

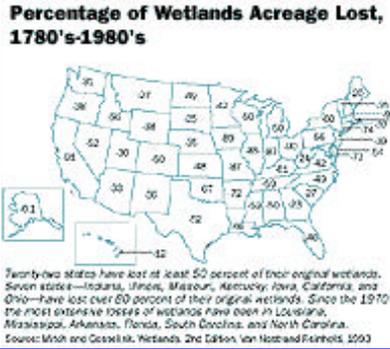
# Status and Trends

## Current Situation

The lower 48 states contained an estimated 103.3 million acres of wet lands in the mid-1980s. This is an area about the size of California. An estimated 170-200 million acres of wetland exist in Alaska-- covering slightly more than half of the state-- while Hawaii has 52,000 acres. Next to Alaska, Florida (11 million), Louisiana (8.8 million), Minnesota (8.7 million), and Texas (7.6 million) have the largest wetland acreage.



In the 1600s, over 220 million acres of wetlands are thought to have existed in the lower 48 states. Since then, extensive losses have occurred, and over half of our original wetlands have been drained and converted to other uses. The years from the mid-1950's to the mid-1970's were a time of major wetland loss, but since then the rate of loss has decreased.

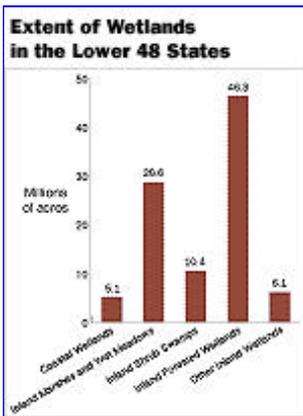


Recent estimates of wetlands trends on non-federal lands indicate a loss rate between 70,000 to 90,000 acres annually. Draining of wetlands for agricultural purposes has continued to decline, while development accounts for a larger percentage of factors including federal farm policies that discourage drainage and encourage restoration more effective governmental regulation, land owner stewardship, acquisition and protection of sensitive environmental areas, and more State, Tribal and local involvement in wetland programs.

In addition to these losses, many other wetlands have suffered degradation of functions, although calculating the magnitude of the degradation is difficult.

These losses, as well as degradation, have greatly diminished our nation's wetlands resources; as a result, we no longer have the benefits they provided. **The increase in flood damages, drought damages, and the declining bird populations are, in part, the result**

**of wetlands degradation and destruction.**



Wetlands have been degraded in ways that are not as obvious as direct physical destruction or degradation. Other threats have included chemical contamination, excess nutrients, and sediment from air and water. Global climate change could affect wetlands through increased air temperature; shifts in precipitation; increased frequency of storms, droughts, and floods;



increased atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration; and sea level rise. All of these impacts could affect species composition and wetland functions.

## Major Causes of Wetland Loss and Degradation

### Human Actions

- Drainage
- Dredging and stream channelization
- Deposition of fill material
- Diking and damming
- Tilling for crop production
- Levees
- Logging
- Mining
- Construction
- Runoff
- Air and water pollutants
- Changing nutrient levels
- Releasing toxic chemicals
- Introducing nonnative species
- Grazing by domestic animals

**Natural Threats**

- Erosion
- Subsidence
- Sea level rise
- Droughts
- Hurricanes and other storms



**Previous:**  
[Wetlands and People](#)

**[Table of Contents](#)**

**Next:**  
[Wetlands Protection](#)



[Wetlands Division home page](#)



**Additional Questions?** Call our Wetlands Hotline at 1-800-832-7828 or send e-mail to [wetlands.helpline@epa.gov](mailto:wetlands.helpline@epa.gov).

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