***Is it a Pond? It is a Wetland? It is Both?***

# What is a wetland?

Wetlands are naturally occurring areas of land where water covers the soil, or is present at or near the soil surface all year or part of the year, including during the growing season. Sometimes known as marshes or bogs, wetlands support both aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. They can be found on floodplains along rivers and streams, along the margins of lakes and ponds, and in other low-lying areas.  Wetlands are protected areas under state law. What you can do in a wetland is restricted.

# What makes and area a wetland?

There are three characteristics that define if an area is “wetland.” The area has to have;

1) Hydric soils. These are soils that show evidence of being wet periodically.

2) Hydrophytic Plants. These are plants that only like to grow in water.

3) Hydrology. It must have evidence that water flows to that area at least 2 weeks out of the year.

Areas without consistent standing water are considered wetlands if they have the above characteristics. These areas are known as wet meadows and seasonally flooded wetlands. Wet meadows are the wetter, lower-lying parts of prairies or grasslands. Seasonally flooded wetlands may only be wet for a few weeks out of the year and can be found within the floodplains of rivers and streams or in shallow depressions in upland areas.

# How to tell if there is a wetland on your property?

If you have a low area of land where water gathers periodically and makes it soggy, particularly in the spring after snow melt, you may have a wetland. If you want to know for sure, it is best to contact your local city, township or County Soil & Water Conservation District. Staff there will be able to look at aerial photos, the National Wetland Inventory, and other information and can provide guidance on whether or not the area in question is wetland and what types of activities are allowed. A wetland delineator (an official determination of the wetland boundary) may be needed for certain activities.

# What should you know/do if your property contains wetlands

Wetland areas are protected under state law. The basic recommendation is to leave it alone. You CANNOT fill, excavate or drain the wetland. It is best not to mow right down to the wetland, but instead leave a few feet of buffer to help filter pollutants from water flowing into the wetland.

If you’d like to enhance your wetland you can plant additional native plants. Meeting with a restoration professional prior to doing so is recommended.

# There is a pond on/near my property, is that a wetland?

The ponds found in typical developments are generally not wetlands. They are stormwater ponds which are there to capture and treatment excess stormwater runoff. Ponds and wetlands can look very similar so it can be hard to tell them apart. Typically, if the pond has an unnatural shape such as a triangle, or square or looks manmade, it is a stormwater pond, even if it has wetland plants in and around it. However, some older ponds may be considered wetlands as prior to Wetland Conservation Act in 1991 ponds could be constructed in wetlands.

History tells us a lot. By looking at historical aerial photos of the area, you can tell if water previously drained to an area, creating a wetland, or if the area was dry. Ponds that have been created in areas that appear dry in historical photos are likely stormwater ponds.

For new development, developers must have a wetland delineation done and must try to avoid any wetland impacts. With the passing of the Wetland Conservation Act, impacts to wetlands must be mitigated (e.g. another wetland area must be restored or created).

It’s best to check all these resources when looking to figure out if an area is a wetland: the three characteristics of a wetland, the history of area, and any plans for development.

# Additional Resources

Carver County has an interactive map with a Wetlands Layer where you can see the location of some wetlands within the County. Visit <https://gis.co.carver.mn.us/publicparcel/>, click on the button on the upper left marked “themes” and select “Wetland.” This layer shows National Wetland Inventory data for the County (please note that the inventory is not exact and does not include all wetlands in the County).