

What are inland wetlands and why are they important?

Connecticut has a long history of protecting its water and land resources. In 1972 the state legislature enacted the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act which required the regulation of activities affecting the wetlands and watercourses in Connecticut. Prior to the 1970's, wetlands had been regarded as waste areas and were systematically filled for development purposes and used as dump sites. Although data is not well established for inland wetland loss throughout Connecticut, it has been estimated that approximately half of the state's wetlands have already been filled.

In 1980 the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Department of Fish & Wildlife Service conducted a wetlands inventory for the state of Connecticut. Lebanon's wetland map, which depicts wetland areas identified during this inventory, is available online (www.lebanontownhall.org) on the Inland Wetlands Commission page. Due to the scale of this map, the wetland information provided is to be used for general planning purposes and is not appropriate for property specific planning. For example, just because the wetlands map does not depict wetlands on your property does not mean they do not exist. A field inspection by a trained professional, called a soil scientist, is required to determine if wetlands are located on your property.

Some wetlands are obvious such as ponds streams, rivers, marshes, swamps and other bodies of water. However, wetlands aren't necessarily wet all the time. The State of Connecticut defines wetlands by soil type. Identifying wetlands by soil type allows us to define wetland areas during times of the year when wetland characteristics may not be obvious, such as winter or times of drought. There are three (3) types of soils defined as wetlands in the Act.

- **Poorly Drained soils** occur where the water table is at or just below the ground surface, usually from late fall to early spring. This type of land is usually nearly level or gently sloping.
- **Very poorly drained soils** where the water table is at or above the surface during most of the growing season. Marshes and bogs would generally be associated with this type of soil.
- **Alluvial and Floodplain soils** are found along watercourses where periodic flooding occurs. These soils are formed when material is deposited by flowing water.

The second part of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourse Act defines the term **watercourses** very broadly to mean rivers, streams, brooks, waterways, lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps, bogs and all other bodies of water, natural or artificial, vernal or intermittent, public or private.

Lebanon's leaders and citizens have long realized the benefits and values that wetlands provide. Many of us already have an appreciation of wetlands, whether it is enjoying the beauty of a canoe trip on Lake Williams or fishing for wild trout in Pease Brook. In addition to providing significant habitat for fish, avian and furbearing wildlife, wetlands provide other important functions such as erosion control and the filtration of pollutants that keep our streams and groundwater clean. Wetlands provide human quality of life benefits such as flood protection

through the storage of vast volumes of surface water during spring floods, protecting our homes and property from potentially damaging flooding. The Lebanon Inland Wetland Commission and its Agent play an important role in protecting wetlands to preserve these functions and values for its current and future citizens.

What is the Inland Wetland Commission? The State of Connecticut has given towns the option of creating their own Inland Wetlands Commissions or have the State do it for them. In 1974 Lebanon passed an ordinance allowing the creation of the Inland Wetland Commission. Since that time, the Commission has been responsible for the preservation and protection of wetlands and watercourses in Lebanon from random, unnecessary, undesirable and unregulated uses and provides an orderly process to balance the need for economic growth and use of land with the need to protect its environment and ecology.

In addition to activities proposed within wetlands and watercourses, the Commission also regulates activities within 100 feet of these resources. Regulation of this “upland review area” allows the Commission to review activities in proximity to wetlands, streams, ponds, etc. to ensure that these resources are properly protected. A copy of Lebanon’s Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Regulations are available in the Town Clerk’s Office or on Lebanon’s web site.

Lebanon currently has 6,765+/- acres of wetlands, which represents 19% of the land area of the town. Wetlands and watercourses and the 100-foot upland review area around them are critical to all of us. We all have a vested interest in protecting this vital resource. If you have questions regarding your wetlands or are planning to conduct work in wetlands, watercourses or within 100 feet of these resources please contact Phil Chester, Lebanon Town Planner at 642-2006.