

History of Wetlands in Wisconsin

Early explorers referred to the Wisconsin Territory as “the Great Swamp”. One-fourth (10 million acres) of this wild and pristine land was covered with wetlands. This rich ecosystem provided a host of benefits to early inhabitants. Native Americans relied heavily on the bounty of these areas. The first settlers, however, didn’t recognize the value of wetlands. Wetlands were considered nuisances,



neither tillable nor navigable. Because of the Swampland Act of 1850, wetlands were very quickly destroyed. In less than 150 years, 47% of the wetlands in Wisconsin were drained or filled. Nationally, less than 50% of our original wetlands remain.

Today, we know that wetlands are in fact important. They store water during heavy spring rains. They release water slowly and thereby prevent flooding. They trap sediments

that erode from upland areas. They filter chemicals and fertilizers out of the water, helping to insure both surface and ground water quality. Wetlands provide food, cover, and water for hundreds of species of wildlife and offer a tremendous recreation resource.

The old views of wetlands as useless wasteland couldn’t be further from the truth. Over the course of the two day program students will learn that these areas fulfill many vital ecological processes which are invaluable to humans and the biodiversity of wildlife.

Day ONE

The students will partake in a canoe tour of the wetland learning about the natural history, and observing biodiversity and ecological interactions within the area. Discussions will be generated around key concepts including: succession, ecosystems, community, food chains, wetland functions and more. Students will participate in an activity showing how wetlands have been diminished over time.



Day TWO

The second day the students will use the scientific method to determine if the marsh is a healthy ecosystem based on water quality testing, and macro invertebrate sampling and identification. Students will also participate in activities that demonstrate the relationship of predator and prey, and competition.



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