



WETLAND VALUES...

- Wildlife Habitat
- Recreation
- Food Reduction
- Water Purification
- Groundwater Replenishment
- Farm Water Supply
- Ecosystem Preservation



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

SASKATCHEWAN RIVER BASIN

Wetlands and Waterfowl

The word wetlands conjures up images of towering cattails, lily pads and leaping frogs and a pair of ducks skimming the surface before landing with a splash. And that is an accurate description for certain kinds of wetlands. Technically, there are five classes of wetlands: bogs, fens, salt and freshwater marshes, swamps and shallow water. Each class has its own set of unique characteristics but all are defined as lands saturated by water for periods long enough for vegetation to take root and peaty soils to form.

THE VALUE OF WETLANDS

Historically, wetlands have had a reputation of being spaces with little value. However, a closer look reveals that wetlands have plenty to offer.

For the human populations, wetlands help guard against floods, buffer shorelines against erosion and purify water by acting as filters. Wetlands across Canada also provide direct economic benefits through the harvest of marsh hay, wild rice, cranberries, peat moss and sphagnum moss. Income is also generated from recreational activities that abound at wetlands, such as bird watching, and hunting and fishing. Wetlands are wonderful for demonstrating and observing ecological principles in a natural ecosystem. Canadians depend on wetlands and the educational opportunities they provide across the country.

Almost every part of a wetland, from the mucky bottom to the still surface, is important to wildlife. Wetlands provide crucial habitat for birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, insects and plants and support one third of species identified as endangered, threatened or vulnerable. Frogs bury themselves in the mud to survive the winter and some hardy insects cover themselves with bottom debris for the cold season. Fish swim and feed in wetlands, often eating insect eggs on the water's surface. Wetland vegetation provides nesting material for many bird species and serves as a major food source for mammals, including moose.

SASKATCHEWAN RIVER BASIN

You will find a variety of wetlands in the Saskatchewan River Basin. Find out about their special features and how they are threatened.

Parkland Lakes

Larger than parkland potholes, these lakes are surrounded by gently rolling grasslands and trees. A fringe of vegetation circles a deep centre filled with submergent vegetation. Parkland lakes serve as important migration stopovers for birds that depend on deeper water. Threats: agricultural encroachment, drainage, pollution.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Parkland Pothole

The most important breeding habitat for waterfowl can be found where parkland potholes are abundant. The mix of open shallow water and vegetation varies greatly in parkland potholes, but bulrush and cattail are usually included. The source of water is mostly snowmelt and groundwater inflow. Threats: agricultural activities.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Irrigation Wetland

These man-made wetlands store water for future irrigation needs in areas of low rainfall. They feature an even cover of vegetation from edge to edge. A man-made device to control the water level is usually nearby. Irrigation wetlands are important sources of water for a variety of prairie wildlife. Threats: pollution.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Seasonal Prairie Pothole

Despite their seasonal nature, these wetlands provide a critical food source for migrant birds and serve as breeding areas for a wide variety of shorebirds and waterfowl. Seasonal prairie potholes adopt the best features of both ephemeral and permanent wetlands; they are trimmed with whitetop and sedge, and may grow cattail and bulrush in the centre. Threats: agricultural drainage.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Boreal Lake

Located in the Canadian Shield, boreal lakes are deep and clear and feature a large area of open water topped with floating plants like water lilies. bulrush and giant reeds dot the fringe of these wetlands that are usually tucked into a forest. They are home to loons, otters and eagles. Threats: pollution, logging, cottage development.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Delta Marshes

A variety of abundant vegetation and a mixture of ponds and channels make delta marshes, formed at the mouth of rivers, excellent habitat for wildlife. Waterfowl in particular like the lush surroundings these kinds of wetlands offer. Delta marshes also attract human visitors for recreation and economic endeavours such as trapping. Threats: hydro development, pollution, infilling.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Bogs

Black spruce and tamarack can be found at the fringe of these northern wetlands. Water-loving shrubs such as Labrador tea are also common. Bogs are dominated by peatlike soils and have a water table at or near the surface. Spongelike, bogs hold back water that could otherwise cause flooding downstream. Threats: hydro development, highway construction, drainage, logging.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Saline Lake

Large white patches of salinity characterize this type of wetland. Because there usually is no outflow, evaporation makes these lakes extremely saline and attractive to certain species like gadwall and widgeon. They are also breeding habitat for avocet, killdeer and piping plover. Alkali bulrush and widgeon grass flourish in these areas. Threats: drainage, mining from the lake bed.



Photo credit: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Wetland Preservation

Wetlands are in trouble. Across the prairies, more than 70 percent of all wetlands have been drained or heavily impacted by human development. When wetlands are drained, not only does important waterfowl and other wildlife habitat disappear, a critical link in the water cycle and the prairie ecosystem is lost. Wetlands store water, filter pollutants and recharge groundwater supplies. A network of wetlands throughout the prairies is important to maintain water quality and quantity, particularly during drought years. Through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, government and private agencies like Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation are working hard to preserve and restore wetlands and adjacent uplands.



Photo credit Ducks Unlimited Canada

For More Information

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The fact sheet series includes:
Introduction and Overview
Water Management
Hydroelectric Operations
Water Quality
Wetlands and Waterfowl

What YOU can Do!

Everyone can get involved in wetland preservation. Here are a few ideas to help you understand and save these important ecological spaces.

- Start a school project that determines the variety of life that exists in a wetland ecosystem.
- Take a hike to a wetland with your family and keep a list of the wildlife you see. Investigate the vegetation, insects and birds that are part of a wetland.
- Be a friend to wildlife. Support your local wildlife and habitat groups such as the Canadian Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited Canada and your local naturalist organizations.
- Host a fundraising event to raise money to protect a hectare of wetland.
- Learn about how water is being used in your community. Talk to the mayor or reeve about the extent of drainage that goes on in the community.
- Become a steward of the marsh. Restore a wetland on your property. Leave at least a 20 to 30 foot buffer of grasses and other vegetation around the edge to provide habitat for wildlife.
- Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin has a network of organizations that can provide more information on wetlands and other issues.

You **can** make a difference!