

What role can prescribed burning play in wetland management?

- Regular prescribed burns are a key component of a comprehensive wetland management plan.
- Together with controlled grazing and mowing, prescribed burns mimic the original environment of wetlands.
- Burning has been shown to reduce the presence of many invasive species.
- Regular burning also reduces fuel loads in wetlands, decreasing the chance of a property damaging wildfire.

What can you expect to see after a prescribed burn?

- Immediately afterward, mostly charred brush remains and ash-covered ground.
- Within weeks, wetland rushes, grasses, and flowers will grow back, invigorated by the release of nutrients.
- Over time, repeated burning can suppress the growth of invasive species and improve native wildlife habitat.

"Swamps and wetlands are a necessary part of the ecological creation...An owner of land has no absolute and unlimited right to change the essential natural character of his land so as to use it for a purpose for which it was unsuited in its natural state and which injures the rights of others."-Justice Hallows, Wisconsin Supreme Court, Just vs. Marinette County, 1972

Wetland Plants and Animals:

Understory:

- Joe-pye-weed
- Turks cap lily
- Tussock sedge
- Bluejoint grass

Shrubs:

- Red osier dogwood
- Willow species

Animals:

- Great blue heron
- Blanchard cricket frog (WI endangered)
- Yellow headed blackbird
- Blanding's turtle

For more information:

WI-DNR publication "Getting the Help You Need," on organizations that can give you funding and advice for restoration and habitat management activities. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/public/gettinghelp.pdf>

WI-DNR Wetlands Restoration Handbook. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/wetlands/documents/handbook.pdf>

WI-DNR publication "Just Add Water," on restoring shallow wetlands. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/public/justaddwater.pdf>

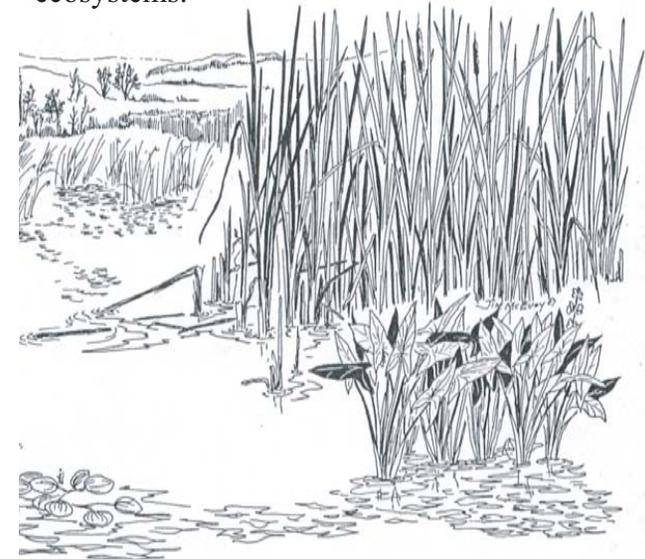
The Endangered Resources Program of the Wisconsin DNR. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/>

Conservation Programs for Wisconsin Landowners. Information at <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/WI/Pubs/Progs2003.htm>
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Wetlands in Wisconsin

Just fifty years ago, public opinion universally agreed that wetlands were a health menace and a waste of fertile land. Today, most efforts aim to restore degraded wetlands and protect every wetland that remains after years of ditching, draining, and filling.

What changed in our understanding of wetlands that brought about this new perspective? Research has demonstrated that wetlands provide a host of irreplaceable 'ecosystem services'--the valuable, ongoing benefits provided by thriving ecosystems like water purification, flood control, and maintenance of wildlife. The worth of each remaining wetland has increased as the number of intact wetlands has decreased. Today, countless organizations are working together to maintain and restore wetland ecosystems.



Where were wetlands historically found in Wisconsin?

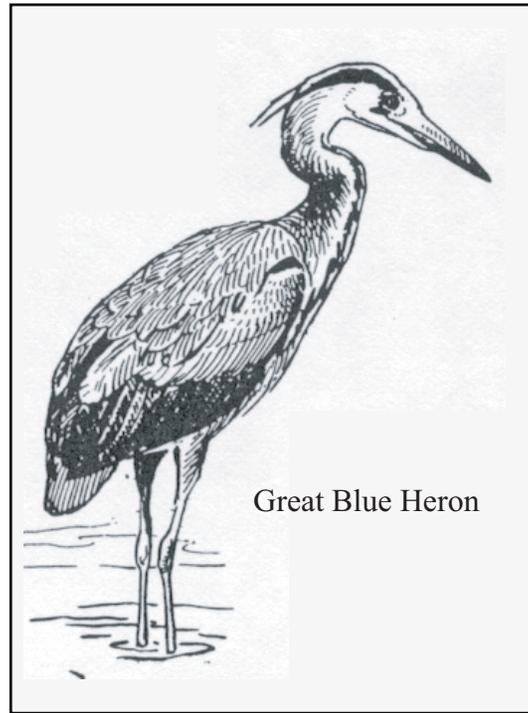
- In the lowest part of the landscape or along streams and lakes.
- Different types of wetlands are found throughout Wisconsin, including prairie pothole wetlands, sedge meadows, tamarack swamps, and many others.

What are the characteristics of wetland ecosystems?

- Presence of water at or just below the soil surface for part of the year.
- Specific soils that develop under wet conditions.
- Distinctive plants adapted to wet soils.
- More variety of wildlife than almost any other ecosystem. More than one third of U.S. endangered species depend on wetlands during part of their life cycle.

What valuable 'ecosystem services' do wetlands provide?

- Nurseries for many fish species including the northern pike, muskie, and walleye.
- Flood control by slowing water runoff and temporarily storing excess water.
- Purifying rain and surface water through special chemical reactions.
- Protecting streambanks and shorelines from erosion.



Great Blue Heron

What is the status of Wisconsin wetland ecosystems today?

- Approximately 5 million acres of wetlands remain in Wisconsin out of the original 10 million.
- Wetland health is still threatened by invasive species (e.g. reed canary grass and purple loosestrife), urban and rural runoff, and eroding sediment from development.

"If there is anything which may be supposed to be known by everybody...it is that swamps and stagnant waters are the cause of malaria and malignant fevers, and that public power is never more legitimately exercised than in removing such nuisances."-The Swamp Land Act of 1850, U.S. Supreme Court

What role did fires play in maintaining wetland ecosystems?

- Before European settlement, fires started by lightning strikes or Native Americans periodically swept through wetlands.
- Fire removes brush and trees, creating improved, open habitat for wildlife.
- Fire incinerates dead vegetation, which promotes plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil and giving sunlight an opportunity to warm the ground earlier in the spring.

How is this situation improving?

- Citizens are increasing their appreciation of wetlands and what they offer-hunting opportunities, local scenic value, rare plants and wildlife, and many ecosystem services.
- Many public and private organizations at local, state, and federal levels have programs to help private landowners pay for and execute wetland restoration on their property (Please see the back for more information.)