

Wetland Advocacy Guide

A resource to help you understand wetlands, the benefits they provide, the threats they face and the actions you can take to protect them.

Wetlands are crucial for our communities, providing clean drinking water, flood protection and spaces for wildlife to thrive. Without them, we face greater risks from flooding, water pollution and the loss of biodiversity that sustains healthy ecosystems and people alike.

What is a wetland?

A wetland is an area that is regularly saturated with water, either seasonally or year round. These conditions allow specialized water-loving and water-tolerant plants and animals to thrive.



Marshes



Swamps



Fens



Bogs

Key benefits of wetlands



Natural flood resilience



Water purification



Carbon storage



Habitat for species at risk



Cultural and recreational value



Around [one quarter of Canada's wetlands](#), or 6% of wetlands on Earth, are found in Ontario. The province has a crucial role in protecting these incredible ecosystems!

Wetlands are well worth protecting

Climate



Wetlands in southern Ontario store [1.3 billion tonnes of carbon](#), about 8 times as much as Ontario's [2023 greenhouse gas emissions](#). However, disturbing wetlands releases this carbon. Wetland loss in southern Ontario may have released [700 million tonnes of carbon](#) into the atmosphere.



Healthy wetlands keep greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere, reducing the intensity of climate change.

Flood Prevention



In southern Ontario, natural wetlands can [reduce flood related damages by 29-38%](#). Even a wetland as small as two hectares can reduce flood waters in an area [up to 70 times its size](#).



Healthy wetlands reduce flooding by absorbing excess water, protecting people and communities.

Clean Water



Southern Ontario wetlands filter [\\$4.2 billion of phosphorus and sediments](#) from the water every year, among other pollutants. This reduces the impact of harmful algae blooms and supports community access to clean water.



Healthy wetlands keep freshwater sources clean, supporting drinking water, recreation and aquatic species.

Biodiversity



In Ontario, [at least 20% of species at risk](#) rely on wetland ecosystems. This includes [all eight native turtle species](#), which are provincially or federally listed species at risk.



Healthy wetlands are crucial to ensuring beloved biodiversity continues to thrive.



Ontario wetlands are under threat

Southern Ontario has already [lost over 70%](#) of its original wetland areas. About [18,000 hectares](#) disappeared from that part of the province from 2000 to 2020 - over 10 times the size of Downtown Toronto or more than 114,000 NHL Hockey Rinks.

Many factors are causing wetland loss, including [development pressures, invasive species and pollution](#).

Provincial policies are being eroded

Numerous changes to provincial laws and policies have weakened protections for wetlands across Ontario, leaving wetlands at increased risk. For example:

Broader protections for wetlands in the most heavily developed areas of the province have been removed.

When the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was revoked in 2024, protections were weakened for [over half of the remaining wetlands](#) in the Greater Toronto and surrounding areas.

Ontario's local wetland and watershed management experts, conservation authorities, have been repeatedly undermined.

Changes to their [jurisdiction, mandate, resourcing](#) and [independence](#) have made it harder for conservation authorities to protect and regulate wetlands for flood resilience and other community benefits.

Changes to the evidence-based system for identifying provincially significant wetlands make it [harder for wetlands to qualify](#) for strict protection.

Wetlands without the provincially significant wetland designation do not receive strict provincial protection and are at increased risk of development.



What can I do to protect wetlands?

Everyone can be a wetland protector. Here are some examples of how you can get involved at the provincial, municipal or community levels:

Stay informed about your local wetlands:

Follow local organizations, attend events and learn about nearby wetland ecosystems.



Raise awareness in your community:

Share resources, stories and key facts on social media or when speaking with friends and family to spark conversations and build grassroots support.

Connect with your government representatives:

Call, write or request a meeting with your MPP or local councillor to express your interest in ensuring wetlands are protected.

Get involved in local decision-making processes:

Consider speaking at a council or committee meeting or providing written comments next time your city or town is considering a decision that will impact local wetlands.

Tips for Talking to Government Decision-makers

- Reference personal stories and local examples that matter to you
- Be courteous but confident - these are your representatives!
- Be clear and use a couple of key facts to support your position

