelling, recreational activities (hiking, birdwatching, etc...) and aesthetic enjoyment are other human-specific benefits that wetlands can provide.

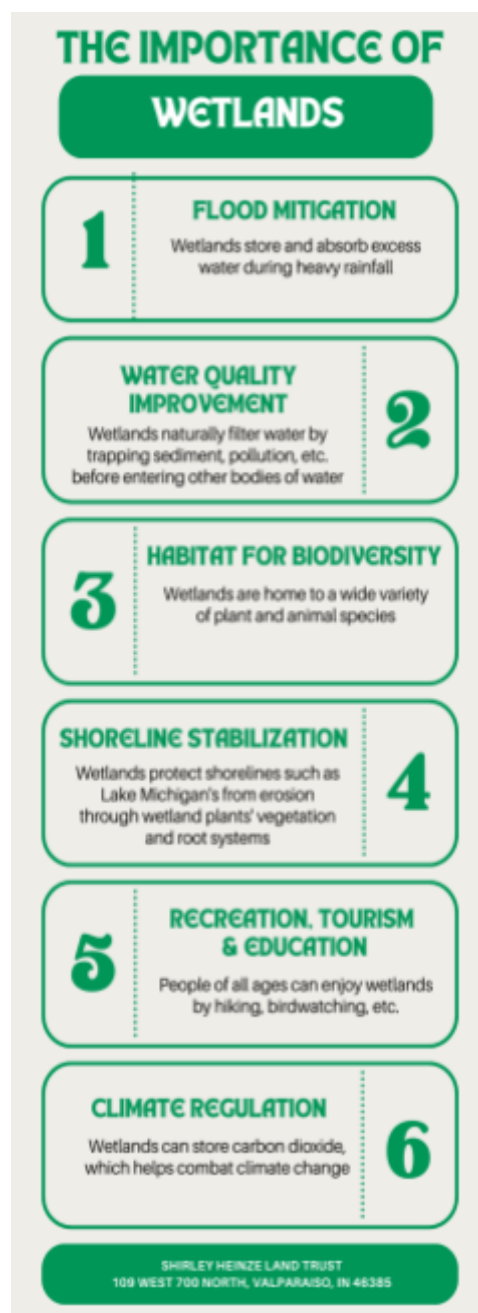
Wetlands are important areas that are often misunderstood and threatened. According to the EPA “approximately 100 million wetland acres remain in the 48 contiguous states, but they continue to be lost at a rate of about 60,000 acres annually” and in Indiana, 85% of known wetlands are gone. With the 2023 [Sackett v. EPA](#) ruling narrowing the definition of a wetland, more of these areas are likely to lose protection and be lost.

Wetlands are primarily lost for developmental and aesthetic purposes. For example, wetlands are filled in to be sold as real estate or drained for agricultural purposes since the soil is often nutrient rich. Also, a wetland may be considered a nuisance and removed because of its periodic flooding and insects. Overall, wetlands are lost because their importance is not recognized or valued.

Wetlands Restoration

The goal of wetland restoration is to return a former wetland site as close to its original function as possible. This is accomplished by rebuilding the site with its aesthetic features and rehabilitating its natural characteristics. Although restoration has its benefits, some wetlands take thousands of years to form naturally.

There are two categories of restoration: regulatory and voluntary. Regulatory restoration is required by law to compensate and offset adverse effects on a wetland. For example, depending on a state’s regulations, this type of restoration is required when a wetland is destroyed or



damaged. Voluntary restoration is not required by law but rather done by choice. Nonprofit organizations lead the way in voluntary restoration, and this practice is crucial for state/local wetland health. For best results, restoration efforts require routine maintenance, monitoring, collaboration and coordination, often from multiple organizations.

How To Help

- Support land trusts and their mission
- Raise awareness and educate people about wetlands' importance
- Share the importance of wetlands with local and state leaders.
- Celebrate American Wetlands Month in May
- Visit nature preserves and bring others to see wetlands' impact firsthand



Hidden Prairie & Ivory Wetlands-SHLT

Notes/References

[Indiana's wetlands](#)

[More information about wetlands-USGS](#)

[What is a wetland- EPA](#)

[Wetlands 101](#)

[Wetland disturbances](#)

[Wetland protection](#)

[Sackett v EPA ruling](#)

[Compensatory mitigation](#)

<https://heinzetrust.org/hidden-prairie-ivory-wetlands/>

[EPA wetlands brief](#)



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