



Wetlands are natural areas that are permanently or seasonally submerged in water. Wetlands contain a wide variety of plant and animal species and are considered the most biologically diverse habitats in nature.

Wetlands are usually located in areas where the water table is at or near the land surface. Hence, they become continuously covered with water. Wetlands are found near the shores of lakes, rivers and oceans, and are considered transitional zones between aquatic (water-based) and terrestrial (land-based) habitats.

Wetlands are considered the “kidneys” of nature because they filter out contaminants from water before discharging into lakes and rivers. Because of their function, wetlands allow incoming water to settle so sediments can be filtered out. They also naturally absorb chemical contaminants from water.

Waterfowls and other birds rely on wetlands as resting stops along their seasonal migratory routes. Because of their unique environment, wetlands are home to many plants, fish and other large animals, creating a rich food web and biological diversity.

Another important function of wetlands is groundwater recharge. Because of continuous withdrawal, groundwater levels may become depleted in some areas and wells can run dry. Wetlands help balance that effect by recharging groundwater aquifers and restoring the balance. The percolating water is clean because it gets naturally filtered by soils and rocks.

In addition to groundwater recharge, wetlands play an important role in flood protection. Wetlands located in floodplains can receive stormwater after heavy rainfall or spring runoff, acting as a buffer zone to prevent excess water from flooding nearby areas.

Unfortunately in the past, many people considered wetlands as “wastelands” because they find the water unsuitable for recreational or boating activities and impede urbanization and agricultural development. The result was many of natural wetlands were drained and destroyed to make room for development, especially agriculture. In fact, it is estimated that 50% of all wetlands in the world were lost to agriculture.

Destruction of wetlands has also contributed to increasing flooding, droughts and water contamination because their removal reduces the nature’s capacity to resist weather extremes and pollution. In addition, destruction of wetlands has caused the near extinction of many plant and animal species.

More people are now becoming increasingly aware of the importance of wetlands and their role in preserving the natural environment. Conservation programs have been placed in Canada to protect the valuable remaining wetlands, especially in Northern Canada. Wetlands are uniquely beautiful natural treasures, and their preservation will protect our natural environment and water resources for many generations to come.