



United States
Environmental
Protection Agency

May is... American Wetlands Month

What are wetlands? Why are they important?

Wetlands are the link between land and water, where the flow of water, the cycling of nutrients and the energy of the sun meet to produce a unique ecosystem characterized by hydrology, special soils and vegetation. Wetlands provide numerous benefits, including habitat for flora and fauna, improved water quality, flood abatement, water storage and ground water recharge, reduced erosion, support of fisheries and opportunities for education and recreation. Wetlands may not be wet year-round. In fact, some of the most important wetlands are seasonally dry transition zones.

Many communities are now exploring how to best protect their existing wetland resources and restore some of the thousands of acres that have been lost or degraded. Active citizens are working to protect this critical feature of the environment for future generations.

Unfortunately, wetlands have been misunderstood for many years, often viewed as wastelands to be drained and converted to other uses. But if wetlands disappear, water will not be as clean, fish and bird populations will suffer, and the frequency and severity of floods will increase. Americans have begun to recognize the value of wetlands, and the rate of loss has declined dramatically over the last 30 years. It is important that we continue to stop the loss of wetlands and begin to achieve a net gain through better management and restoration. Learn how you can help by discovering more about wetlands and participating in events celebrating American Wetlands Month.

May is the month to recognize and celebrate the wonderful ways wetlands enrich the environment and people. It is a time to give back to the environment by learning more about wetlands and participating in the many scheduled events. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is proud to partner with the Izaak Walton League of America and other partners celebrating American Wetlands Month each May. Events are scheduled across the country to educate, involve and engage Americans who want to better understand the value of one of Earth's most important ecosystems.



Why Celebrate Wetlands?

Wetlands are among the most valuable but least understood of all natural resources. They provide rich habitat for wildlife. They are places in which many animals and birds build nests and raise their young. Migrating birds stop over in wetlands to rest and to feed on abundant plant life that flourishes there. We celebrate wetlands each May when they are teeming with new animal and plant life.

Wetlands benefit our communities as well. They are valuable because they replenish and clean water supplies and reduce flood risks. In addition, wetlands provide recreational opportunities and aesthetic benefits. They serve as sites for research and education and benefit commercial fishing.



Canoeists dip into wetlands during an exciting educational excursion.



Federal Agencies Participating on American Wetlands Month Steering Committee:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service

Wetland Programs

EPA's Wetlands Division, part of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, works to restore and maintain the nation's waters, including wetlands, by developing flexible and effective wetland programs and policies. The Division distributes sound scientific information and encourages states, tribes and local governments to include wetlands protection and restoration in their watershed planning efforts.

Wetland Protection and You

American Wetlands Month showcases the importance of wetlands. It also reminds us that government regulations and zoning restrictions are not enough to protect and restore wetlands. Citizens must also become involved in wetland protection efforts. You can identify your watershed and find any wetlands in your neighborhood by visiting the National Wetlands Inventory site at www.nwi.fws.gov. Caring, devoted volunteers can make a big difference. You can find volunteer resources on the Internet at these sites:

National Audubon Society

www.audubon.org

Frog Watch

www.mp2-pwrc.usgs.gov/frogwatch

USDA's Backyard Conservation Guide

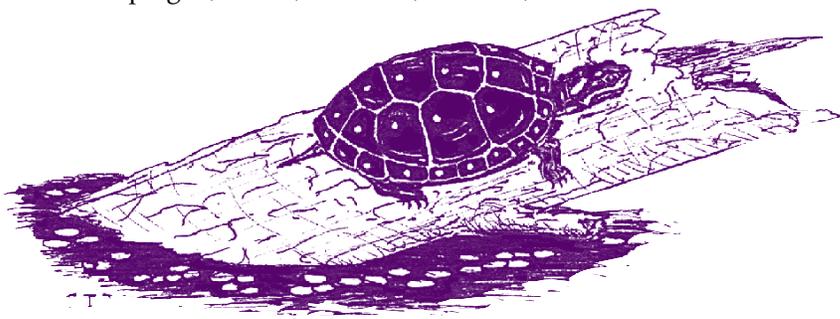
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard>

Volunteer Wetland Monitoring: An Introduction and Resource Guide (EPA 843-B-00-001)

www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands

Volunteer Monitor Newsletter Site

www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/monitor/#vol



History of American Wetlands Month

American Wetlands Month was begun in 1991 by EPA and its partners in federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and private and nonprofit organizations, as a way to educate Americans about the functions and values of wetlands. Annual events, including national and regional conferences, have been staged. A broad range of people with ties to wetlands, including scientists, educators, and public interest groups, participate in these events and celebrations. The annual celebration of American Wetlands Month in May inspires and empowers people to work throughout the year to protect and expand wetlands. For more information on what you can do to take part, visit the EPA website below.

The Environmental Law Institute's National Wetlands Awards are a highlight of each year's celebration. They honor individuals from across the country who demonstrate extraordinary effort, innovation and excellence in wetland conservation. For more information on these awards, see www.eli.org.

The American Wetlands Conference is also held biennially in partnership with the Izaak Walton League of America. Conference information, American Wetlands Month project ideas and a calendar of wetland events in your state can be found on the Izaak Walton League website at www.iwla.org/sos/awm.

For more information on American Wetlands Month, log onto www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/awm