

# Why are wetlands so important?



## Fish & Wildlife

**Habitat** Oregon is host to a remarkable variety of wetlands. From the high desert to the lush, coastal river valleys, these damp landscapes provide the perfect conditions for wildlife to flourish. Whether in the estuaries on the Columbia River where young salmon seek shelter; the marshes of the Klamath and Closed Lakes Basins where migratory birds swoop down for a stopover; or Sauvie Island where sandhill cranes and swans winter; the unique diversity of Oregon's wetland habitats is echoed in the vast range of species that make them their home.



Wetlands are vital to the health of our environment in so many ways. Like kidneys, they **absorb, filter and recirculate our water**. In addition, they provide **critical fish and wildlife habitat** to so many of the iconic species we identify with Oregon. In the face of destructive floods, they serve as **natural buffers helping to protect our communities**. With the heightened awareness around limited water resources, their role in **cleaning and recharging our water supply** has become even more essential. While these beautiful spaces are found throughout Oregon, wetlands often go unrecognized as the **most biologically rich and productive landscapes** in our state.



**Estuaries** Oregon's 22 major estuaries are ecologically essential for many fish and wildlife species, including salmon, herring, flounder, crabs, oysters, clams, wading birds, ducks, geese, shorebirds and harbor seals. The vibrant coastline we cherish in Oregon owes much to these estuarine habitats that allow for reproduction, rearing, resting and foraging.



**Improve Water Quality** Wetlands help to slow the flow of water so sediments, pollutants, nutrients and pathogens can settle out of the waterways. These precipitates usually remain in the wetland, allowing the filtered water to enter streams, lakes, rivers, estuaries and groundwater. Often considered nature's kidneys, many wetland plants, animals and soil organisms will actually consume precipitates, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, in the process of filtration. Thus, while benefiting water quality, wetlands not only capture, but often reclaim the nutrients for better water quality.



## Increase Biological Productivity & Diversity

Like coral reefs and rainforests, wetlands have a great diversity of life. They're efficient, natural factories that turn sunlight into biomass at a rapid rate, creating a base for complex food chains and habitats. This abundance of life helps the wetland reduce erosion and feed wildlife.





**Natural Resources.** As “powerhouses” of biological productivity, wetlands provide large volumes of fish, shellfish, peat and other natural products.

**Store & Release Water** Like sponges, wetlands absorb, store and re-lease water. They can slow the flow of water entering a main stream, providing a buffer against storm flooding. During dry periods, water stored in wetlands maintains base streamflow by regulating overall water flows, and releasing water over time to recharge the groundwater system.



**Recreation & Sport** Wetlands provide the setting for many Oregonians’ favorite recreational activities: bird watching, photography, kayaking, fishing and duck hunting.



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**Reduce Erosion.** The ability of wetlands to store and filter water helps to reduce downstream erosion and sedimentation, protecting both natural and man-made environments. By absorbing the destructive force of waves and currents, the roots of wetland plants stabilize soil to keep it from washing away sensitive coastal and riparian areas.