

Freshwater Wetlands

Wetlands are commonly referred to as swamps, marshes, or bogs. Previously misunderstood as wastelands, wetlands are now recognized for their vital ecological and socioeconomic contributions.

Freshwater wetlands have many valuable uses for our environment and the community. To protect these valuable landmasses, New Jersey has put in place some of the most progressive laws concerning the protection of freshwater wetlands. On July 1, 1987, the New Jersey legislature passed the NJ Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act to “preserve the purity and integrity of freshwater wetlands from unnecessary and undesirable disturbance.” The legislature found that protecting wetlands required “vigorous action” because of the important functions performed by wetlands and because the existing federal programs were not stringent enough. The NJ Freshwater Protection Act has been revised many times since 1987, and will continue to be modified to ensure our environment is protected.

Under the Federal Clean Water Act, a state may take over the federal program as long as the state agrees to incorporate all of the federal laws. In 1994, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved that New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) assume responsibility for the federal wetlands program. The EPA retains oversight of the state program and coordinates certain activities with the DEP. The DEP relies on local communities such as Montvale to ensure the wetland regulations are observed and enforced.

Despite New Jersey's strict wetlands laws and regulations, wetlands are still being destroyed. Losses of such areas take place whenever a municipality does not properly recognize and enforce existing wetlands regulations. State and federal governments do not have the manpower to police all wetlands, hence local communities must take responsibility. As with any community-driven activity, citizens must help state and local officials by understanding and sharing in their responsibilities, and by bringing potential violations to the attention of state and/or local officials. The Montvale Environmental Commission, Planning Board, and Building Code Official are here to assist you concerning wetlands-related issues. To learn more about wetlands, please visit the [New Jersey DEP website](#).