

Fact Sheet

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania • Department of Environmental Protection

CLUES TO WETLAND IDENTIFICATION: QUESTIONS FOR DEVELOPERS, CONTRACTORS, SURVEYORS, FARMERS, AND LAND OWNERS

Wetlands are areas where ground and/or surface water lingers for at least brief periods during the growing season (see: DEP Fact Sheet, *An Introduction to Wetlands* and the enclosed map, "Growing Seasons for Wetland Hydrology").

In Pennsylvania, wetlands are protected by both state and federal regulations and may also be protected by local (municipal) regulations or ordinances. Wetlands are valuable because they function in ways that benefit the natural world, including the human community (see: DEP Fact sheet, *Wetlands: Functions at the Junctions*).

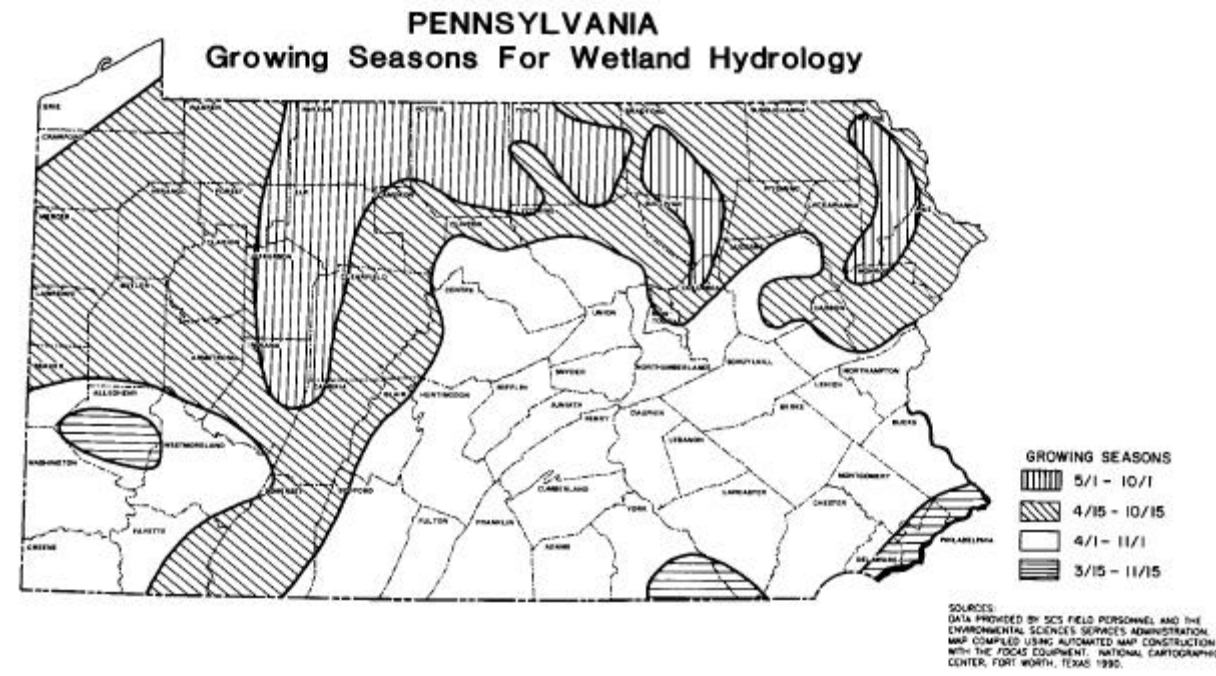
ARE WETLANDS PRESENT ON YOUR SITE? Make a walking inventory of fields, forests and woodlots. Ask the following questions:

Yes No

- Are there open bodies of water, ponds, lakes, streams or reservoirs?
- Are there natural drainage channels (permanent or temporary)?
- Is the ground soggy or spongy under foot at any time during the growing season (see: "Growing Seasons" map)?
- Are there "low spots" or depressions where water lies or pools for more than seven days during the growing season?
- Are swales, springs or seeps present?
- Are there areas you would not cross by vehicles, tractors or other machinery for fear of "getting stuck"?
- Has the site been "ditched" or "tiled" in spots to "dry it out"?
- Do some plants have roots growing from their stems, above the soil line?
- Do you see these plants: cattails, sedges (frequently with triangular stems), iris (flags), arrowheads, joe pyeweed, touch-me-not (jewelweed), rushes, sensitive fern, ironweed or skunk cabbage?
- Do you see these trees or saplings: willows, red or silver maples, box elders, black or green ash, sycamore or black gum?
- Are tree trunks expanded or swollen at the base?
- Are any trees "blown down" (windthrows), exposing a shallow but extensive root system?
- Are any of these shrubs present: blueberry, bush-type dogwoods (for example, red osier), alders, buttonbush or spicebush?
Do you see:
- cleared areas where water has scoured the surface and removed the plants?
- places where fallen leaves are discolored gray or black?
- silt/sedimentation deposits on decaying leaves lying on the ground or on living plant leaves, or on stems or tree trunks?
- drift lines (wrack lines) where sticks, leaves, and other water-carried debris have lodged along a contour or at the base of vegetation?

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a dark-brown layer of organic matter, over two inches thick, on the soil surface? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does sphagnum moss (a lush, green, juicy moss) cover the site? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the soil composed primarily of peat (decaying sphagnum moss)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the soil smell like rotten eggs (sulfur)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Digging to a depth of 18 inches, is the soil color gray, gray-blue, or gray-green, or marked with spots, streaks, or lines of different color? Note: In agricultural fields these characteristics are observed below the plow-line. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does a soil test pit (a hole dug to 18 inches) fill with water or does water "trickle down the sides"? |

If you have answered "Yes" to any of these questions, a wetland may be present on your project site or property. Further information/assistance is available. Seek the advice of professionals. Observe! Ask questions! Be alert to changes in state and federal regulations! Be aware of local regulations/ordinances! Seek professional advice at state, federal and private levels! **It is important to note that permits are normally needed before you perform any work in a wetland.** Contact: Regional Offices of DEP Soils and Waterways Section, DEP Water Quality Protection, your local county conservation district or the Natural Resource Conservation Service.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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This fact sheet and related environmental information are available electronically via Internet. For more information, visit us through the Pennsylvania homepage at www.state.pa.us or visit DEP website at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose Information by Subject/ Water Management/Water Quality Protection/Waterways, Wetlands and Erosion Control).

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 Tom Ridge, Governor

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