



**Geography Standard:** Understands the characteristics of ecosystems on Earth's surface

**Benchmark:** Knows ways in which humans can change ecosystems

# We Need Wetlands

Wetlands are ecosystems found in low, flat areas. Often they border ponds, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Wetlands include marshes, swamps, and bogs. No trees grow in a marsh, but there are lots of grassy plants, such as cattails. They thrive in the soggy ground covered by shallow water. Ducks, swans, turtles, and many different bugs live there, too.

Florida has the world's biggest freshwater marsh. The Everglades covers 4,000 square miles (103,600 sq. km). The Everglades is not entirely freshwater, however. Near the sea the freshwater and saltwater mix. Some plants and animals can live only in this brackish water.

Saltwater marshes lie along the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. During high tide these marshes are under water. During low tide these marshes are visible. The water rushes out, carrying bits of plants, dead animals, and minerals necessary for sea animals. Many plants and animals depend upon this ever-changing environment.

Many wetlands go through stages. Swamps begin as marshes. If the water covering the marsh gets shallow enough, trees and bushes take root. Swamps have trees that grow with their roots underwater. Usually the water level changes with the amount of rainfall. If the trees' roots stay underwater too long, they die. This leaves ghostly stumps in the murky water. Water snakes, frogs, beaver, heron, and moose are just a few of the animals that live in swamps.

Bogs have damp, spongy soil. So many dead plants have piled up that there is no longer any standing water. This rotting plant matter turns into peat. In Ireland and Scotland peat is dried and burned to heat homes. Bog soil is useful for growing cranberries and wild rice. Salamanders and lots of insects live there.

People have destroyed more than half of the 215 million acres of wetlands that were once in the U.S.\* Parts of some major cities—including Washington, D.C.; San Francisco; and Boston—stand on former wetlands. First the swampy land was filled in with truckloads of dirt. Then people put buildings and streets on the new land.

Most people do not find wetlands beautiful. Swamps can have a bad odor, too. But wetlands are important. Marshes and swamps store water, thus reducing the flooding a heavy rain can cause. They **replenish** underground water supplies. The wetland plants keep water from eroding the surrounding land. About one-third of all of America's endangered plants and animals live in these areas. Now laws protect some wetlands. More than a dozen wetlands in the U.S. are refuges and wildlife preserves.

(\* not including Alaska)

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# We Need Wetlands

## Comprehension Questions

- The world's largest freshwater marsh is in
  - Ireland.
  - Mexico.
  - Florida.
  - Scotland.
- Think about how wetlands change over time. What would happen first?
  - Peat is used to heat homes.
  - There is a marsh.
  - There is a bog.
  - There is a swamp.
- How do saltwater marshes differ from freshwater marshes?
  - Saltwater marshes change daily; freshwater marshes do not.
  - Freshwater marshes change several times daily; saltwater marshes do not.
  - Saltwater marshes are endangered; freshwater marshes are not.
  - Freshwater marshes are endangered; saltwater marshes are not.
- Replenish means
  - to drain.
  - to clean.
  - to open up.
  - to refill.
- From the article you can tell that brackish water is found
  - only in freshwater swamps and marshes.
  - only in saltwater marshes.
  - where salt and fresh water combine.
  - only in bogs.
- Picture a swamp. What would you be surprised to see there?
  - rotten logs
  - sea gulls
  - ducks
  - snapping turtles
- Do you think that it is okay to fill in wetlands if the space is needed for new homes in a growing city? Explain.

Answer Key: 1.c 2.b 3.a 4.d 5.c 6.b

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# Wetlands

How are a bog, a marsh, and a swamp the same? They are all wetlands.

A wetland is land that is very wet at least some of the time. Plants and animals live there.

The crocodile lives in swamps in Florida. A yellow fly lives in bogs in England. This fly is called the "hairy canary."

People are working to save the wetlands. They try not to build houses on them. They also try not to build roads over them.

Wild grass and birds and bugs live in wetlands. We must keep their homes safe.



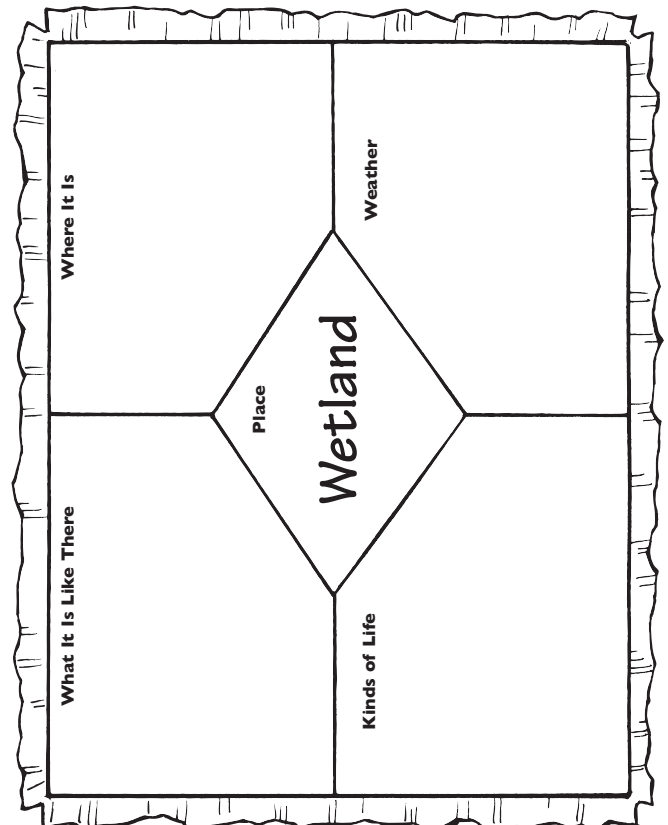
## Story Questions

- What is not a kind of wetland?
  - a bog
  - a marsh
  - an ocean
  - a swamp
- A wetland is land that is wet . . .
  - all the time.
  - some of the time.
  - never.
  - in the spring.
- The hairy canary is a . . .
  - crocodile.
  - wetland.
  - wild grass.
  - fly.
- We should protect wetlands to . . .
  - keep plants and animals safe.
  - build roads over.
  - build houses on.
  - drink water.

Answer Key: 1.c 2.b 3.d 4.a

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# Habitat Organizer



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