

World Wetlands Day - February 2nd

Move Over, Groundhog! February 2nd each year is World Wetlands Day. The international Convention on Wetlands was adopted February 2, 1971. Known as the [Ramsar Convention](#), members, including the United States, commit to:

"The conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution toward achieving sustainable development throughout the world."



Wetlands are among the most diverse and productive ecosystems on earth, providing essential services and supplying our fresh water. "Wetlands" includes all lakes and rivers, swamps and marshes, aquifers, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, and coral reefs. "Wetlands" also encompasses human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans.

The United States has designated 35 Ramsar sites as "Wetlands of International Importance." One of these sites is our Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the U.S. More than 150 major rivers and streams flow into the bay's 64,299 square mile drainage basin that covers parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and all the District of Columbia.

Facts about the Chesapeake Bay, our Wetlands of International Importance:

- The Bay is approximately 200 miles long from its northern boundary at the Susquehanna River to its outlet in the Atlantic Ocean.
- It is 2.8 miles wide at its narrowest (between Kent County's Plum Point near Newtown and the Harford County shore near Romney Creek) and 30 miles at its widest (just south of the mouth of the Potomac River).
- Total shoreline including tributaries is 11,684 miles, covering a surface area of 4,479 square miles.
- The average depth is 21 feet, reaching a maximum of 174 feet.
- The bay is spanned twice -- by the Chesapeake Bay Bridge from Sandy Point to Kent Island, and in Virginia by the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel connecting Virginia Beach to Cape Charles.

The Bay and other Maryland wetlands face rapid population growth and water quality challenges. With careful stewardship, we seek to guard against the destruction of tidal wetlands and maintain a healthy Bay into the future though a balanced approach to ecological, economic, developmental, recreational, and aesthetic considerations – the same guiding principles we use for evaluation of Board of Public Works wetland licenses.



World Wetlands Day
2 February 2017

Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction



Wetlands sustain lives. How can we take care of them?

Healthy wetlands can reduce the damage caused by disasters and make recovery faster. Yet worldwide, wetlands are in alarming retreat; at least 64% of them have disappeared since 1900.



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Coastal Protection Strategy for Tacloban, Philippines

In 2013, the city of Tacloban in the Philippines was struck by typhoon Haiyan, the deadliest tropical cyclone in the country's history. In 2016, a new nature- and infrastructure-based plan was presented, showing how the area could "future-proof" itself against disasters. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) and experts from Deltares, Arcadis, Wetlands International, the Red Cross, Rebel and Van Oord suggested a combination of measures and outlined ways to fund them:

- restoration of mangroves and other ecosystems
- identifying specific sites along the coast for building infrastructure that works with nature
- capacity building for communities and government agencies

Mismanaging wetlands can make disasters worse...

- Canalizing rivers and limiting drainage reduces the natural floodplain sponge effect and makes flood surges more powerful.
- Clearing mangroves to create shrimp fisheries and salt pans removes the natural coastline buffer and reduces carbon storage.
- Mining coral reefs can leave the shoreline exposed to stronger than normal waves.
- Draining or filling in wetlands for agriculture and development removes their function as a natural sponge against flooding.
- Burning and draining peatland releases CO₂ in large quantities.



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So how can we help wetlands to help us instead?

COMMUNITIES

- Find out how the wetlands in your area are being used or overused - and who depends on them. How do wetlands protect your area during extreme events?
- Adopt practices that ensure long-term sustainability of the local wetlands for everyone. Measures might include controlling illegal fishing and dumping, no-take rules, set catch limits and regulate the type of activities by season.
- Clear rubbish from wetlands, and unblock streams and rivers.

POLICY-MAKERS

Governments can include wetlands in their strategy for coping with disasters. Possible measures:

- Designate wetlands in flood- and storm-prone zones as protected areas.
- Restore degraded wetlands that act as protective barriers.
- Work with local stake holders and civil society to promote sustainable agriculture, fisheries and tourism.
- Adopt cross sectoral policies especially in agriculture and water to help protect wetlands.

INDIVIDUALS

- Organize or join a wetland clean-up.
- Become a Wetland Ambassador advocate for wetlands.
- Use water more sparingly and avoid toxic products that drain into wetlands.
- Participate in actions to conserve and restore wetlands.

Expert suggestions on managing wetlands to reduce the risk associated with disasters can be found in Ramsar Handbooks 1,2,8,9,10,12,16 and 19.



2017 World Wetlands Day Art Contest

Sponsored by the Society of Wetland Scientists

Grades 1-5

- ✿ Drawings on standard size (8.5 x 11") paper.
- ✿ Theme: "Image of Your Favorite Wetland".
- ✿ 1st place: \$50
- ✿ 2nd place: \$25
- ✿ 3rd place: \$10



Grades 6-12

- ✿ Drawing, photograph, or combination image on standard size (8.5 x 11") paper.
- ✿ Theme: "Wetlands for Protecting and Serving People".
- ✿ 1st place: \$50
- ✿ 2nd place: \$25
- ✿ 3rd place: \$10

Thursday, February 2nd 2017 is World Wetlands Day! The Society of Wetland Scientists is promoting this important day by offering an art contest open February 2 – April 2, 2017. Thirty finalists in each category (grade group) will be announced in May (American Wetlands Month), and the final artworks will be judged by SWS members attending the Annual meeting held in San Juan, Puerto Rico June 5-8, 2017. Entrants should include the following on the back side of the paper (or sticky note):

Name, grade level, city state and country, and parent's email address.

Send original artworks to:

**SWS Wetland Promotions Subcommittee
22 N. Carroll St., Suite 300
Madison, WI 53703, USA**

All submissions become the property of SWS for promotion and education purposes. Submissions will not be mailed back to entrants. Submissions must be received by April 2, 2017 to qualify for the contests. Only one submission per person.