



Habitat Loss

WETLANDS

Photo Courtesy of U.S. EPA

ONLY HALF OF OUR ORIGINAL WETLANDS STILL EXIST

- ▶ Over half of all the wetlands that existed in the lower 48 states at the time of European settlement have been lost.
- ▶ In many states, wetland loss is severe. Both California and Ohio have lost at least 90% of the wetlands that were present 200 years ago.
- ▶ Louisiana loses up to 40 square miles of wetlands annually. By 2040, Louisiana could lose an additional 800,000 acres, moving the coast inland by as much as 33 miles in some areas.
- ▶ Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated a net gain in freshwater wetlands between 1998 and 2004, most of the gain was in acres of ponds. There continues to be significant losses of vegetated wetlands, such as emergent and shrub wetlands.

RESTORING LOST WETLANDS

Federal and state agencies and conservation organizations are continually engaging in efforts to restore degraded wetland habitats. For example, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetlands Reserve Program offers conservation easements to landowners willing to protect and restore wetland habitat. Almost 2 million acres were enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program as of 2008, preserving or restoring vital wetland habitat across the country.

Non-profit conservation organizations are vital to wetland restoration projects, and they often partner with state and federal agencies to carry out restoration efforts. In Illinois, for example, local conservationists and scientists teamed with the state's Department of Energy and Natural Resources to form the Des Plaines River Wetlands Demonstration Project. The objective of the project was to study the effects of wetlands on water quality, wildlife conservation, and flood protection, particularly after the flood-prone county lost over \$40 million in damages as a result of a massive flood in 1986. The results of these restoration efforts have been monitored over the decades to demonstrate the ecological and economic benefits of wetlands. The demonstration, which totaled 50 acres, is now home to 21 endangered or threatened species that were not present before restoration, with notable increases in bird, beaver, muskrat, fish, and plant populations. In addition, the restored area was able to filter 80% of nutrients and sediments from flowing into Des Plaines River.

WETLANDS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

On the American and Canadian plains, shallow, water-filled depressions known as prairie potholes host more than 50% of North America's migratory waterfowl. These wetlands also absorb excess rainfall and snow melt, reducing the threat of flooding downstream. Changes in precipitation due to climate change are already evident in the prairie pothole region, adding stress to a habitat already altered by drainage for agriculture. Decreased precipitation in the western prairie pothole areas may lead to drier soils, earlier spring drying, and fewer potholes. These changes may cause the prairie potholes to shrink by 38-54% by the end of the century.

National Wetlands Awards

For the past 20 years, the National Wetlands Awards program has honored leaders in wetland conservation, research, and education. These wetland champions personify the concept of "think globally, act locally," dedicating countless hours and resources to our nation's wetlands.

MAKING AN IMPACT



Photos Courtesy of Molly Brown and Donna Dewhurst/FWS

1999 Volunteer Leadership recipient Molly P. Brown has worked tirelessly and successfully to protect and expand Virginia's Back Bay National Refuge. The Refuge is composed mostly of fresh and brackish marshlands and supports high levels of biodiversity. These marshes support perennial plants that provide habitat for invertebrates that fish, birds, and amphibians rely on for food. Animals like geese, muskrats, and red-bellied turtles rely on this protected area.

When housing developments and a new parkway threatened to destroy some of the forested wetlands within the Refuge, Ms. Brown contacted every member of the Virginia Beach City Council, involved a coalition of non-profit organizations, and garnered strong public support to oppose the project. Her efforts succeeded in finding alternative options.

Ms. Brown, as president of the Friends of Back Bay, has secured several million dollars-worth of land acquisition appropriations. The influx of federal support and increased community advocacy has helped to double the size of the Refuge from its creation in 1938, to 9,000 acres.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

LEARN more about wetland habitats and restoration efforts in your area, at www.ducks.org.

CONTACT your state wetland program or your local natural heritage program at www.natureserve.org/visitLocal.

EDUCATE friends, family, local reporters, and elected officials about the importance of wetlands.

VISIT us online, check out former National Wetland Awards recipients at nationalwetlandsawards.org.

VOLUNTEER with a local conservation group or floodplain restoration project.

PROTECT wetlands on your own land. Find out how at www.aswm.org/fwp/consultant/index.htm#guides.

The National Wetlands Awards are administered by the Environmental Law Institute and supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Forest Service, Federal Highway Administration, and NOAA Fisheries.