

# Discovering Wetlands

*A helpful guide for identifying wetlands in your backyard.*



Delaware Wetlands



[de.gov/delawarewetlands](http://de.gov/delawarewetlands)

# Where To Start?

Wetlands may not always be obvious. You can take some simple steps to learn if your property has these valuable natural resources that are protected by law.



## Step 1: Review Maps

Visit [de.gov/wetland toolbox](https://de.gov/wetland-toolbox) to find an interactive map viewer to enter your address. If the maps show a potential wetland, consult a wetland professional to verify that you have a wetland and to identify its boundaries.



## Step 2: Put Boots on the Ground

Walk the property with this checklist, and look for wetland clues. (Please note that this checklist is not intended to represent an inclusive listing of all wetland characteristics, but is a rough guide. You must get a professional to verify a wetland is present and determine wetland boundaries.)



## Step 3: Explore Your Options

If the maps indicate wetlands and/or you answered “Yes” to any wetland clue questions, a wetland is likely present.

*If you're buying land*, please consider engaging the services of a qualified specialist to inspect the property for the presence of wetlands prior to submitting a written offer, or include in your written offer a clause making your purchase of the property contingent upon a satisfactory wetlands inspection. (Please see [Agreement of Sale for Delaware Unimproved Land](#) for more information.)

*If you're planning to build on land you already own*, consult a wetland professional to verify wetlands and mark their boundaries so you can plan your project to avoid them. If you can't avoid them, you may need to apply for state and federal permits detailed on [DNREC's website](#). Filling or damaging wetlands gets rid of the valuable services wetlands provide us, so permit applications are reviewed carefully and are not automatically granted.

**Wetlands are wonderlands that are great places to enjoy and explore. Some wetlands may be in good condition making them good candidates for conservation, while some maybe in poor health making restoration or enhancement a better option. For a list of programs, contacts and wetland benefits, please visit the [Delaware Wetland Toolbox](#).**

# Wetland Clues Checklist

Yes No

## Is There Evidence of Water?

- Are there ponds, lakes, streams, springs or seeps?
- Are there "low spots" where water collects or the ground is soggy for at least a week?
- Are there drainage channels or has the site been ditched or tilled in spots to "dry it out?"
- If the site is a farm field, are there areas where crops do not grow or the plants are stunted or yellowing during years with normal rainfall?
- Are there water marks or stains on tree trunks?
- Do trees have a shallow root system?
- Are there areas where water has scoured away plants and leaves, flattened vegetation or where no vegetation is growing?
- Are sticks, leaves, soil and other debris deposited by water in a line on plants and trees (rack)?

## Are Water Loving Plants Present?

- Are these plants present: cattails, phragmites, smooth saltmarsh cord grass, reed canary grass, sedges, rushes, yellow flag iris, joe-pye-weed, New England aster, sensitive fern, skunk cabbage or sphagnum moss?
- Are these shrubs present: dogwoods, willows, alder, groundsel tree or blueberry?
- Are these trees present: willows, maples, black or green ash, black gum, swamp chestnut oak, swamp white oak, Atlantic white cedar, bald cypress, ironwood?
- Do plants have roots growing from their stems above the soil?
- Do trees have multiple trunks or are the trunks expanded or swollen at the base?

## Are There Wet Soils ? (*Dig a hole down 20 inches*)

- Is the soil dark brown or black?
- Does the soil feel moist or can you squeeze out water?
- Is the soil primarily peat (decaying plants) or muck?
- Does the hole fill partially with water or does water trickle down the sides?
- Is the soil dark gray, gray-brown or brown-yellow or marked with orange spots or dark streaks?
- Are there crayfish burrows -- mounds of dirt with a hole?

# Where Do I Find a Wetland Professional?

Wetland delineations are performed by wetland professionals, and are a jurisdictional determination of where the wetland is located on your property. Professionals will look at the soils, hydrology and plants located at the site to determine the presence and border of a wetland.

A list of [environmental consultants](#) are available to hire to perform this service. The State can also help with the identification of State-regulated tidal wetlands on your property if you call [DNREC's Wetlands and Subaqueous Lands Section](#) (302-739-9943) and provide the "contact person of the day" with a detailed description of your property location.

# What Are The Services Wetlands Provide?



1. Slow the flow of runoff
2. Improve water quality
3. Control erosion
4. Provide fish and wildlife habitat
5. Provide recreation
6. Supply groundwater
7. Absorb floodwaters and reduce flooding
8. Protect the coast from storms

For more information about wetlands and a list of contacts please visit [de.gov/wetlandtoolbox](http://de.gov/wetlandtoolbox).

