

# Wetlands

## in Nova Scotia

Saltmarsh near Antigonish

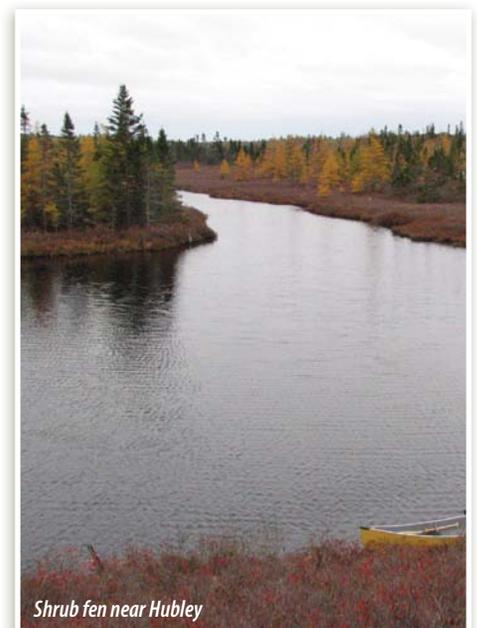
Wetlands are a valuable part of our environment. Healthy wetlands help keep Nova Scotia's watersheds, lakes, and streams vibrant. They keep our drinking water pure and safe by filtering out sediments and chemicals, and supplying clean water to important underground sources. They are also home to many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

Nova Scotia's Wetland Conservation Policy reflects the government's commitment to protect wetlands. Visit [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/conservation.policy.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/conservation.policy.asp) to view the policy.

### 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.



Shrub fen near Hubley

### MAIN WETLAND TYPES IN NOVA SCOTIA AND KEY CHARACTERISTICS

TYPE	SOURCE OF WATER	WATER CHEMISTRY	SOIL CHARACTERISTICS	PLANTS
BOG	Precipitation	Fresh water, acidic and stagnant	Layers of decomposed peat (often > 40 cm deep)	Peat moss, cotton grass, pitcher plants
SWAMP	Groundwater or seepage	Generally fresh water, neutral	Mixed mineral and organic soils with a woody organic layer	Trees and shrubs like black spruce, red maple and alders
MARSH	Precipitation, seepage, tidal flooding	Can be salt or fresh water, generally neutral to alkaline	Organic, often mucky surface with mineral soils below	Rushes, cattails, water lilies and arrow heads
FEN	Seepage from ground or surface waters	Fresh water, slightly alkaline to slightly acidic	Layers of decomposed peat (often > 40 cm deep)	Bog plants plus sedges and wildflowers



Wooded Swamp near Halifax

## 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.



Open bog near Shelburne

## 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



Deep freshwater marsh near Tangier Grand Lake



Vernal pool

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- 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](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland)**

### FACT SHEETS ALSO AVAILABLE:

- Farms & Wetlands
  - Wetland Checklist
  - Development & Wetlands
  - Wetland Compensation
  - Woodlots & Wetlands
  - Wetlands Policy Fact Sheet
- [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/)**