

## Identifying Wetlands

Wetlands are areas of the landscape where water is present at or near the surface for sufficient periods during the growing season such that the plants present in these areas are adapted to life in wet conditions. The State of Minnesota is home to many types of wetlands that vary greatly in appearance and function in response to their landscape position and dominant source of water. Wetlands such as swamps and marshes are often obvious, but some wetlands are not easily recognized because they are dry during part of the year or have saturated soil but no surface water.

Identification and delineation of wetlands requires a trained professional who is experienced in applying the technical guidance and procedures contained in the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual and Regional Supplements (Corps Manual). According to the Corps Manual, identification of wetlands is based on a three-factor approach involving indicators of hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soil, and wetland hydrology. Positive indicators of each factor must be documented in order for the area being evaluated to be determined to be a wetland.

## Wetland Functions and Benefits

Wetlands provide a number of important environmental, ecological and economic benefits, including [erosion](#) and [flood control](#), [fisheries habitat](#), [groundwater recharge and discharge](#), [natural water quality filtration](#), [rare species and general wildlife habitat](#), [recreation and educational resources](#), and [economic commodities](#) like harvestable crops (e.g. cranberries).

## Work in Wetlands

Work in wetlands may require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers if the activity is regulated under one or both of the following Federal laws:

**Section 404 of the Clean Water Act** authorizes the Corps to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into “waters of the United States.” “Waters of the United States” include navigable waters, their tributaries and most wetlands. A permit may be required for discharges including, but not limited to, placement of fill material for roads or building pads; the sidecasting of excavated material; construction of levees and dikes; land grading/leveling; and the placement of riprap.

**Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899** requires a permit for structures and/or work in or affecting navigable waters of the United States, including wetlands below the ordinary high water mark of a navigable river or lake. Activities for which permits may be required, include, but are not limited to: placement/removal of structures such as docks or pilings, work involving dredging or disposal of material, aerial cables, directional boring, sea walls and riprap.

## Obtaining Assistance

Corps of Engineers staff is available to assist the public with identifying wetlands, determining if the wetlands are regulated under Federal law, and answering questions about the permitting process. You may request assistance by contacting the St. Paul District toll free at (800) 290-5847, Ext. 5525 and leaving a message. Your call will be returned by the staff member assigned to your geographic area who can respond to your inquiry. You may also find information on the Corps regulatory program by visiting the Corps’ website at:

<http://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/regulatory>.