Volunteering for Wetlands

Can Volunteers Protect Wetlands?

Government regulations and zoning restrictions are not enough to protect wetlands. Citizens must also become involved. Volunteers that demonstrate concern and devote time to protecting wetlands can make a big difference. In fact, volunteers have already halted wetland degradation and reduced the number of threatened wetlands in communities around the country. We all have a responsibility to protect and restore wetlands, and by working together we can make a difference.

How Do Volunteers Make a Difference?

Local citizens not only provide the extra workforce necessary to assess the health of and threats to our wetlands but also serve as some of the most powerful advocates for protecting wetland habitat. Volunteer efforts to improve our environment have been gaining momentum over the past 20 years. Volunteer groups are growing in strength and number in many states across the country. These groups would certainly welcome your assistance, or you could even start a group in your own community. Whether you work on your own or with a group, you can help wetlands by working to preserve and protect them, monitoring and assessing their health, and restoring them. There are ways to help.

Wetland Preservation and Protection

When volunteers work to protect local wetlands, they greatly improve the chances that those wetlands will be valued by the community. You can help local conservation and restoration efforts by influencing local and regional environmental policy. By educating others about the functions and values of wetlands, you can empower them to become involved in wetland protection. For example, many landowners have voluntarily enrolled wetland areas on their property in the USDA’s Wetland Reserve Program, which provides technical and financial support to landowners. You could also join the Izaak Walton League of America in its American Wetlands Month celebration every May. The League offers American Wetlands Month kits on the Internet to help local groups initiate on-the-ground projects. The kits include fact sheets on wetlands, project ideas, contact information, case studies of projects from across the country, and links to many informative wetland sites. For more information on American Wetlands Month, visit the web site at www.iwla.org/SOS/awm.

Wetland Assessment and Monitoring

Volunteer monitors often make critical observations and measurements that help assess the health of a wetland. Monitoring wetland characteristics such as plants, soils, hydrology, and wildlife helps us better understand wetland functions and track changes in wetland ecosystems. To become involved in wetland...
monitoring and assessment, contact your local extension service or join a local citizens group involved in wetland monitoring. Working with these groups, you can address data gaps that exist in the current monitoring system in your area. If no local organizations are involved in wetland monitoring, you can help to educate local officials about the importance of wetlands and encourage them to set aside funding to support wetland monitoring.

**Wetland Restoration**

Through their dedication, volunteers increase awareness of the importance of wetlands and create a foundation for active restoration of previously degraded wetlands. By staying involved in local issues and serving as a source of information for others, you can reinforce the importance of wetland restoration and ensure that restoration projects get local support. To further your efforts, you can join citizen groups that sponsor restoration projects and help with hands-on restoration work like planting native wetland plants. You can also make a difference by raising funds or recruiting additional volunteers from youth groups, church groups, schools, and other sources.

**Massachusetts North Shore Salt Marsh Assessment**

In the summer of 1999, a volunteer-staffed pilot monitoring program began along the Massachusetts coast, with the support of local organizations, the state, and EPA. Using a curriculum written by the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension, the program developed a series of citizen monitoring workshops that focused on using six wetland parameters—birds, plants, water chemistry, land use, tidal influence, and benthic macroinvertebrates—to assess a wetland’s health. Their outreach and education efforts drew 50 new volunteers. The training program is being revised, using feedback from the volunteers, and will eventually be used throughout New England to train other citizen groups to monitor wetlands. For more information, visit the web site at www.mvpc.org/services_sec/mass_bays/8T&B_volunteers.htm.

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**The Wetland Fact Sheet Series**

- **Wetlands Overview**
- **Types of Wetlands**
- **Functions & Values of Wetlands**
- **Threats to Wetlands**
- **Wetland Restoration**
- **Funding Wetland Projects**
- **Wetland Monitoring & Assessment**
- **Sustainable Communities**
- **Volunteering for Wetlands**
- **Teaching about Wetlands**

For more information, visit www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands.

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**Wetland Resources**

**On the Internet:**

- **Volunteer Monitor Newsletter Site** ................................................................. www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/volunteer/vm_index.html
- **Izaak Walton League of America** ........................................................................ www.iwla.org
- **National Audubon Society** .................................................................................. www.audubon.org
- **Frog Watch** ....................................................................................................... www.frogwatch.org

**In Print:**

- **Handbook for Wetlands Conservation and Sustainability**, 1998. Available from the Izaak Walton League of America, 707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878. Call (800) BUG-IWLA or e-mail sos@iwla.org.