

Kentucky's Hidden Heroes: The Vital Role of Wetlands

What some may call "ugly, disgusting swamps" are actually very important and serve many purposes. Although they may appear muddy and unimportant, wetlands are one of the most vital ecosystems in Kentucky. Found near lakes, streams, and rivers across the state, wetlands play a major role in controlling floods and storing carbon, which helps reduce climate change. Kentucky's wetlands are essential for wildlife survival, help prevent climate change, and reduce flood damage, making them worth saving.

One major way Kentucky's wetlands contribute to the state is by providing habitat for wildlife. According to *Kentucky Wetlands Up Close*, "Wetlands are critical habitats that most of all amphibians in Kentucky rely on for either a permanent home or as a safe place to foster another generation of babies." This highlights that most amphibians in Kentucky depend on wetlands for shelter and breeding grounds. Additionally, the *Team Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet* states, "Largemouth bass, muskies, and bluegills need wetlands for food and water." This demonstrates that many fish species rely on wetlands for food, safety from predators, and as a home. Furthermore, *Encompass* notes, "Lack of federal protection for isolated wetlands has resulted in the loss of amphibian breeding habitat." This suggests that the destruction of wetlands could lead to the endangerment of amphibian species. Clearly, wetlands are crucial for animal survival, but they also play an important role in controlling pollution.

Wetlands in Kentucky can capture harmful greenhouse gases, such as carbon, which helps mitigate climate change. According to *Kentucky Wetlands Up Close*, "A wetland can also trap carbon from the atmosphere. This process is called carbon sequestration, and it removes greenhouse gases from the air." This indicates that wetlands contribute to reducing climate change by trapping carbon, a common greenhouse gas. *Kentucky Wetlands Up Close* also states, "Wetlands across the country help remove tons of carbon from the air each year." This underscores the significant role wetlands play in carbon sequestration. The *United States Geological Survey* (USGS) further explains, "These productive landscapes are highly efficient at

accumulating soil organic matter and can function as carbon sinks, even though they only account for less than 10% of Earth's land surface." Even though wetlands cover a small percentage of Earth's land, they are incredibly efficient at removing large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. In addition to capturing carbon, wetlands are also vital for flood prevention.

Another crucial benefit of wetlands is their ability to protect Kentucky from flood damage. According to *Kentucky Wetlands Up Close*, "Wetlands are natural sponges and hold large amounts of water during a flood event because they are natural depressions in the earth and have water-loving vegetation." This shows that wetlands help control flooding by absorbing large amounts of water. The *Team Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet* adds, "One acre of wetlands can store one million gallons of water and release it gradually after rains end. This reduces flooding downstream and allows water to soak into the soil and replenish groundwater." This demonstrates the ability of wetlands to store water and reduce the risk of downstream flooding. Furthermore, the *Team Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet* also states, "Losses of our wetlands have caused increases in downstream flood events and water pollution problems." When wetlands are lost, they can no longer absorb and manage water, leading to increased flooding and water pollution.

In conclusion, Kentucky's wetlands should be protected and preserved due to their crucial role in providing habitats for wildlife, mitigating climate change, and reducing flood damage. By working together to protect these valuable ecosystems, we can prevent the destruction of Kentucky's wetlands and ensure that they continue to provide their essential benefits.

Works Cited

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