Be A Wetlands Investigator

Place a check next to what you find on your property.

### Native Plants:
- Skunk Cabbage
- Sweet Pepper Bush
- Highbush Blueberry
- Sphagnum Moss

### Invasive Plants:
- Phragmites
- Purple Loosestrife

### Animals:
- Spotted Salamanders
- Frogs
- Turtles
- Dragonflies

### Soils:
- Black soil over grey soil
- Brown soil over yellow

### Sounds:
- Spring peepers
- Ducks
- Geese

### My Property Deed shows wetlands:
- Yes
- No

### Website research:
- go to [www.dem.ri.gov/maps](http://www.dem.ri.gov/maps)
- Wetlands are mapped in my community.
- Wetlands are NOT mapped near me.

### Wetland Buffer Zone:
- Buffer Zone has been left in natural condition to help protect wetland function & values.
- Buffer Zone has been altered and does not support my wetland ecosystem.

### What are wetlands?
In broad terms, wetlands are simply lands that are wet. They have water at or near the surface of the ground for a portion of the growing season. Some wetlands are only wet for part of the year and others are continually wet.

Many wetlands serve as the important transitional areas between dry lands and deeper aquatic systems, like rivers and lakes; others may be isolated within upland areas. Swamps, marshes, and bogs are some of the most commonly known wetland types.

You can find wetlands in forests, you can find wetlands along coastal shorelines and salt marshes, and you can find wetlands bordering streams, rivers and lakes. You can even find wetlands in your own backyard.

Wetlands support both terrestrial and aquatic species of plants and animals. Wetlands are highly productive, unique ecosystems that support the streams flowing on or near your property, which lead to Narragansett Bay.

Wetlands are highly productive, unique ecosystems that support the streams flowing on or near your property, which lead to Narragansett Bay. These ecosystems are important to the sustainability and health of your community, as well as your environment.

### How do I affect wetlands?
Human activities have destroyed over half of all U.S. wetlands. Historically, wetlands were viewed as mosquito-infested wastelands. They were drained for agricultural use, filled for housing developments and industrial complexes, or used as dumping sites for household and hazardous wastes.

Presently swing sets, sandboxes, gardens and sheds tend to damage wetlands located on private properties. Homeowners may be unaware that their home is near, or that their property includes, wetland areas. Property owners may then unknowingly proceed to clear trees, plant gardens, add sheds, install pools or patios, etc. This encroaches on wetland areas and affects their functioning.

Although small encroachments on your property may seem insignificant, the cumulative impact resulting from your actions and the actions of your neighbors can be detrimental.

### Are Wetlands in YOUR Backyard?

Protecting YOUR Water Resources

This educational brochure was developed by the Northern RI Conservation District with funding from Section 104(b)3 of the Clean Water Act.
Wetlands perform critical functions that directly impact the quality of life that you enjoy. Most wetlands help with:

**Flooding & Water Purification**

Wetlands often help reduce flooding. They may temporarily store flood water and slowly release it, preventing flooding of your property--often your basement. Wetland plants (grasses, herbaceous plants, shrubs, & trees) are specially adapted to stressful conditions and serve to slow storm water; ultimately protecting adjacent and downstream properties from flood damage by diffusing large storm flows and slowing the momentum of the rushing water.

Wetland soils that are largely characterized by organisms create an environment that can retain large volumes of water. Wetlands may slowly release excess water into groundwater systems below or pass it into nearby streams.

**Erosion Control & Sediment Trapping**

Wetland vegetation slows storm water flow rates, settling excessive sediments loaded with pollutants from the land (nonpoint source pollution) and preventing soil erosion from your property. “Studies have shown that as much as 80-90% of sediments in the water column may be removed as they move through wetlands” ([www.epa.gov/NE/students/teacher/world.html](http://www.epa.gov/NE/students/teacher/world.html)).

Sediment poses a significant threat to water--both drinking water resources and non-drinking sources, including streams and lakes. Sediments can fill water bodies, smothering fish spawning areas and bottom-dwelling aquatic life. Sediments are prime candidates for transporting pollutants from our homes and communities.

It is important to note that, although vegetated wetlands have a limited capacity for storing sediment, it is not beneficial for them to do so. Storing sediment reduces the wetland’s ability to slow or amass flood waters or to provide habitat.

**Providing Habitat**

Wetlands provide food, shelter, nesting areas and escape cover for a variety of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and birds. Some species simply would cease to exist without wetlands, which are one of the most biologically fertile and diverse landscapes on Earth. Amphibians may spend most of their lives in uplands, but they depend on wetlands for breeding. Vernal pools, a type of seasonal wetland, provide this safe breeding area that is void of predator fish.

According to RI DEM, many rare and native plant and animals of RI depend on wetlands for survival. Examples include the yellow lady slipper, American bitters, and leopard frog. The US EPA reports that up to 45% of rare and endangered plant or animal species rely to some extent on wetlands.

**Human Enjoyment**

Hunting and fishing remain sports that are dependent on wetlands. You can also enjoy hiking, bird watching, and photography in wetland areas. Frogs, turtles and interesting insects can tantalize the curiosity of your children. You can enjoy kayaking and canoeing in open waters abutting wetlands. Wetlands simply provide an escape from the stress and demands of everyday life.

**What can I do?**

To preserve and improve YOUR wetlands:

- Find out if you have wetlands on your property and in your watershed community. You can begin by using the Wetlands Investigator section at the right.
- Learn about the types of plants in your wetland.
- Plant only native species on your property.
- Do NOT “clean up” wetland areas. Woody debris & leaves provide food and habitat for wildlife and promote a healthy wetland ecosystem.
- Reduce your nonpoint sources of pollution:
  - reduce usage of chemical pesticides and fertilizers
  - properly dispose of household chemicals and motor oil
  - clean up and dispose of pet and animal waste
  - properly maintain your septic system ([www.nricd.org/landwaterconnection/index.htm](http://www.nricd.org/landwaterconnection/index.htm) for full list.)

**The Value of your Wetlands**

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