



# Fact Sheet

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania • Department of Environmental Protection

## CLUES TO WETLAND IDENTIFICATION: QUESTIONS FOR DEVELOPERS, CONTRACTORS, SURVEYORS, FARMERS AND LAND OWNERS

Wetlands are areas where ground and/or surface water lingers for at least brief periods of time during the growing season (see DEP Fact Sheet, *An Introduction to Wetlands* and the enclosed map, "Growing Seasons for Wetland Hydrology").

In Pennsylvania, wetlands are protected by both state and federal regulations and may also be protected by local (municipal) regulations or ordinances. Wetlands are valuable because they function in ways that benefit the natural world, including the human community (see DEP Fact sheet, *Wetlands: Functions at the Junctions*).

**ARE WETLANDS PRESENT ON YOUR SITE?** Take a walking inventory of fields, forests and woodlots. Ask the following questions:

**Yes      No**

- Are there open bodies of water, ponds, lakes, streams or reservoirs?
- Are there natural drainage channels (permanent or temporary)?
- Is the ground soggy or spongy under foot at any time during the growing season (see "Growing Seasons" map)?
- Are there "low spots" or depressions where water lies or pools for more than seven days during the growing season?
- Are swales, springs or seeps present?
- Are there areas you would not cross with vehicles, tractors or other machinery for fear of "getting stuck"?
- Has the site been "ditched" or "tiled" in spots to "dry it out"?
- Do some plants have roots growing from their stems, above the soil line?
- Do you see these plants: cattails, sedges (frequently with triangular stems), iris (flags), arrowheads, joe pyeweed, touch-me-not (jewelweed), rushes, sensitive fern, ironweed or skunk cabbage?
- Do you see these trees or saplings: willows, red or silver maples, box elders, black or green ash, sycamore or black gum?
- Are tree trunks expanded or swollen at the base?
- Are any trees "blown down" (windthrows), exposing a shallow but extensive root system?
- Are any of these shrubs present: blueberry, bush-type dogwoods (for example, red osier), alders, buttonbush or spicebush?  
Do you see:
- cleared areas where water has scoured the surface and removed the plants?
- places where fallen leaves are discolored gray or black?
- silt/sedimentation deposits on decaying leaves lying on the ground or on living plant leaves, or on stems or tree trunks?
- drift lines (wrack lines) where sticks, leaves and other water-carried debris have lodged along a contour or at the base of vegetation?

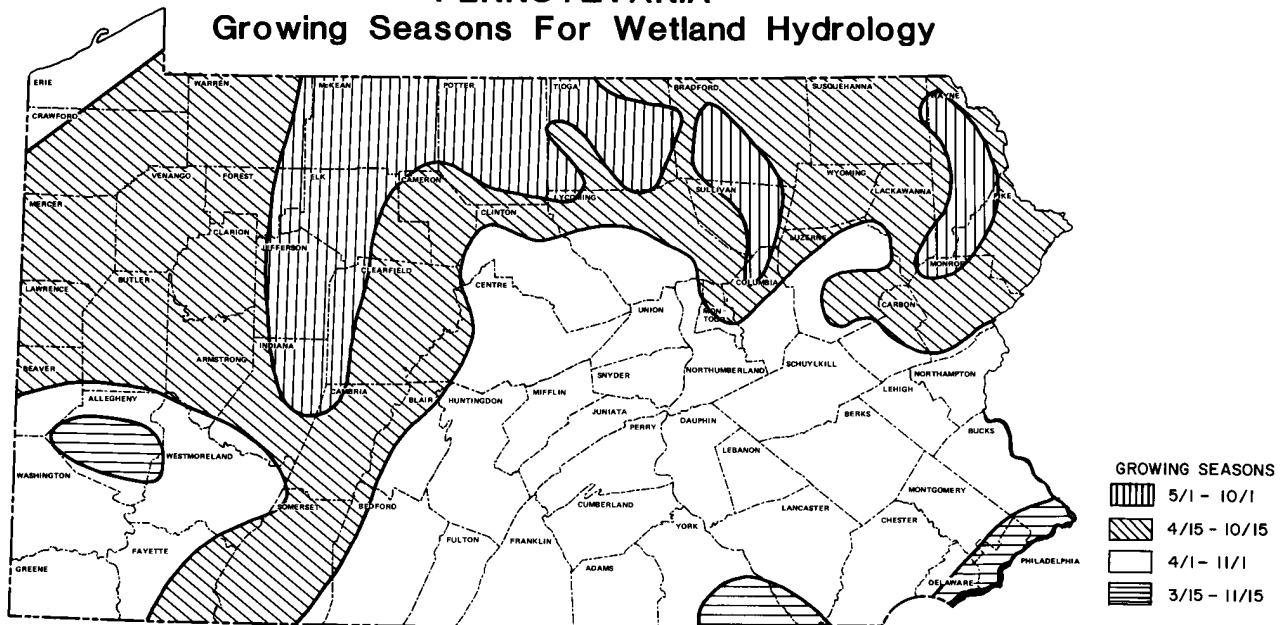
Yes No

- Is there a dark-brown layer of organic matter, over two inches thick, on the soil surface?
- Does sphagnum moss (a lush, green, juicy moss) cover the site?
- Is the soil composed primarily of peat (decaying sphagnum moss)?
- Does the soil smell like rotten eggs (sulfur)?
- Digging to a depth of 18 inches, is the soil color gray, gray-blue or gray-green or marked with spots, streaks, or lines of different color? Note: In agricultural fields, these characteristics are observed below the plow-line.
- Does a soil test pit (a hole dug to 18 inches) fill with water or does water "trickle down the sides"?

If you have answered "Yes" to any of these questions, a wetland may be present on your project site or property.

Further information/assistance is available. Observe! Ask questions! Be alert to changes in state and federal regulations! Be aware of local regulations/ordinances! Seek professional advice at state, federal and private levels! **It is important to note that permits are normally needed before you perform any work in a wetland.** Contact: Regional Offices of DEP Permitting and Technical Services Section, DEP Division of Waterways, Wetlands, and Stormwater Management, your local county conservation district or the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

## PENNSYLVANIA Growing Seasons For Wetland Hydrology



SOURCES:  
DATA PROVIDED BY SCS FIELD PERSONNEL AND THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES SERVICES ADMINISTRATION.  
MAP COMPILED USING AUTOMATED MAP CONSTRUCTION  
WITH THE FOCUS EQUIPMENT, NATIONAL CARTOGRAPHIC  
CENTER, FORT WORTH, TEXAS 1990.

For more information, visit DEP's Web site at [www.depweb.state.pa.us](http://www.depweb.state.pa.us), keyword: Wetlands,

or contact:

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