A Landowner’s Guide to
Wetland Restoration

Why and How

What is wetland restoration?

Wetland restoration is taking action to reverse human-caused changes so the land can return back to a more natural state. The main problems for wetlands are lack of adequate water and the right kinds of plants.

Why restore wetlands?

It is estimated that over 50% of North and South Carolina’s wetlands have been drained, filled, converted to farms, logged, or otherwise severely changed since early European settlement.

This means society has lost the benefits they provided:

- **water purification** - wetlands help clean the water that ends up in your tap
- **flood protection** - wetlands give water a place to go
- **wildlife habitat** - wetlands are great for fish, ducks, turtles, frogs and salamanders
- **recreation** - wetlands are great places for boating, hunting, hiking, and birdwatching

All these benefits can be regained through wetland restoration.

How do we restore wetlands?

Wetlands can be restored by bringing back the right amount of water and re-establishing wetland plants.

- **Restore the water**
  - plug or fill drainage ditches
  - remove fill material (rock, gravel, sand, dirt) from historically wet areas
  - remove dams to lower water levels in ponds and lakes
  - remove drain pipes (tiles) used to drain fields for farming
  - reconnect streams with adjacent low land floodplains so the floodplains can soak up water and decrease flooding elsewhere

- **Restore the habitat**
  - plant native trees, shrubs, plants
  - remove non-native plants
  - exclude livestock from wet areas to allow natural regeneration and improve water quality
How do I get started restoring my wetland?

1. Gather information on your site
   - What is the history of your site and resulting changes to your wetland?
   - How can these changes be reversed?
   - Understand what wetland type(s) you have. Do you have marsh? Forested wetland?
   - Talk to local natural resource agencies about ideas on what activities they would suggest for restoring your wetland. To protect water quality, some activities may require a permit, especially if you are moving dirt in or near a stream or wetland.

2. Create and implement a restoration plan
   - Outline your restoration goals for the wetland. What steps are required to achieve these goals?
   - Consider consulting with a native plant nursery for wetland plant suggestions, or a private consulting company for assistance in creating and implementing your plan, especially if manipulation of dirt or water is planned.
   - Funding may be available for your restoration. Contact your county, local soil and water conservation district, or other natural resource agency for information. Agency lists and other resources are provided on the Carolina Wetlands Association website.

3. Evaluate your results and plan for the future
   - Observe your wetland for a couple of years. Take pictures. Is your wetland on the right track? Is it returning to a more natural state? Is it soaking up water?
   - Remember that wetland restoration is a process that can take several years. Some years will be wetter or drier, and wetland plants take time to establish.
   - Consider long-term legal protection, such as through a conservation easement. This can also include nearby or surrounding natural areas to further protect your restored wetland.

Get More Information
Carolina Wetlands Association
www.carolinawetlands.org

Published in 2020 by the Carolina Wetlands Association