

Where were wetlands historically found in Wisconsin?

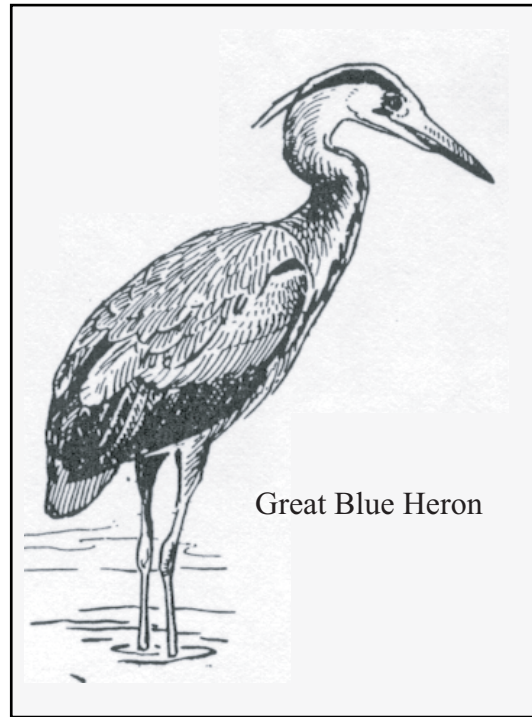
- In the lowest part of the landscape or along streams and lakes.
- Different types of wetlands are found throughout Wisconsin, including prairie pothole wetlands, sedge meadows, tamarack swamps, and many others.

What are the characteristics of wetland ecosystems?

- Presence of water at or just below the soil surface for part of the year.
- Specific soils that develop under wet conditions.
- Distinctive plants adapted to wet soils.
- More variety of wildlife than almost any other ecosystem. More than one third of U.S. endangered species depend on wetlands during part of their life cycle.

What valuable 'ecosystem services' do wetlands provide?

- Nurseries for many fish species including the northern pike, muskie, and walleye.
- Flood control by slowing water runoff and temporarily storing excess water.
- Purifying rain and surface water through special chemical reactions.
- Protecting streambanks and shorelines from erosion.



Great Blue Heron

What is the status of Wisconsin wetland ecosystems today?

- Approximately 5 million acres of wetlands remain in Wisconsin out of the original 10 million.
- Wetland health is still threatened by invasive species (e.g. reed canary grass and purple loosestrife), urban and rural runoff, and eroding sediment from development.

"If there is anything which may be supposed to be known by everybody...it is that swamps and stagnant waters are the cause of malaria and malignant fevers, and that public power is never more legitimately exercised than in removing such nuisances."-The Swamp Land Act of 1850, U.S. Supreme Court

What role did fires play in maintaining wetland ecosystems?

- Before European settlement, fires started by lightning strikes or Native Americans periodically swept through wetlands.
- Fire removes brush and trees, creating improved, open habitat for wildlife.
- Fire incinerates dead vegetation, which promotes plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil and giving sunlight an opportunity to warm the ground earlier in the spring.

How is this situation improving?

- Citizens are increasing their appreciation of wetlands and what they offer-hunting opportunities, local scenic value, rare plants and wildlife, and many ecosystem services.
- Many public and private organizations at local, state, and federal levels have programs to help private landowners pay for and execute wetland restoration on their property (Please see the back for more information.)