

FAQs



Wetlands 101

What Is a Wetland?

"Wetland" describes the area where land and water meet. Wetlands are not always easy to spot—places with a high ground water table (like meadows, fields, and forests) may qualify as wetlands, even if no standing water is visible.

Why Are Wetlands Important?

Wetlands reduce flood risk, improve water quality, and provide valuable habitats for many plant and animal species.

What Are the Different Types of Wetlands?

The four most common examples of wetlands are marshes, swamps, bogs, and fens. Marshes are found near streams, lakes, ponds, and rivers, and range from a few inches to a few feet deep. Swamps are home to water-tolerant trees or shrubs and contain saturated soils and standing water. Bogs are characterized by peat deposits, acidic waters, and a mossy floor, providing a habitat for numerous specially adapted organisms. Fens are similar to bogs, but are less acidic and have higher nutrient levels.

What Is Wetland Mitigation?

The overall goal of wetland mitigation is to ensure that there is no net loss of wetlands. It is a means of offsetting unavoidable impacts to existing wetlands. A permit must be acquired before a wetland is drained or filled, and these permits are often conditioned on mitigation activities—normally the creation of new wetlands or the restoration of previously existing wetlands.

What Are Mitigation Ratios?

Mitigation ratios describe how many acres of wetland must be created or restored for every acre of existing wetland impacted.

How Are Mitigation Ratios Determined?

A number of factors are considered to determine the appropriate ratio, such as the ecological type of the wetland and the proposed mitigation, whether the wetland being impacted is rare or imperiled, and the method of mitigation employed. Mitigation ratios can require as little as 1.5 acres of mitigation per acre of impact (1.5:1), to over 5 acres of mitigation per acre of impact (5:1). If a permit to use or develop wetlands is acquired after-the-fact, the ratio will be doubled.

What Is Wetland Mitigation Banking?

To facilitate compliance with permit requirements, "banks" of wetlands have been established in advance. Wetland mitigation banks offer "credits" that can be sold to applicants to satisfy permit conditions.

Why Is Mitigation Banking Preferred?

Mitigation banks are an effective alternative to traditional means of complying with wetland permit requirements, providing consistently available mitigation sites while reducing the necessary time and cost involved. Wetland mitigation banks often consolidate several small mitigation projects into larger, comprehensive projects, restoring wetland resources in an efficient and well-planned manner.

