



Potential impact- Fence in a wetland

## How can I maintain and protect wetlands near my home?

- Stay out of natural areas.
- Do not add dirt or fill to natural areas.
- Do not build structures like fences or sheds in natural areas.
- Do not create brush/landscape waste or refuse piles in natural areas.
- Do not mow in natural areas.
- Do not plant non-native vegetation in or around natural areas.



Potential impact- Fill in a riparian or buffer area

## Wetlands Indicators

- Dark, muddy soils and some sandy soils
- Standing water after rain
- Exposed tree roots
- Swollen tree bases
- Water lines and lichen lines
- Presence of plants like ferns or sedges
- Presence of trees like cypress, bay or elm
- Designated Floodplains

*You may still have wetlands even if you do not have any of the conditions listed.*

**Land Development Code**  
**Chapter 6: Resource Protection**  
[www.polk-county.net/LDC](http://www.polk-county.net/LDC)

**For more information, contact:**

**Polk County Board of County Commissioners**  
**Office of Planning and Development**  
**Land Development Division**

330 W Church Street

Drawer GM03, P.O. Box 9005

Bartow, FL 33831

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## Homeowners' Guide to Polk County Wetlands

**W**hat is a wetland? Wetlands are areas that remain wet for extended periods of time and support vegetation typically found in wet conditions. Florida wetlands include swamps, marshes, bay heads, bogs, cypress domes and strands, sloughs, wet prairies, riverine swamps and marshes, hydric seepage slopes, tidal marshes,



**W**hat is a riparian or buffer area? A riparian or buffer area is the vegetated area adjacent to lakes, rivers or wetlands. These areas help protect and support the functions of the wetland or water system. They allow the wetland or water systems to expand during flood events. This expansion helps prevent water from entering developed areas.

**W**etlands, riparian and buffer areas provide many benefits to the surrounding ecosystem. They:

- *Transfer nutrients* into the soil for use by plants and animals.
- *Clean runoff* from roadways by filtering out pollutants, such as fertilizer, pesticides, or other contaminants – removing sediments before they reach the water supply.
- *Contribute to the groundwater supply* by slowing water until it has time to return to the aquifer.
- Make up approximately 5 percent of land in the continental U.S., but contain almost one third of our plant species.
- *Provide* aesthetic, research and scientific *value*.
- *Serve as a habitat* for many plant and animal species that depend on moist, nutrient rich environments for survival.
- *Control flooding* by absorbing runoff from storms.

*One acre of wetlands can potentially store 1.5 million gallons of floodwater!*

**W**etland impacts are the effects of activity that pose a serious threat to the wetland and can degrade their function.

**Direct impacts** result from disturbances that occur within the wetland. Common direct impacts include filling, grading, removing vegetation, building construction, changes in water levels and drainage patterns.



*Direct impact to a wetland*

**Indirect impacts** result from disturbances that occur in areas outside of the wetland, such as uplands, other wetlands, or waterways that have the ability to affect the wetland.



*Indirect impact to a wetland*

**W**etlands are regulated by many agencies including:

**Federal.** U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**State.** Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Water Management Districts

**Local.** Polk County Board of County Commissioners

### ***Polk County's Wetland Requirements***

***Avoid and buffer.*** Polk County requires that all wetlands include a *15-foot minimum / 25-foot average* undisturbed buffer.

***Mitigate any impacts.*** Before development can occur a letter must be obtained from a state agency (listed above) indicating that the site is 1) not within a wetland or 2) that any impacts have been addressed through their permit process.

### ***Does your property contain wetlands?***

Check out the County's online property viewer, <http://gisserver.polk-county.net/countyviewer/>. It includes Wetland Protection Areas data.

Remember, the only reliable way to determine whether wetlands exist is to have an environmental consultant review the property.