

# Wetlands:

## Why do fish need them?

by Kevin Gergel

Wetlands and fish go together like a worm on a hook. Without wetlands, many of our favorite places to fish may be polluted or covered by silt. Wetlands have been around for over 10,000 years. Our wetlands are very important to many different types of plant, animal and fish life. A wetland is an area of land that has water-loving plants and has undrained wet soils saturated with or covered by shallow water sometime during the year.

Wetlands are important to fish in many ways. Swamps along rivers give spawning areas and produce food for fish. Bluegills, bass, and crappies often find that these are good places to live. Snakes, turtles, frogs, and salamanders all like to raise their young in wetlands.

The plants that grow in wetlands are also good for the fish. When plants grow, they give off oxygen that fish need to breathe. Tiny plants

that we can't see are food for many of the smaller fish. Swamp plants also help with water pollution by removing chemicals in the water. Without swamp plants, fish wouldn't be able to survive because of the chemicals.

Wetlands are also good at protecting fish from erosion. Plants grow so thick in wetlands that they slow down the water. This helps to prevent erosion. Erosion is the wearing away of the banks of streams or rivers. Erosion makes silt in the water. Silt can cover the bottom of the stream, making it harder for a fish to find a good place to spawn. In a wetland, the water moves so slowly that the silt settles and makes the water clearer.

Wetlands have a bad reputation. Some people tell us that this is where swamp monsters live and describe them as scary areas in the wild. This is not true. Wetlands are very important to us and our fish friends. Without them our waters would be dirty and polluted, and the fish couldn't survive. They give the fish oxygen to breathe, a place for fish to live, and food, and they keep the water clean. Without wetlands, we might not be able to fish in the local stream and catch healthy fish.

