

WETLANDS

PROTECTING NATURAL & CONSTRUCTED

Do you have wetlands in your HOA community? Wetlands are typically natural but can also be constructed to manage stormwater. **Natural wetlands have protection requirements your HOA must follow.** The best way to find out if there is a wetland your community is to contact your city's public works department where a specialist can identify wetland boundaries.

What are Wetlands?

Wetlands occur throughout watersheds and can vary in size from a small confined basin to hundreds of miles. Some are dry for much of the year, while others usually contain several feet of water.

Wetland characteristics include:

- **Hydric soils:** Soils showing evidence of prolonged saturation.
- **Hydrophytic vegetation:** Plants adapted to wet conditions.
- **Saturation or inundation:** Wet above ground or within 12 inches of the surface during all or part of the growing season.

Wetland types include:

- **Marshes:** Can be shallow or deep, with 6 inches to 3 feet of water and plants such as grasses, cattails, and wild rice.
- **Swamps:** Can have 6 to 12 inches of water and plants including shrubs or trees.
- **Bogs:** Soils contain peat, the partially decomposed remains of plants, with water near the surface year-round and plants including shrubs, trees, and moss.
- **Wet meadows/Fens:** Typically saturated or nearly saturated and contain low-growing grasses, sedges, rushes, and broad-leaved plants. **Calcareous fens** are a rare type of wet meadow, rich in calcium carbonate.
- **Shallow open water:** Shallow ponds, lakes and reservoirs with 3 to 10 feet of water and plants such as grasses and floating leaf vegetation.
- **Seasonally flooded:** Generally contain water for relatively short periods, primarily in the spring or after heavy rains, and contain grasses, sedges, annual plants, or flood-tolerant trees.



Wetland Benefits

Due to their unique natural characteristics, **wetlands provide numerous beneficial services** for the environment, people, and wildlife, including:

- **Erosion control:** Vegetation slows water and reduces damage along shorelines and stream/river banks.
- **Flood control:** They act as a natural sponge to slow and retain runoff water, reducing flooding.
- **Groundwater recharge and discharge:** Some recharge groundwater by slowly allowing surface water to filter into the groundwater reserves, and some are discharge areas that receive groundwater, even during dry periods, and help maintain flows in nearby rivers and streams.
- **Water quality:** They filter out pollutants to protect and improve the water quality of downstream lakes, streams, and rivers.
- **Wildlife habitat:** 43 percent of threatened or endangered species in the U.S. live in or depend on wetlands, and they are home to many common aquatic and terrestrial species as well.
- **Recreation:** They provide space to canoe, hunt, fish, or watch wildlife.
- **Economic value:** They provide economic commodities such as wild rice and bait fish.

Protecting Wetlands

In Minnesota, wetlands are protected by state law that prohibits altering them, and permits are required for all development projects that impact them. **Your HOA can protect wetlands by asking your landscapers to maintain a 10 foot buffer of un-mowed native vegetation around them, removing invasive species, and not dumping grass clippings and yard waste.** Buffers protect wetlands from pollution and provide habitat for reptiles, amphibians, and birds.

Constructed Wetlands

Constructed wetlands replicate natural wetland features to provide environmental benefits. They are generally large, shallow, basins or a series of connected pools planted with flood-tolerant native vegetation and designed to collect runoff from large drainage areas. They typically have an inflow forebay to collect sediment and can hold water for over 72 hours. Similar to a stormwater pond, **your HOA must regularly inspect and maintain stormwater wetlands to ensure engineered components are functioning.**



Visit mnwcd.org/hoa-stormwater-tools for more information and resources.

Reach out to your city to determine where
wetland boundaries lie in your HOA.