

WETLANDS ASSESSMENT

Background

Maine has approximately 5 million acres of wetlands, which are found all over the state and comprise roughly 25% of total surface area. They are broadly categorized as either freshwater or coastal wetlands.

Freshwater wetlands can be fed by surface water bodies, groundwater, or precipitation, and include wooded swamps, marshes, bogs, and wet meadows. Coastal wetlands are influenced by tides and can include marshes, bogs, beaches, or mudflats. Salt marshes are rare, comprising only 17,000 acres in the entire state. Maine's wetlands are among its most diverse and valuable natural resources. Wetlands provide habitat for fish and wildlife, reduce flooding through storage of runoff water, and improve water quality by filtering out sediments and other harmful materials.

Common threats to wetlands are drain and fill projects and development which occurs next to wetlands. Human activities in or near wetlands can alter or harm life within them, particularly if many small scale projects occur nearby. These types of projects can have large negative impacts.

Assessment

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The Department currently has not developed wetland water quality standards and there are no designated uses associated with wetlands under Maine law. However, the State of Maine regulates activities in all wetlands under the **Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA)**, which includes a requirement that a project not violate any state water quality law, including those governing classification of state waters.

As a result of the revisions to the NRPA, "one stop permitting" is now a reality for most wetland alteration projects. To achieve this, the Maine DEP and the Army Corps have adopted a joint permit application form. Applications only have to be filed by applicants with the DEP regardless of the project size. DEP coordinates with the federal agencies on screening and reviewing applications.

For an outline of major points of the law which took effect on September 29, 1995, or for information regarding wetland protection activities, see Part III, Ch. 6 of the complete 305(b). The "Citizen's Guide to the Natural Resources Protection Act" can also be obtained from the DEP.