Wetlands are a valuable part of our environment. Healthy wetlands help keep Nova Scotia’s watersheds, lakes, and streams vibrant. They keep our drinking water pure and safe by filtering out sediments and chemicals, and supplying clean water to important underground sources. They are also home to many species of fish and wildlife.


**WETLANDS DESCRIPTION**

Simply stated, wetlands are areas that, for most of the year, are wet enough to soak your feet when walking through them without rubber boots. Some people call this the “squish test.”

Wetlands have water at or near the surface, with little or no water flow. They have peat or rich mineral soils as their foundation. There is enough water over a sufficient period of time to support wetland vegetation or aquatic life. Some wetlands are wet only in spring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SOURCE OF WATER</th>
<th>WATER CHEMISTRY</th>
<th>SOIL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>PLANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOG</td>
<td>Precipitation</td>
<td>Fresh water, acidic and stagnant</td>
<td>Layers of decomposed peat (often &gt; 40 cm deep)</td>
<td>Peat moss, cotton grass, pitcher plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAMP</td>
<td>Groundwater or seepage</td>
<td>Generally fresh water, neutral</td>
<td>Mixed mineral and organic soils with a woody organic layer</td>
<td>Trees and shrubs like black spruce, red maple and alders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARSH</td>
<td>Precipitation, seepage, tidal flooding</td>
<td>Can be salt or fresh water, generally neutral to alkaline</td>
<td>Organic, often mucky surface with mineral soils below</td>
<td>Rushes, cattails, water lilies and arrow heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEN</td>
<td>Seepage from ground or surface waters</td>
<td>Fresh water, slightly alkaline to slightly acidic</td>
<td>Layers of decomposed peat (often &gt; 40 cm deep)</td>
<td>Bog plants plus sedges and wildflowers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wetlands are defined in the Environment Act as: land commonly referred to as marsh, swamp, fen, or bog that:

- either periodically or permanently has a water table at, near, or above the land’s surface, or is saturated with water, and
- sustains aquatic processes as indicated by the presence of poorly drained soils, hydrophytic vegetation and biological activities adapted to wet conditions.

Benefits of Wetlands:

Wetlands keep our drinking water pure, safe, and abundant:

- remove organic waste and bacteria
- filter out excess nutrients, contaminants, and silt
- store and release surface water
- refill groundwater reservoirs

Wetlands minimize erosion and storm damage:

- moderate flood waters
- slow runoff rates
- protect coastlines from storm surges

Wetlands provide habitat, often for rare or endangered species of plants and animals:

- provide breeding habitat for many birds, fish mammals, frogs, turtles, salamanders, and insects
- support fisheries and food webs in nearby rivers, inlets, and coastal waters
- supply food, commercial products, and medicinal and ceremonial plants, such as cranberry, blueberry, wild rice, and sweetgrass

Fact sheets also available:

- Farms & Wetlands
- Wetland Checklist
- Development & Wetlands
- Wetland Compensation
- Woodlots & Wetlands
- Wetlands Policy Fact Sheet

Contact Nova Scotia Environment’s Wetland Program at 902-424-2117 or wetlands@gov.ns.ca

Visit Nova Scotia Environment’s website for links to additional information www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/