

WETLAND WONDERS

~ St. Joseph River Watershed ~

Historically, wetlands were viewed as obstacles that needed to be overcome or eliminated. But, today we understand the importance of wetlands and the need for protection and restoration of these areas.

What are wetlands? Wetlands are also known as swamps, bogs and marshes. They are the areas where land and water meet. There are 3 components for a wetland:

- ☞ have hydric soils (soils that have developed under wet conditions),
- ☞ have water present during at least part of the year, and
- ☞ contain water-loving plants which have adapted to changes in water levels.



Wetlands can look very different. Most people are familiar with cattail or lily pad wetlands found in areas with standing water. But wetlands may also look like grassy meadows, brushy fields or mature forests. In fact, 75% of Michigan's remaining wetlands are forested areas.

Why are wetlands wonderful? Everyone benefits from healthy wetlands. They:

- ☞ Keep our water clean
- ☞ Provide wildlife habitat
- ☞ Protect houses, businesses and roads from flooding
- ☞ Guard against erosion of streambanks and lakeshores
- ☞ Make great outdoor classrooms

Where are wetlands? Wetlands are found in every state and on every continent except Antarctica. In the St. Joseph River Watershed, wetlands are found in lowland areas, farm fields, forests and along rivers, streams and lakes. Wetlands vary in size: some may only be a few hundred square feet and in the middle of a forest where water collects or some can be several hundreds to thousands of acres along the banks of a river or lake.

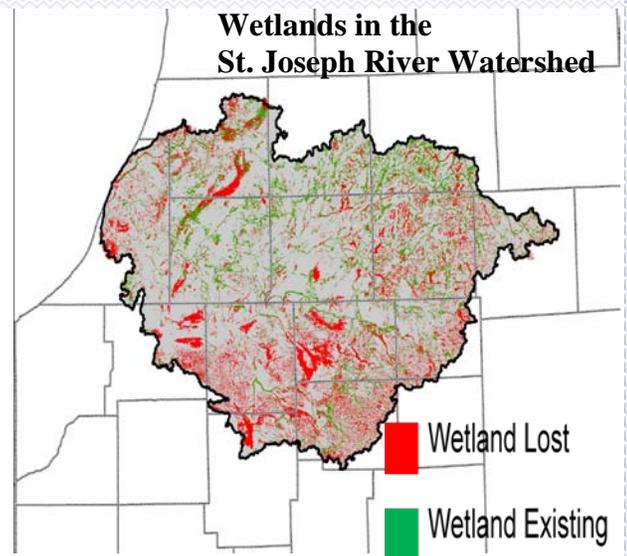


Wetlands are among the most biologically productive places in the world comparable to tropical rain forests and coral reefs.



Why worry about wetlands?

- Despite all the benefits provided by wetlands, the United States loses about 60,000 acres of wetlands each year.
- 53%** of the wetlands have been filled or drained in the St. Joseph River Watershed in the last 200 years.
- Wetland loss continues to degrade and threaten the water resources (streams, rivers, lakes and drinking water) in the St. Joseph River Watershed.
- The polluted runoff that wetlands help to filter and clean can overload and pollute these fragile areas.
- Non-native species, both plants and animals, as well as climate change, contribute to wetland degradation or loss.



Find out more at www.fotsjr.org/wetlandpartnership

Are Wetlands Protected? The regulatory responsibility for protecting wetlands in Michigan is shared by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the Army Corps of Engineers and in Indiana by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Natural Resources. Wetland protection laws require a permit for the following wetland activities:

- Depositing fill material
- Dredging, excavating or removing material
- Construction within or development of a wetland
- Draining wetlands
- Mechanical clearing of vegetation that removes root structures

For more information on wetland permits and regulations:

Michigan www.deq.state.mi.us/LWM/gt-lakes/wetlands/wetlands.html or call 800-662-9278
Indiana www.wetlands.IN.gov or call 800-451-6027

Who do I call if I see someone filling or draining a wetland or if I see sediment from a construction site or earth moving activity polluting a wetland?

- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality 269-567-3500 or 800-292-4706
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management 800-451-6027 ext. 24464

Incentives/Resources for Voluntary Landowner Protection and Restoration of Wetlands

Who to call if you think you have an existing or lost wetland on my property and want more information.

- County Soil & Water Conservation Districts or Natural Resources Conservation Services
- Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy 269-324-1600
- US Fish and Wildlife Service 517-351-6235
- Ducks Unlimited, Inc 734-623-2000



Local Governments' Role in Protecting and Restoring Wetlands

Are Current Levels of Wetland Protection Adequate? In a national survey, 53% of the respondents said they felt that more wetlands protection efforts were needed, 24% said current efforts struck the right balance, 9% said these efforts had gone too far, and 14% said they did not know. Local units of government have the authority to protect wetlands. Wetlands provide multiple public benefits such as flood reduction and clean drinking and surface water.

Update Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances

Review your master plan and zoning ordinance and seek guidance on how to better protect water quality and wetlands.

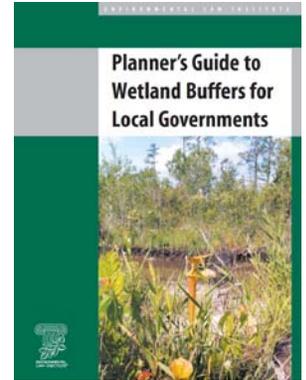
Planner's Guide to Wetland Buffers for Local Governments

http://www.elistore.org/Data/products/d18_01.pdf

Protecting Michigan's Wetlands – A Guide for Local Governments

http://www.watershedcouncil.org/resources%20and%20publications/files/Wetland_eBookFINAL.pdf

Call for assistance: Southwest Michigan Planning Commission at 269-925-1137 x25 or the St. Joseph River Basin Commission at 574-287-1829



Be Prepared - Know Who You Should Call

Voluntarily Programs and Assistance to Protect and Restore Wetlands

- ☞ County Soil & Water Conservation District or Natural Resources Conservation Services
- ☞ Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy 269-324-1600
- ☞ US Fish and Wildlife Service 517-351-6235
- ☞ Ducks Unlimited, Inc 734-623-2000



Report the filling or draining of a wetland or if sediment from a construction site or earth moving activity is polluting a wetland

- ☞ Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
269-567-3500 or 800-292-4706
- ☞ Indiana Department of Environmental Management
800-451-6027 ext. 24464