A Quick Guide to Wisconsin Wetland Indicators

Being able to recognize wetlands on the landscape is a useful skill for anyone involved in land use planning, management, sales, or development. This *Quick Guide to Wisconsin Wetland Indicators* is a tool to be used in the field to help people develop a working knowledge of common wetland plants and other wetland indicators. It is one of a growing series of publications produced by the Wisconsin Wetlands Association to help wetland land owners and land use professionals understand what wetlands are, why they matter, and how to protect them. For more information visit www.wisconsinwetlands.org.

Common Southwestern Wisconsin Wetland Plants

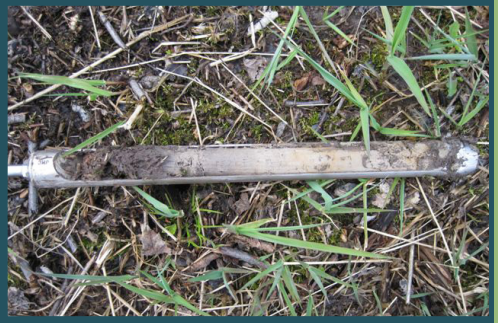
With 12 wetland community types, Wisconsin is home to a diverse array wetland plants, trees, and shrubs. You don't need to be able to name all, or even most, of the plants to recognize a wetland. Pictured below are images of some of the more common wetland plants that you will encounter in the field.

Photos courtesy of Steve Eggers, Gary Shackelford, and Brynda Hatch

Wetland Soils Indicators:

Wetland or "hydric" soils form when there is saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper horizon. Pictured below are common characteristics that you can look for to indicate whether hydric soils are present.

Redox Features: Due to chemical reactions in the soil when saturated, wetland soils might have rust "spots" or colorations.



Soil profiles might show light colors (chroma) - usually gray - near the surface.

Wetland soils can be gleyed or primarily gray and even greenish or bluish gray.

Wetland soils tend to often appear darker in color when compared to upland soils.

Additional Resources: WDNR Wetland Clues Checklist; MN & WI Wetland Plant Book - Eggers & Reed 2011; NRCS Field Indicators of Hydric Soils; UWSP or UWGB Herbarium; WWA's Land Use and Wetlands Publication Series: www.wisconsinwetlands.org/for-communities/

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Wetland Hydrology Indicators:

Wetland water levels can vary substantially over the course of an average year. In many wetlands, surface flooding will last only a few days or weeks before the water recedes leaving sometimes saturated, but often dry, conditions for the remainder of the growing season. If you know what to look for, you can easily find evidence of wetland hydrology on a site. Pictured below are common things to look for as indicators of wetland hydrology.

Low lying wet areas and drainage ditches are strong indicators that wetlands are present at the site.

Indicators like shallow root systems and water mark stains on trees signify that water frequents a site.

Other indicators like areas with no vegetation and flattened vegetation show that water has been present at the site.

Photos courtesy of Tim Miland, Pat Trochlell, Kyle Magyera, Cherie Hagen, and Joanne Kline