
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WETLANDS PROTECTION IN SHEFFIELD



**Read this before you
dump, cut, fill, remove, dredge, alter, or build
near a wetland
& contact:**

Sheffield Conservation Commission

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WHAT WETLANDS ARE PROTECTED?

Under the MA Wetlands Protection Act, wetlands are defined by the kind of plants that grow in them (such as jewel weed, red maples, or skunk cabbage) and the kind of soils that exist there. The Conservation Commission (ConCom) or a wetland specialist can help you determine whether you live near a wetland or wetland resource area. Contact the ConCom if you plan any work:

- Within 100 feet of a:
 - Swamp or marsh
 - Forested wetland
 - Pond
 - Intermittent stream
- Within 200 feet of a stream or river that flows year round
- Within the 100-year flood zone
- Within the Schenob Brook Drainage Basin Area of Critical Environmental Concern



Wetlands may not be wet all the time. Low areas that flood in the spring may be wetlands.

Wetlands are valuable because they reduce flooding, provide wildlife habitat, help recharge aquifers, and filter polluted water.

ARE BUFFER ZONES AROUND WETLANDS PROTECTED?

Yes! Buffer zones, the land within 100 feet of wetlands, are protected and regulated as is any work within 200 feet of a year round stream or riverfront.

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE REGULATED?

The ConCom is charged by state law with reviewing & issuing permits for activities that will alter wetland resource areas or their buffer zones.

Regulated activities include:

- Dumping leaves, brush, grass, debris
- Cutting down trees or shrubs
- Reconstructing lawns & landscaping
- Building, or repairs to, a septic system and related structures
- Grading, excavating, or filling
- Changing storm water discharge
- Polluting wetlands or streams
- Pumping water from or into a wetland
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You may maintain lawfully existing (grand-fathered or permitted) structures, lawns, and landscapes, and you may do some limited vista pruning of trees, but **cutting of whole trees, clearing understory, construction, earth disturbing activities, altering drainage and other activities require a permit.**

WHY ARE WETLANDS IMPORTANT?

Wetland resource areas provide critical habitat to wildlife and help maintain the aesthetic beauty of our town. They also provide priceless yet “free” services including:

- Drinking water purification
- Groundwater recharge
- Flood control
- Pollution prevention.

All Sheffield residents benefit from these services because of our reliance on natural settings for property values, wells for drinking water, and septic systems for waste disposal.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A PROJECT IN MIND?

1. Determine if your project will occur within a wetland or buffer zone – see the graphic on p 3.
2. Come to a ConCom meeting with questions.
3. Complete & file the required application, if needed.
4. Attend the public hearing.
5. Get a permit before starting work.



WHAT HAPPENS TO VIOLATORS?

Violations include unpermitted:

- Dumping of grass, leaves, brush, or debris in a wetland or buffer zone;
- Cutting of trees or shrubs within Riverfront Area, wetland, or buffer; or

- Building without a permit within Riverfront Area, wetland, or buffer.

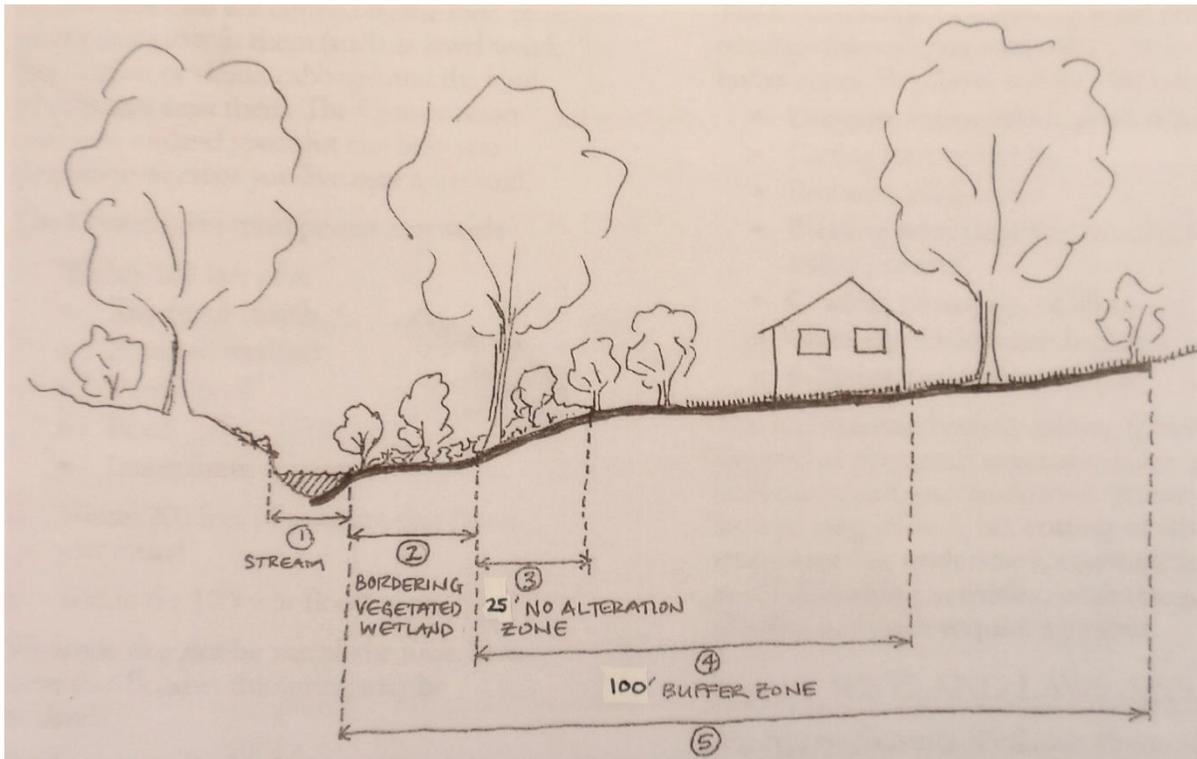
Under the Wetland Protection Act, the ConCom can require illegally altered land to be restored to its original condition, as well as issue fines. This cost may be much more than just coming to the ConCom in the first place.

HELP PROTECT WETLANDS!

To do more than just obey the law, consider:

- Not using fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, or deicers near wetlands.
- Encouraging native vegetation and native wildlife.

Wetland Resource Areas and Buffer Zones



What are Wetland Resource Areas & Buffer Zones?

Wetland resource areas include the commonly known *cattail marsh* and open water *pond, rivers* that generally flow throughout the year, 200-foot *riverfront areas* which border rivers on both sides, *intermittent streams* that dry up during part of the year, and low-lying *flood plains*. All these areas (except riverfront areas) are surrounded by “*buffer zones*” – 100 foot wide protective zones around wetlands that protect wetlands from human impacts and provide valuable wildlife habitat. Sheffield also has an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). Many Sheffield homeowners have wetland resource areas on or near their property. If you plan to do any work in a wetland resource area, within the 100 foot buffer zone of a wetland, or within 200 feet of a river, such as: tree removal or other vegetation clearing, grading/excavation, new landscaping, construction of any kind such as an addition, new, or repairs to a, septic system, new driveway, adding a pool, or any other activity that might alter wetlands or their buffer zones, you must contact the Sheffield Conservation Commission before beginning this work. To find out if your property, or any portion of it, is in a Wetland Resource Area go to sheffieldma.gov/conservation-commission, click on the How to Check for Wetlands blue button on the left and follow the instructions. Maps showing outlines of wetland resource areas are also in the 1st Floor meeting room at Town Hall or check with your contractor or wetland specialist.