

PROTECTING CANADA'S WETLANDS

Overview

Wetlands occur where water is held on the surface of the land, or where the water table is at or near the land's surface. They are usually in low-lying areas or along the edges of lakes and rivers. Many wetlands are permanently flooded, while others flood only periodically.

Canada is home to 25 per cent of the world's wetlands. They are important for the health of our country and the health of our planet.

Why NCC protects this habitat

Many unprotected wetland ecosystems are disappearing due to residential and commercial development, conversion to agriculture, invasive species and pollution. Large areas of wetlands already have been lost across Canada. More than 50 per cent of the Maritimes' salt marshes, 72 per cent of southern Ontario's wetlands, 40 to 70 per cent of the Prairies and 85 per cent of British Columbia's South Okanagan wetlands have disappeared. These losses are part of a global trend.

Many wildlife species rely on wetlands. They provide vital nesting and feeding grounds for waterfowl, habitat for insects, fishes, amphibians and many other animals. When wetlands disappear, species that depend on these habitats have nowhere else to live. Some species become endangered, or no longer occur in Canada. As we lose these places, we also lose unique wildlife habitats and the crucial ecological services that healthy wetlands provide, such as flood control and purifying drinking water.

Conservation needs

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is protecting more than 109,000 hectares of wetlands across Canada. Currently, there are several NCC properties requiring urgent action to conserve the wetlands' natural ecological features and the species they sustain. These include:

- Chase Woods, BC
- Bunchberry Meadows, Alberta
- Mackie Ranch, Saskatchewan
- Breda Bay and Siglavik, Manitoba
- Hastings Wildlife Junction, Ontario
- Île de Grâce, Quebec



Northern flicker (Photo by Ren Furgenson)

5 FACTS ABOUT CANADA'S WETLANDS

1. Approximately 14 per cent of Canada is covered in wetlands.
2. Since 1900, over 64 per cent of the world's wetlands have been lost, with nearly half of this loss happening since 1970.
3. To date, NCC has secured over 281,000 hectares of wetland and upland habitat for migratory birds and other wetland species under the *North American Wetlands Conservation Act*.
4. Wetlands play a critical role in absorbing and storing CO² emissions. They also remove sediments, excess nutrients and even bacteria from our drinking water.
5. Thirty-seven of Canada's wetlands have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance, including NCC's Minesing Wetlands (ON), Creston Valley (BC), Grand Codroy Estuary (NL) and Lac Saint-Pierre (QC).

To learn more about this habitat type, visit natureconservancy.ca/wetlands.

