

# Development & Wetlands

## What You Should Know Before You Buy or Build

### WETLANDS ARE A VALUABLE PART OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

They provide important benefits for people as well as fish and wildlife. Using caution when altering or developing near a wetland will result in many benefits.

### BUILDING ON WETLANDS

The government of Nova Scotia's new policy to conserve wetlands can allow you to build in or near a wetland, but approval from the Nova Scotia Department of Environment is required.

### THE DECISION TO BUILD ON OR NEAR WETLANDS

It depends on the circumstances of each building situation, but you should avoid wetlands whenever possible. Developers or land owners should also be aware that compensation must be made if wetlands are altered. Building on wetlands is usually more expensive than on dry ground and leads to problems with soggy basements, and shifting foundations.



## BENEFITS OF WETLANDS

### WETLANDS KEEP OUR WATERSHEDS HEALTHY AND BENEFIT NOVA SCOTIANS. THEY

- ◆ moderate flood waters, purify water in rivers and streams, slow runoff rates, and minimize erosion
- ◆ remove organic waste, bacteria and excess nutrients, contaminants, and silt from surface, and ground water
- ◆ protect coastlines from storm surges
- ◆ contribute to drinking water supplies by storing and releasing surface water, and refilling groundwater reservoirs
- ◆ provide habitats for fish, wildlife, and plants, often for rare or endangered species
- ◆ support fisheries and food webs in nearby rivers, inlets, and coastal waters
- ◆ supply food, commercial products, and medicinal plants

## LINKS

to help determine if you have a Wetland on Your Property

- ◆ Check the online Nova Scotia Wetland Inventory  
[www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/habitats/wetlands.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/habitats/wetlands.asp)
- ◆ Contact a Wetland Professional  
[www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/wetland.professional.resources.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/wetland.professional.resources.asp)

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPERS

The Nova Scotia Wetland Conservation Policy describes the provincial approach to regulating wetlands.

Any development near wetlands must also consider the following:

- altering two or more hectares of any wetland requires that a project proposal be evaluated under Nova Scotia Environment's Environmental Assessment process
- septic systems must be located at least 30.5 metres from all wetlands
- building in designated flood risk areas is prohibited in many municipalities by a Statement of Provincial Interest under the Municipal Government Act
- provincial subdivision regulations under the Municipal Government Act require that wetlands be shown on subdivision plans
- draining, filling, flooding, or excavating in a wetland is not allowed without approval from Nova Scotia Environment. All approvals to alter wetland require compensation
- building permanent roads through wetlands requires department approval, unless the road runs through a wooded swamp and is less than 10 metres wide, and 600 m<sup>2</sup> in total area
- wetlands constructed for wastewater or stormwater treatment may be used as part of compensation for wetland alterations if natural wetland function can be demonstrated

## MINIMIZING IMPACTS

Impacts from developing in and around wetlands can be minimized by

- avoiding wetlands whenever possible
- leaving a buffer (an undeveloped zone) of at least 20 metres between wetlands, watercourses, and building activities
- using temporary roads to access or cross wetlands, and minimizing road width
- ensuring proper use of culverts, drains, and/or road design to maintain flow through wetlands

## APPROVALS ARE NOT REQUIRED FOR

- altering wetlands that are less than 100 square metres (approximately 1000 square feet) in size
- restoring and maintaining drainage systems, and ditches
- altering wetlands constructed for wastewater or stormwater treatment (unless constructed for compensation)
- wetlands that develop as a result of landscaping for construction projects

See the Nova Scotia Wetland Policy for a complete list of exceptions



**FACT SHEETS ALSO AVAILABLE:**

- Wetlands in Nova Scotia
- Wetland Checklist
- Wetland Compensation
- Farms & Wetlands
- Woodlots & Wetlands
- Wetlands Policy Fact Sheet

[www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/)

## LINKS For more information

- Contact Nova Scotia Environment's Wetland Program at **902-424-2117** or [wetlands@gov.ns.ca](mailto:wetlands@gov.ns.ca)
- Visit Nova Scotia Environment's website for links to additional information [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland)
- Nova Scotia's Wetland Conservation Policy [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/conservation.policy.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/conservation.policy.asp)
- NSE field office information [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/dept/division.emc.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/dept/division.emc.asp)
- Application for approval to work in a wetland [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/wetland.alteration.asp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/wetland/wetland.alteration.asp)
- Nova Scotia's Environment Act [www.nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/envromnt.htm](http://www.nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/envromnt.htm)