



Wetlands: Food, Filter, Habitat



Plants in wetland areas absorb excess nutrients and filter out pollutants before they reach the Bay.

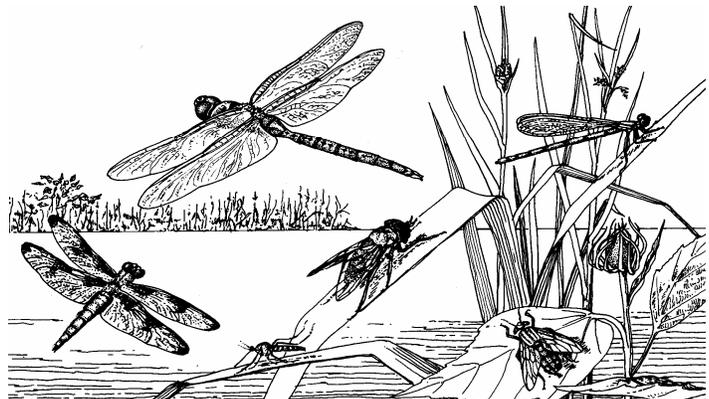
Swamps and marshes found along the coastline of the Chesapeake Bay which connect deep water and land are known as **wetlands**. These areas provide habitat for a wide variety of organisms and act as a natural filtration system for the Bay's water. In recent years, people have come to understand the important role wetlands play in preserving the health of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.

Wetlands act as a protective nursery area for many aquatic organisms who travel into their shallow waters seeking food and protection. Juvenile rockfish, perch, and sea trout are just a few of the fish species which take advantage of the shelter provided by plant cover found in wetland areas. Blue crabs spend much of their young life in the protective confines of the marsh; adult crabs often hide in wetlands after molting while

their new shell is still soft. Wetlands also provide food and resting areas for **migratory waterfowl**. Canada geese, swans, and many species of ducks can typically be found feeding in these areas, consuming rooted plants which are abundant in these shallow water environments.

Swamps and marshes play the important role of filtering water entering the Bay. Sediments and pollutants which wash from land into the water are trapped by the tangled plant matter found in wetlands. Water that flows through a marsh or swamp is consequently much cleaner than it was beforehand. Wetlands help minimize the effects of flooding by protecting shoreline environments from erosion.

When humans fill in wetlands for waterfront development, they remove areas that are vital for improving the water quality of the Bay, as well as critical habitat for many species of plants and animals. In recent years these "critical areas" have been protected by strict environmental laws which prohibit the filling in of swamps and marshes for land development.



Wetlands are home to many insect species. Insect larvae serve as a food source for many young fish living in the marsh.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Read the text on the previous page, then answer the following questions in complete sentences. Write your answers on the lines.

1. What is a wetland?

2. In the spaces below, list five species of animals named in the article that rely on wetlands for food or protection:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

3. In the space below, describe how wetlands filter the water entering the Bay:

4. What has been done to protect wetlands in recent years?
