

WETLAND FACTSHEET



Wetland characteristics:

- “Hydric” soils (soils that developed in wet conditions)
- Saturation within 12 inches of the ground surface during all or part of the growing season
- Vegetation adapted to wet soil conditions

Importance of Wetlands

Wetlands were once considered wasted space, a hindrance to urban development and crop production. In Minnesota, an estimated 11 million acres of wetlands have been drained or filled over the last hundred years, leaving about 10 million acres. While this represents a 50% loss statewide, some areas of Minnesota have lost more than 90% of their original wetlands. Crow Wing County is fortunate to have greater than 80% of the original pre-settlement wetlands remaining. Wetlands provide a number of valuable functions and values:

- **Erosion control.** Wetland vegetation reduces erosion along lakes and stream banks by reducing forces associated with wave action.
- **Fisheries habitat.** Many species of fish utilize wetland habitats for spawning, food sources, or protection.
- **Flood control.** Wetlands can slow runoff water, minimizing the frequency streams and rivers reach catastrophic flood levels.
- **Ground water recharge and discharge.** Some wetlands serve as a source of ground water recharge. By detaining surface waters that would otherwise quickly flow to distant lakes or rivers, the water can percolate into the ground and help ensure long-term supplies of quality ground water. Some wetlands are ground-water discharge areas; they receive ground water even during dry periods. This helps reduce the impact of short-term droughts on rivers and streams.
- **Natural filter.** By trapping and holding water, wetlands store nutrients and pollutants in the soil, allowing cleaner water to flow in to the body of water beyond or below the wetland. Vegetation, like cattails, can absorb some of the pollutants that remain in the soil. Wetlands also moderate water flows, providing time for sediments to settle out before the water is released to other wetlands, lakes, or streams. Less sediment means clearer waters and a better environment for aquatic life.
- **Rare species habitat.** 43% of threatened or endangered species in the U.S. live in or depend on wetlands. This includes plants and animals.
- **Recreation.** Wetlands are great places to canoe, hunt, fish, or explore and enjoy nature.
- **Source of income.** Wetlands provide economic commodities such as cranberries and fish and provide spatial amenities to developments.
- **Wildlife habitat.** Many animals depend on wetlands for homes and resting spots. Fish, amphibians, reptiles, aquatic insects, and certain mammals need wetlands as a place for their young to be born and grow.
- **Education.** Wetlands provide ideal locations for classroom ecological studies and a focus for art.

Wetland regulation

In most cases, draining or filling a wetland will require a permit; applicants will often need to show efforts to avoid wetlands and may be required to replace drained or filled wetland area. In Crow Wing County, you will need to talk with your Local Government Unit (LGU) for any activities in a wetland. A wetland delineation by an approved delineator is typically required to determine the boundaries of a wetland. Crow Wing County is the LGU for all county-jurisdictional areas and can advise you of the process.

