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## JUST THE FACTS...

# ABOUT THE NATIONAL WETLANDS INVENTORY

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## What Is the National Wetlands Inventory?

In 1974, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was directed to conduct an inventory of the nation's wetlands. The goal of the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) is to classify and map the nation's wetlands and periodically evaluate wetland status and trends. NWI maps contain information on the location and type (classification) of wetlands and deepwater habitats (streams, lakes, and estuaries). This information is overlaid on 7.5-minute (1:24,000) U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps.

In 1989, Oregon entered into a cost-share agreement with the FWS to speed completion of the 1,869 maps required to cover the state. The entire state has been completed. Not all of Oregon's NWI maps are the same type or of equal quality. Many of the maps are available in digital format. Contact the Department of State Lands (DSL) or visit <http://www.nwi.fws.gov/> for information on specific maps.

## Important Points to Keep in Mind as You Use the NWI Maps

- ▶ NWI maps are based upon interpretation of high-altitude aerial photographs. Because of this:
  - Most wetlands on the map are not field-verified; although the maps are very good, expect some errors.
  - The minimum required mapping resolution is 2 acres; many smaller wetlands will not appear on the map.
  - The mapped wetland is the *approximate* wetland location with respect to geographic features such as roads. Inventory methods and map scale prevent greater mapping accuracy than 30–50 feet.
- ▶ Maps are a snapshot in time, reflecting conditions at the time the source airphotos were taken. This is especially important to remember for dynamic systems like wetlands, which may vary seasonally and annually.
  - Most of Oregon's NWI maps are getting pretty old; conditions on the ground may have changed.
  - Most airphotos were taken in July or August; this means that many seasonal wetlands or wetlands obscured by tree canopy may be especially difficult to identify and map.
  - The month and year of the airphoto is noted on each map. Changes (natural or otherwise) after that date will not be reflected on the map.
- ▶ The National Wetlands Inventory was not designed to be a map of regulated wetlands and waterways, and there is a note to that effect at the bottom of each map. Reasons include:
  - Wetland regulations vary across the nation and are subject to change.
  - Wetlands that are cultivated and cropped are not included on NWI maps, but may be regulated.
  - Due to scale and methodology, small, seasonal, and/or tree-obscured wetlands are easily missed.
  - All kinds of water features that are not regulated are mapped; for example, sewage treatment lagoons.
  - Airphoto interpretation methods largely rely on *visible* water and/or wetland vegetation, whereas jurisdictional (e.g., regulated) wetlands are determined by on-the-ground examination of

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hydrology, vegetation, and soils. Because of this, on-the-ground investigation is generally required to verify mapped wetlands and make a determination as to whether a wetland is subject to state or federal jurisdiction.

- ▶ All wetlands and other waters of the state, mapped or not, may be subject to local, state, and/or federal regulation.
  - Questions about regulations should be directed to your city or county planning department (local ordinances), DSL (State Removal-Fill Law), and/or the Army Corps of Engineers (Clean Water Act).
- ▶ The NWI forms the basis of the Statewide Wetlands Inventory, which also includes Local Wetlands Inventories (LWI) conducted according to standards adopted by DSL.
  - See *Just the Facts #2* or contact DSL for more information about LWIs.
- ▶ When you order an NWI map, use the same map name as the corresponding USGS topographic map (which forms the base map for most NWI maps). Sometimes, the name on your map (upper left or lower right corner) will not match the map name you ordered. This is because many of the wetlands maps have old (provisional) map names.

## State Distribution Center Services and Products

The Department of State Lands is the lead state agency for wetlands and is the State Distribution Center for NWI maps. DSL is also responsible for compiling the Statewide Wetlands Inventory, which includes LWI maps. LWI maps—much more detailed than the NWI—are available for more than 60 Oregon cities. A list of these cities is on the DSL Web site: <http://www.oregonstatelands.us/>

### *Distribution Center Products*

- NWI map sales (order forms available on the DSL Web site)
- State index maps showing location and name of NWI maps (free; contact wetlands program)
- Wetlands Inventory User's Guide (free; contact wetlands program)
- NWI and LWI Map fact sheets (on our Web site)
- LWI map status (see Web site) and copies
- Digital LWI maps for some areas (contact wetlands program)
- Rules and standards for state-approved LWIs (on our Web site or contact wetlands program)

### *Other Inventory Services*

- Assistance with using the NWI maps (over phone, or training available for groups)
- Developing and distributing wetlands inventory and wetland trends information
- Technical assistance to cities and consultants for LWI planning and completion
- Compiling LWI collection for Oregon

### **Additional NWI Information**

For information on the status of digitized maps, the “Cowardin” classification used on NWI maps, to print portions of selected NWI maps (Wetlands Mapper), and to download digital data, go to the NWI site at: <http://www.nwi.fws.gov/>