



Volunteering for Wetlands

Bossier Parish Wetland Reserve Project

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Bodcau Soil and Water Conservation District in Louisiana worked with five landowners to help them enroll four contiguous tracts of land, a total of about 2,500 acres, in the Wetlands Reserve Program. The land had been in cropland, pasture, and woodland but was not very productive from an agricultural standpoint because of flooding problems. Once this land was set aside and protected, volunteers from schools, community organizations, and a local Air Force base came together to help protect and restore the wetland areas.

J. Larry Newton School Wetland Restoration Project

EPA Supported Five STAR Project

In Fairhope, Alabama, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, in partnership with EPA, local businesses, schools, nonprofit groups, conservation agencies, and a youth conservation corps, are restoring wetlands adjacent to the newly constructed J. Larry Newton School. The restored wetlands will be a living laboratory for the students and a demonstration project for landowners interested in wetland restoration.

Can Volunteers Protect Wetlands?

Government regulations and zoning restrictions are not enough to protect wetlands. Citizens must also become involved. Volunteers that demonstrate concern and devote time to protecting wetlands can make a big difference. In fact, volunteers have already halted wetland degradation and reduced the number of threatened wetlands in communities around the country. We all have a responsibility to protect and restore wetlands, and by working together we can make a difference.



How Do Volunteers Make a Difference?

Local citizens not only provide the extra workforce necessary to assess the health of and threats to our wetlands but also serve as some of the most powerful advocates for protecting wetland habitat. Volunteer efforts to improve our environment have been gaining momentum over the past 20 years. Volunteer groups are growing in strength and number in many states across the country. These groups would certainly welcome your assistance, or you could even start a group in your own community. Whether you work on your own or with a group, you can help wetlands by working to preserve and protect them, monitoring and assessing their health, and restoring them. There are ways to help.

Wetland Preservation and Protection

When volunteers work to protect local wetlands, they greatly improve the chances that those wetlands will be valued by the community. You can help local conservation and restoration efforts by influencing local and regional environmental policy. By educating others about the functions and values of wetlands, you can empower them to become involved in wetland protection. For example, many landowners have voluntarily enrolled wetland areas on their property in the USDA's Wetland Reserve Program, which provides technical and financial support to landowners. You could also join the Izaak Walton League of America in its American Wetlands Month celebration every May. The League offers

American Wetlands Month kits on the Internet to help local groups initiate on-the-ground projects. The kits include fact sheets on wetlands, project ideas, contact information, case studies of projects from across the country, and links to many informative wetland sites. For more information on American Wetlands Month, visit the web site at www.iwla.org/SOS/awm.

Wetland Assessment and Monitoring

Volunteer monitors often make critical observations and measurements that help assess the health of a wetland. Monitoring wetland characteristics such as plants, soils, hydrology, and wildlife helps us better understand wetland functions and track changes in wetland ecosystems. To become involved in wetland



Anna Hicks

These volunteers are learning how to assess wetland habitat.

monitoring and assessment, contact your local extension service or join a local citizens group involved in wetland monitoring. Working with these groups, you can address data gaps that exist in the current monitoring system in your area. If no local organizations are involved in wetland monitoring, you can help to educate local officials about the importance of wetlands and encourage them to set aside funding to support wetland monitoring.

Wetland Restoration

Through their dedication, volunteers increase awareness of the importance of wetlands and create a foundation for active restoration of previously degraded wetlands. By staying involved in local issues and serving as a source of information for others, you can reinforce the importance of wetland restoration and ensure that restoration projects get local support. To

further your efforts, you can join citizen groups that sponsor restoration projects and help with hands-on restoration work like planting native wetland plants. You can also make a difference by raising funds or recruiting additional volunteers from youth groups, church groups, schools, and other sources.

Massachusetts North Shore Salt Marsh Assessment

In the summer of 1999, a volunteer-staffed pilot monitoring program began along the Massachusetts coast, with the support of local organizations, the state, and EPA. Using a curriculum written by the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension, the program developed a series of citizen monitoring workshops that focused on using six wetland parameters—birds, plants, water chemistry, land use, tidal influence, and benthic macroinvertebrates—to assess a wetland's health. Their outreach and education efforts drew 50 new volunteers. The training program is being revised, using feedback from the volunteers, and will eventually be used throughout New England to train other citizen groups to monitor wetlands. For more information, visit the web site at <http://thecompass.org/8TB/pages/News9907Volunteers.html>.

The Wetland Fact Sheet Series



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For more information, visit www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands.

Wetland Resources

On the Internet:

- Volunteer Monitor Newsletter Site* www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/volunteer/vm_index.html
- Izaak Walton League of America* www.iwla.org
- USDA's Backyard Conservation Guide* www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/CCS/Backyard.html
- National Audubon Society* www.audubon.org
- Frog Watch* www.mp2-pwrc.usgs.gov/frogwatch

In Print:

- Handbook for Wetlands Conservation and Sustainability*, 1998. Available from the Izaak Walton League of America, 707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878. Call (800) BUG-IWLA or e-mail sos@iwla.org.
- Monitoring Wetlands: A Manual for Training Volunteers*, T. Miller, C. Bertolotto, J. Martin, and L. Storm, 1996. Available from Adopt-a-Beach, 4649 Sunnyside Ave., N, Rm 305, Seattle, WA 98103. Call (888) 57-BEACH.
- National Directory of Volunteer Environmental Monitoring Programs* (EPA 841-B-98-009), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1998. Available on-line at <http://yosemite.epa.gov/water/volmon.nsf>.
- Volunteer Wetland Monitoring: An Introduction and Resource Guide* (EPA 843-B-00-001), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2000. Available on-line at www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands.
- Wetland Walk Manual: A Guidebook for Citizen Participation* (Manual and Worksheets), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1996. Available on-line at www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/wetwalk.pdf (Wetland Walk Manual) and www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/wetwork.pdf (Wetland Walk Supplement Worksheets).