



LTBB Wetland Protection Program

What are wetlands and why are they important?

Wetlands are important components of the landscape that perform many functions such as water transfer and storage, biochemical processes, and decomposition. They also provide space, food, and shelter for many birds, as well as for a variety of insects, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. Based on these functions, wetlands provide values to humans and ecosystems through flood control, filtering and cleansing water, groundwater recharge, erosion control, food production, recreation, and habitat for plants and animals, including many rare or endangered species.



In spite of the important functions and values that wetlands provide, they have not always been appreciated. Wetlands are transition zones between terrestrial and aquatic systems that are often located along rivers, lakes, and in floodplains, which are often important agricultural lands because they are nutrient-rich and highly productive. Isolated wetlands may occur where precipitation and poor drainage causes water to pool in lowlands. Prior to the 1970's, US public policies encouraged the drainage and destruction of wetlands for conversion to

agriculture as part of the Federal Swamp Land Act of 1850. Some sources estimate that over 70 % of Michigan's original wetlands were either drained or filled, while many remaining wetlands are not representative of original landscape types.

Threats to wetlands

Today, some of the biggest threats to wetlands are from human activities such as filling and drainage for development and farming, as well as diking, damming, dredging and extensive stream channel modifications for navigation, development and flood control purposes. Other threats to wetlands include pollution from runoff, air pollution from factories, power plants, and cars, and landfills and dumps that leak toxins. As the population increases, so does the demand for land, especially along

waterfronts. Still today, policy and management for wetlands is much different than policy and management for streams, rivers, and lakes. Most State and Federal programs have focused on the maintenance and restoration of streams, rivers, and lakes, whereas most wetland policies focus on preventing wetlands from being converted to uplands (U.S. E.P.A., 2002). Currently, wetlands are federally protected under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which regulates the discharge of dredged or fill materials into navigable waters of the United States through a permit program jointly administered by the U.S. EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This permit program has been interpreted to extend from traditionally navigable waters to “isolated waters” such as wetlands. Wetlands are also protected by the State of Michigan under Part 303, Wetlands Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451.

LTBB and Wetlands



Wetlands are very important for the way of life for the LTBB. This way of life is rooted in the traditional reliance on fishing, hunting, and gathering of plants for food, medicine, and crafting, as well as for cultural and spiritual purposes. This past year the LTBB Tribal Council passed a Wetland Protection and Management Statute to further the protection of wetlands on Tribal lands. The Statute defines a wetland to be, “Land characterized by the presence of water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal conditions does support, wetland vegetation or aquatic life, and is commonly referred to as a bog, swamp, or marsh, not contiguous to the Great Lakes, or a river or stream. Wetlands must have hydric soils, wetland vegetation, and wetland hydrology.” In addition to the Statute, Wetland Protection Regulations that establish allowable uses, prohibited activities, enforcement, procedures and penalties for the Statute have been drafted and given to Tribal Council for review. One of the key components of both the Statute and Regulations is that permanent development is not allowed in wetland areas and that mitigation is not an option to replace existing wetlands.