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## Kentucky Wetlands

A boy adventures outside one fall afternoon to fish in his wetlands. During his walk he sees a Midland Water Snake slithering along the path. Upon his arrival to the wetlands he spooks several Canadian geese from the water. As he makes his first cast of the rod a White Tail deer wanders up for a drink and when he reels in his first Catfish, American toads jump in from surrounding logs. Walking home he is met with awe of how one body of water can be the heart of an ecosystem. This is just one of many positive outcomes Kentucky wetlands can have on our lives.

Wetlands are areas of land that are submerged or saturated with water. These areas can range anywhere from a few inches deep to several feet. Often wetlands offer home to various plants, animals and insects, as well as essentials needed by others.

Wetlands can provide aid to flooding. Wetlands are sometimes considered the kidneys of nature because of their ability to break down things like pesticides, fertilizers and sediment, as well as being able to hold many gallons of water. Wetlands are natural sponges, because of their soil and water, thriving vegetation that can absorb the water. An acre of wetlands can typically hold around one million gallons of water and then slowly release it back into the soil over time. Wetlands reduce ground erosion, help slow water flow down, and buffer it. A major source of drinking water is also provided by wetlands.

Kentucky wetlands offer home to many different types of vegetation which have many benefits to our ecosystem. One plant found near Kentucky wetlands is Swamp Milkweed. This is the host plant of Monarch butterflies, in order for Monarchs to survive they have to have milkweed. Wetlands provide home to many amphibians, frogs and toads like to lay their eggs in these bodies of water because it is stagnant, vegetation and debris that offer shelter to the amphibians after they hatch.

It is important to realize that all of these wetlands and their benefits could be lost if we do not protect them. Kentucky has lost over 80% of its historic wetlands due to draining, rerouting and even logging. Often wetlands are drained in order to make space for cropland or new structures, which can lead to our ecosystem becoming unbalanced.

A new threat to Kentucky wetlands is the recently passed law that states, Kentucky wetlands are no longer protected from pollution discharge or dumping as long as it is not directly connected with a larger water way. This raises several issues, one of them being the possible loss of drinking water, 1.5 million Kentuckians rely on water systems that pull from groundwater. Along with the loss of clean habitable water for the wildlife that is dependent upon wetlands.

A few ways you can protect wetlands is by volunteering with local groups in your communities that do clean up projects to remove pollution from the wetlands. Be mindful of the

wetlands in your community and do your best not to harm them. Plant native plants to improve the wetlands and make others aware of the importance of wetlands. Wetlands are an essential component of our wildlife. We need to do our best to protect them for wildlife and humans alike.

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