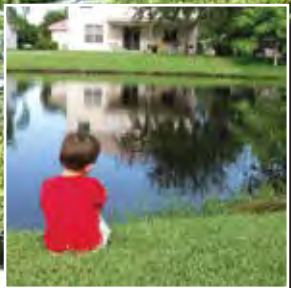


# What Is This Swamp Doing in My Back Yard?



# I Love My Swamp!

Many people that live near Florida's swamps or other wetland areas believe the common misconception that wetlands are useless wastelands that only harbor dangerous animals, stinging insects and stagnant water.

But if you live next to a wetland, consider yourself lucky! You actually live next to a natural botanical garden and thriving wildlife refuge.

In fact, wetlands provide a variety of natural functions essential to Florida's ecology, such as:

- Serving as habitat for a wide variety of native plants and beneficial animals (some of which are threatened or endangered)
- Filtering pollutants from the water supply
- Preventing flood damage by storing floodwaters
- Moderating temperatures by slowly releasing heat on cold winter days and by cooling the air during hot summer days

## Wetlands in Danger

In the 1800s, wetlands covered more than half of Florida. As humans developed the state, wetlands were routinely destroyed, drained and filled.

In the early 1970s, people began to realize that wetlands actually provide valuable habitats, protect the state's water supply and store floodwaters. As perceptions changed, laws were enacted to protect wetlands and preserve their essential functions.

But the decades of abuse have taken their toll. Florida has lost nearly half of its wetlands since pioneer times. With help from residents, the remaining wetlands can be protected and preserved to benefit future generations.

# Know Your Wetland

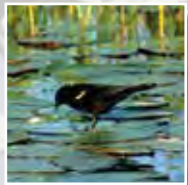
Subdivision developers are now required to preserve wetlands and inform new residents of restrictions regarding actions in and adjacent to wetlands.

Your property survey should indicate any wetland boundary limits.



Older homes and subdivisions may not have wetland boundary limits on their property surveys. But you can still easily determine if you live next to a wetland. Here's what to look for:

- Wetland areas are soaked or flooded by water for part of the year
- Some types of wetlands include forested swamps, grassy marshes, vegetated lake shorelines, forested river floodplains and wet prairies
- Plants that thrive in wetlands include pickerelweed, cattails, water lilies, sedges and rushes
- Trees that thrive in wetlands include cypress, maple, willow, bay, elm, laurel and water oak
- An abundant variety of birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals



# Protecting Your Wetland

If you live next to a wetland, then you are the first line of defense in protecting and preserving it. Here are some things you can do to help:

## **Ask Before Altering Wetlands**

In most cases it is illegal to clear, fill, excavate or build structures in wetlands without proper permits. Since state laws, local laws and some deed restrictions protect wetlands and their buffer areas, it's best to leave wetlands alone.

However, if you do wish to do work in or near wetlands adjacent to your property, you should first consult with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District), as well as review the deed restrictions for your subdivision.

## **Never Add, Remove or Trim Wetland Vegetation**

While the wetlands next to your property may seem unruly, you should resist the temptation to add decorative plants, remove unsightly plants (by hand or by using herbicides) or trim any vegetation.

With the guidance of District environmental staff, it may be permissible to selectively trim or remove undesirable or invasive plant species to enhance the habitat value of the wetlands.

You could also plant a screen of Florida-native shrubs in front of “messy-looking” wetland areas. In addition to improving the view, these plants may serve to attract butterflies, birds and other beneficial wildlife.

## Where to Go for Help

Information about native plants is available at your local county Extension Service Office or online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> (type "Common Native Plants" in the search box).

**For information about  
wildlife, contact:**

**Florida Fish and  
Wildlife Conservation Commission**

*3900 Drane Field Road  
Lakeland, FL 33811-1299  
(863) 648-3203*

**For information about  
protecting wetlands, contact:**

**Southwest Florida  
Water Management District**

***Brooksville Headquarters***  
*2379 Broad Street  
Brooksville, FL 34604-6899  
(352) 796-7211 • 1-800-423-1476 (FL only)*

***Bartow Service Office***  
*170 Century Boulevard  
Bartow, FL 33830-7700  
(863) 534-1448 • 1-800-492-7862 (FL only)*

***Sarasota Service Office***  
*6750 Fruitville Road  
Sarasota, FL 34240-9711  
(941) 377-3722 • 1-800-320-3503 (FL only)*

***Tampa Service Office***  
*7601 Highway 301 North  
Tampa, FL 33637-6759  
(813) 985-7481 • 1-800-836-0797 (FL only)*

## **No Dumping**

The law prohibits dumping any trash, pesticides, herbicides or other chemicals in wetlands. These actions harm native plants, kill wildlife and degrade water quality.

## **Reduce Light and Noise Pollution**

Bright lights and loud noises scare wetland wildlife and disrupt their natural patterns. Avoid shining lights directly into wetlands at night and limit the amount of noise coming from your home.

Planting Florida-native shrubs in front of wetlands bordering your property can help reduce the amount of light and noise entering the wetlands.

## **Thank You!**

By reading this pamphlet, you have taken the first step toward understanding and preserving Florida's wonderful wetlands. Thank you for helping to protect this valuable resource!



WATERMATTERS.ORG • 1-800-423-1476

VISAY0002 01-06