

Stewardship of your private wetland

- ✘ The most important thing you can do for your private wetland is **nothing** - leave it alone!
- ✘ Keep ATVs out of your wetland. Drive around, not through!
- ✘ Use only native species if doing any planting around your wetland. Exotic species like purple loosestrife and goldfish are a big problem in natural wetlands.
- ✘ Protect your wetland during construction on your property by keeping a wide, naturally vegetated, undisturbed buffer area. Install silt fences, silt cloth logs or straw bales to prevent siltation.
- ✘ No need to 'clean' or remove natural brush and logs from your wetland since these provide food and shelter for a large variety of wildlife.
- ✘ Wetlands are part of larger systems so maintain any naturally vegetated corridors and connections to surrounding forests.

Where to find more information

- ◆ **Species at Risk - Ministry of Natural Resources**
www.mnr.gov.on.ca/mnr/speciesatrisk
- ◆ **Environment Canada** www.ec.gc.ca
- ◆ **Hinterland Who's Who** www.hww.ca
- ◆ **Ducks Unlimited Canada** www.ducks.ca
- ◆ **Ontario Nature** www.ontarionature.org
- ◆ **Adopt A Pond - Toronto Zoo**
www.torontozoo.com/AdoptAPond
- ◆ **Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program**
www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/glmmpp
- ◆ **LandOwner Resource Centre**
www.lrconline.com
- ◆ **Wetkit** www.wetkit.net
- ◆ **Wetland Plants of Ontario** by Harris, Kershaw & Newmaster. Published by Lone Pine Publishing. Available at your local bookstore.
- ◆ **On the Living Edge: Your Handbook for Waterfront Living** published by the Living By Water Project. Available from the Muskoka Heritage Foundation at (705) 645-7393.

Caring for Wetlands on your Property



Enjoy your wetland

- ✘ Boardwalks, placed on piers, and woodchip walkways are environmentally friendly ways to get out into your wetland to watch birds and appreciate the wildlife.
- ✘ Educate yourself. Buy binoculars and field guides, have fun, and learn about your wetland.
- ✘ Use your wetland as a natural, changing "picture" by pruning vegetation carefully to allow a view to the wetland. Contact a professional for more information.
- ✘ If digging a small pond is an option you are considering, you **must** consult with local, provincial and federal authorities first. Plan to leave the majority of your wetland and its natural buffer area intact.



Muskoka
WATERSHED COUNCIL

Taylor Road, Box 482
Bracebridge, ON P1L 1T8
Phone: (705) 645-7393
Fax: (705) 645-7888

Email: watershed@muskokaheritage.org
Website: www.muskokaheritage.org/watershed

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BEST PRACTICES SERIES

Wetlands: too wet for a picnic, too dry for a swim!

WHAT IS A WETLAND?

Any land saturated with water long enough to cause the formation of waterlogged soils and the growth of water-loving or water tolerant plants is a wetland.

Wetlands vary from very large complexes connected by streams, to wetlands too small to be mapped that lie in poorly drained depressions in the landscape, to fringes along the edges of lakes and rivers.

Whatever the size, wetlands provide critical habitat for wildlife and valuable benefits to humans.

The four main types of wetlands are marsh, swamp, fen and bog.



WETLANDS IN THE MUSKOKA RIVER WATERSHED

While wetland loss ranges from 68% to 90% in southern Ontario, we are fortunate that we still have most of our wetlands, partly because of the rocky topography and poor suitability of the soil for agriculture.

With 11% of our watershed covered in wetlands, we may view them as something we can afford to lose, but we shouldn't. In reality, we have a wonderful opportunity to conserve and protect wetlands now so they will always be here for future generations of both humans and wildlife to use and enjoy.

We must also learn to be good stewards of this invaluable resource in order to protect our water quality.



Why are wetlands important?

Many of us look at wetlands as wasted space, which could not be further from the truth. Wetlands are one of the most productive ecosystems on earth.

PROVIDE IMPORTANT HABITAT - A large variety of plants, mammals, birds, amphibians, fish, reptiles and invertebrates can only find their habitat needs in wetlands, even very small ones.

IMPROVE WATER QUALITY - Wetlands act as a filter by removing sediments and absorbing excess nutrients.

HELP REDUCE FLOODING - Wetlands physically hold back or slow down the movement of storm water during periods of peak flows.

STABILIZE BANKS AND PREVENT EROSION - Vegetation along the shores of rivers and lakes absorb energy from waves and quickly running water.

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE WATER CYCLE - Many wetlands link the movement of water between the surface and groundwater below the surface.

SUPPORT RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES - Bird watching, hunting, canoeing and nature appreciation depend partially or wholly upon wetlands.

PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS - Logs, wild rice, cranberries, blueberries, fish and commercial baitfish, waterfowl, furbearers, and natural medicines all come from wetlands.



Species at Risk in Muskoka wetlands

Species at risk and wetlands are connected. Some of these animals rely completely on wetlands for all of their life processes.

Blanding's turtle (below) prefers to live in open water marshes and the spotted turtle prefers poor fen habitats.

Eastern massasauga rattlesnake and the eastern hognose snake are upland animals that use conifer swamp wetlands as feeding and hibernation sites.

Some nationally and provincially rare plants can only survive in water saturated habitat.

