

FACT SHEET



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Wetlands Office of Water Quality

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Description:

- Wetlands are areas where water saturates the soil long enough to affect the chemical and physical characteristics of the soil and the composition of plant species in the area.
- Wetlands are found throughout the landscape and occur in every county in Indiana.
- Wetlands are customarily thought of as places that lie between deep water, such as a lake or stream, and dry land. However, wetlands are also found at higher elevations in the landscape. They occur in depressions, at the head of streams or even on slopes where groundwater seeps from a hillside. Wetlands also occur in wooded areas.
- Not all areas that flood or pond water are wetlands, and not all wetlands are wet on the surface.
- Nearly 7,000 different plants may live as wetland vegetation in the United States. Some Indiana examples include: bulrush, willow, green ash, pin oak, buttonwood, silver maple, cotton wood, arrowhead, and cattail.
- In addition to the diversity of wetland plant life, nearly 2,000 named soils in the United States occur in wetlands.

Environmental Benefits of Wetlands:

- Wetlands are important for water storage, acting like a natural sponge, storing water, and slowly releasing it. This process slows the water's momentum and erosive potential, reduces flood heights, and allows for ground water recharge. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) found that protecting wetlands along the Charles River in Boston, MA, saved \$17 million in potential flood damage annually.
- Wetlands also act as a natural filtration system. Because water is slowed in the wetland and forced to move in close contact with the microbes in the soil, much of the water's nutrient and pollutant load is removed by the time it leaves a wetland. In fact, due to wetlands' filtration ability, environmental managers have developed artificial wetlands to treat storm water and wastewater.
- Wetlands high in the landscape act to capture and filter rainwater and transmit this water into aquifers that feed our streams and wells.
- It is common to find woodlands saturated just below the surface for more than two weeks at a time. These dryer wetlands are more difficult to recognize, but have distinctive soil chemistry and plant species which render them valuable water quality and groundwater recharge resources.
- Wetlands are also some of the world's most productive ecosystems, rivaling tropical rainforests in biological productivity and diversity of species.

Wetland Permits

- Federal wetland regulations are contained in Sections 401 and 404 of the federal Clean Water Act. Indiana wetland regulations are found in the Indiana Administrative Code under 327 IAC 17.
- In Indiana, wetland permits are issued primarily by USACE and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) may also be involved in reviewing certain projects.
- Permits for wetland impacts typically require measures to be taken to protect wetland areas from immediate impacts and long-term impacts. Some wetlands projects require permits from both USACE and IDEM, while other projects require permits only from IDEM. **A professional**

wetlands delineation is necessary in order to determine your permit requirements. Before beginning any project, always check with an IDEM project manager.

- Some wetland loss is unavoidable. In these situations, IDEM issues a permit requiring the replacement of the lost functions and values of the wetland. This replacement is known as compensatory mitigation or, sometimes, just mitigation.
- The IDEM permit will contain success criteria and monitoring requirements to ensure the wetland functions and values are adequately replaced through compensatory mitigation.
- Mitigation Banking is another option to constructing individual mitigation wetland sites. Mitigation Banking allows a sponsor (*e.g., individual, corporation, governmental entity etc.*), to restore a large wetland in advance of impacts with the expectation that they may use or sell these "credits" at a future date. Under certain circumstances, the sponsor may be allowed to use or sell a percentage of the credits before the wetland is restored.

IDEM's Role:

- IDEM is responsible for protecting human health and the environment while providing for safe industrial, agricultural, commercial, and governmental operations vital to a prosperous economy.
- IDEM's role in the federal permitting process (*for USACE permits*) is to ensure that activities authorized by USACE meet state water quality requirements.
- IDEM is responsible for issuing permits under Indiana's State Regulated Wetlands Program for projects in wetland areas that do not fall under USACE jurisdiction and are not exempt from state rules.

Citizen's Role:

- Citizens are encouraged to learn about watershed management and support local efforts to improve water quality. Watershed management information is provided on IDEM's website at www.idem.IN.gov/nps/2369.htm.
- Citizens are encouraged to monitor IDEM's website for information about proposed projects and participate in matters that may be of interest.
 - IDEM posts Public Notices about permit applications and public comment opportunities on its website at www.idem.IN.gov/5474.htm.
 - Federal and state permitting processes provide opportunities for citizen involvement through public comment periods.
 - Public comment is a time set aside during the permitting process to allow citizens to submit written comments to USACE and/or IDEM regarding applications for proposed wetland impacts.
 - Where it is requested and appropriate, a formal public hearing may be held in addition to the public comment period, to provide citizens with an opportunity to speak on the record.

More Information:

- Find Indiana's Wetland Conservation Plan on the IDEM website at www.idem.IN.gov/wetlands/2334.htm.
- For information about U.S. EPA's Wetlands Program, visit U.S. EPA's website at <http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/index.cfm>.
- Find links to other sources of information regarding wetlands on IDEM's Web page for Wetlands, Lakes and Streams Regulation at www.idem.IN.gov/wetlands/index.htm.
- State wetland regulations contained in Indiana Administrative Code 327-IAC-17 are posted online by the Indiana Legislative Services Agency at www.in.gov/legislative/iac/T03270/A00170.PDF.