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WETLANDS FACT SHEET

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Topic: Local Wetland Initiatives

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The need for strong wetland protection has been widely recognized in the last few decades throughout the country. As a result, wetlands are currently regulated at the state and federal levels and, in some towns in Vermont, at the town level. The true importance of wetlands, however, is most felt at the local level. It is the landowners near the wetlands that are affected by the loss of that wetland, whether by increased flooding of their property, contaminated wells, polluted streams and lakes, loss of neighboring wildlife or loss of scenic beauty. It is, therefore, critical that wetland protection begin at the local level. Most landowners would rather interact with local commissions than with state or federal government officials. Also, developers often seek local approval as the first step of a project. If proposed impacts to wetlands are identified and addressed early in the process, there is the greatest chance of resolving them with the least cost.

There are many roles conservation commissions, local citizens, or other interested groups can take in promoting strong wetland protection in their town. Below are some ideas.

- Obtain copies of the Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory (VSWI) maps for the town. Learn where the mapped wetlands in your town are.
- Call the Wetlands Office for information on wetlands and wetland regulations. The Wetlands Office has numerous Fact Sheets, brochures and other information available.
- Conduct an inventory of the wetlands in the town. The Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory (VSWI) maps are not a complete representation of all the wetlands in Vermont. Due to the scale of the VSWI maps, many small wetlands are entirely omitted and the boundaries of many of the mapped wetlands are not accurate. An inventory of the local wetlands can greatly increase the accuracy of the existing maps. These wetlands should then be shown on a map. Several towns in Vermont, such as Charlotte, Hinesburg, and Norwich, have completed a wetland inventory. If your town is pursuing this option, please call the Vermont Wetlands Office for the standardized mapping techniques.
- Obtain landowner information from the Town Office and notify each landowner owning wetlands of their presence and the applicable regulations.
- Conservation Commissions and/or Planning Commissions should review all new projects to see if there are any wetlands on or near a proposed project. As part of the review process, Commissions should conduct site visits for properties with wetlands and provide specific comments to town officials and the state Wetlands Office. The more specific the comments are, the more useful they will be.

- Invite a speaker to come to discuss wetlands with you. Talks can be specifically targeted to meet your needs. Invite all the local boards and commissions to get the word out.
- Borrow the new wetlands video and/or wetland slide show from the Vermont Wetlands Office to present to public officials and residents.
- If the town does not have local wetlands protection, draft some and bring it to the Planning Commission for approval. The Water Quality Division can provide you with models from other towns. It is important to include wetland protection in the town plan and in the zoning regulations.
- If your town does not currently have a Conservation Commission, get other interested residents and start one. Call Virginia Rasch with the Association of Conservation Commissions at (802) 223-5527 for more information about starting Conservation Commissions.
- Conduct field trips to nearby wetlands for residents of the town. Include a naturalist, birder or environmental educator. Bring picnic lunches. There is so much to explore and learn about wetlands, have fun!



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