

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

WHY IS THIS SWAMP IN MY BACK YARD?



HELP PROTECT YOUR WETLAND!

If you live next to a wetland, then you are the first line of defense in protecting and preserving it.

LEARN WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP!

Wetlands are Important

Many people that live near Florida's swamps or other wetland areas believe the common misconception that wetlands are useless wastelands that only harbor dangerous animals, stinging insects and stagnant water. But if you live next to a wetland, consider yourself lucky! You actually live next to a natural botanical garden and thriving wildlife refuge. In fact, wetlands provide a variety of natural functions essential to Florida's ecology:

- Serving as habitat for a wide variety of native plants and animals (some of which are threatened or endangered)
- Filtering pollutants from the water supply
- Preventing flood damage by storing floodwaters
- Moderating temperatures by slowly releasing heat on cold winter days and by cooling the air during hot summer days



Wetlands in Danger

In the 1800s, wetlands covered more than half of Florida. As humans developed the state, wetlands were routinely destroyed, drained and filled. In the early 1970s, people began to realize that wetlands actually provide valuable habitats, protect the state's water supply and store floodwaters. As perceptions changed, laws were enacted to protect wetlands and preserve their essential functions. But the decades of abuse have taken their toll. Florida has lost nearly half of its wetlands since pioneer times. With help from residents, the remaining wetlands can be protected and preserved to benefit future generations.

Know Your Wetland

The wetland preserve area adjacent to your property or within your community is a conservation area granted to the South Florida Water Management District (District). Also known as a mitigation area, it is a wetland that will be preserved and maintained in its natural state in perpetuity by the CDD or permittee. Subdivision developers are required to preserve wetlands and to inform new residents of restrictions regarding actions in and adjacent to wetlands. Your property survey should indicate any wetland boundary limits. Older homes and subdivisions may not have wetland boundary limits on their property surveys, but you can still easily determine if you live next to a wetland. Here's what to look for:

- **Wetland areas are soaked or flooded by water for part of the year**
- **Some types of wetlands include forested swamps, grassy marshes, vegetated lake shorelines, forested river floodplains and wet prairies**
- **Plants that thrive in wetlands include pickerelweed, cattails, water lilies, sedges and rushes**
- **Trees that thrive in wetlands include cypress, maple, willow, bay, elm, laurel and water oak**
- **An abundant variety of birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals**

Do Not Alter a Wetland or Buffer Area

A wetland preserve area cannot be modified in any way. This includes, but is not limited to, removal or trimming of planted vegetation, planting of new landscape vegetation and sod, dumping of yard debris and clippings, and installation of structures such as swing sets, decks, patios, gazebos, docks, etc. Along the edges of wetland preserves are strips of land called buffers. These buffers are usually planted and maintained with native vegetation. They can also be open water areas. The buffer provides a natural barrier between developed areas and preserve areas. In addition, it can serve as an alternate habitat type - a dry area for birds and other animals to nest, or a deep water area for animals such as fish, waterfowl, turtles, salamanders, and frogs. State laws, local laws and some deed restrictions protect wetlands and their buffer areas.

Do Not Encroach on a Wetland or Buffer

Wetland preserve areas and buffers can only be used for passive recreational purposes, and the use of any motorized or non-motorized vehicle is prohibited. Encroachment within these areas may result in civil penalty and removal of the encroachment. A District Permit, along with any other required governmental agency permits, must be modified prior to any changes to the wetland preserve or its associated buffers.

Thank You!

By reading this article, you have taken the first step toward understanding and preserving Florida's wonderful wetlands. Thank you for helping to protect this valuable resource. For information about wetland wildlife, please contact:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
8535 Northlake Blvd.
West Palm Beach, FL 33412
561-625-5122

For information about native wetland
plants, please contact:

Your local County Extension Service Office or
online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> (type "Common
Native Plants" in the search box).

For information about wetland preserves
and buffers, please contact us at:

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