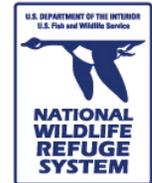


# Wetland Awareness



**Grade:** Kindergarten  
**Group Size:** 1 class

**Season:** Spring    **Time:** 1 hour  
**Ratio:** 1 adult: 5 students

## For the Teacher:

<b>Overview</b>	Using a KWL approach, students will use their senses of touch, sight, hearing, and smell to explore, observe and make discoveries about a wetland. They will ask and answer questions about the wetland based upon what they already know and what they experience while investigating.
<b>Subjects Covered</b>	Science
<b>MN Science Standards Supported</b>	Helps support three standards. See section "Minnesota Academic Standards in Science"
<b>Skills Used</b>	Listening and following directions, observing with senses, examining, socializing, cooperation, exploration, matching, asking and answering questions, critical thinking
<b>Performance Objectives</b>	After completing this activity, students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use four of their senses (not taste) to explore, observe, describe, and answer questions about a wetland</li> <li>• Measure the height of cattails against their body height</li> <li>• Recognize a wetland habitat based upon common characteristics such as cattails, water, ducks, muck, or other specialized organisms</li> </ul>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Wetland, habitat, muck, cattail, soil, texture, senses, question, observe

## For the PWLC Instructor:

<b>PWLC Theme</b>	The Prairie Pothole Region
<b>Primary EE Message</b>	The prairie pothole region is valuable and in need of restoration and protection.
<b>Sub-message</b>	Habitat: The Prairie Pothole Region is a unique and rare ecosystem
<b>PWLC EE Objective</b>	Identify the components and functions of a given ecosystem by observing, counting, and describing the animals and plants in that ecosystem
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illustrations of the five senses</li> <li>• Clipboard, paper, and pencil for instructor use</li> <li>• Pond nets, tubs</li> </ul>
<b>Locations</b>	Classroom, dining hall, or amphitheater; Mallard Marsh bridge (preferably) or Adams Pond platform

## Background Information

The purpose of this program is to introduce kindergarteners to wetlands and give them an enjoyable first-hand wetland experience. This program would also make a suitable review of a unit on habitat and the senses.

What exactly is a wetland? Unlike rivers and streams, wetlands are standing water bodies that lack a current. Unlike lakes, wetlands are often smaller in dimension and have uniform water temperature. However, wetlands may be associated with lakes, rivers, and streams. In wetlands, water is the main factor controlling the environment and the plants and animals living there. Water is at or near the surface of the land and may be visible all or part of the year or not at all. In these shallow water bodies, water depth may be as great as six feet and typically fluctuates over time. Wetland soils are often water-logged and deprived of oxygen. As a result of these and other factors,

specialized animals and plants live in wetlands such as duckweed, lily pads, water striders, dragonflies, frogs, turtles, ducks, muskrats, weasels, and mink. Wetland plants and animals are able to live in a watery world for several reasons:

- Because of unusual adaptations for obtaining oxygen and for locomotion through water;
- Because they can adjust to changing moisture conditions by moving from wetland to wetland;
- Because they live part of their life cycle on land;
- and/or because they survive in a dormant state for a period of time.

Wetlands are among the most biologically productive ecosystems on earth because of availability of moisture and nutrients for plant growth. Wetlands can capture large quantities of energy from the sun and store it as chemical energy in their sheer mass of vegetation. Lance-shaped cattail leaves standing vertically, for example, maximize the surface area exposed to the sun for photosynthesis. Cattails and other emergent plants like bulrushes store energy and nutrients in their extensive roots and rhizomes. Nutrients in the wetland are efficiently released for use by grazing animals like muskrats and ducks or through decomposition by detritivores like bacteria, fungi, clams, snails, and aquatic earthworms.

A rhythmic cycle of drying out and re-flooding brings in new nutrients or improves access to them and helps keep wetlands oxygenated. This wet-dry cycle seems to trigger higher productivity as nutrients are released from muck when decomposing – wetlands efficiently recycle what is produced. The longer wetland water is stagnant, the less productive it becomes compared to wetlands with periodic flooding and refreshed water. In terms of biomass, cattail marshes are the most productive type of wetland, surpassing grasslands and forests. High plant productivity in prairie potholes is the basis for high production consequently of ducks, muskrats, and other wildlife. Their basins flood with snow melt runoff in spring and rainfall but dry out with summer and even fall droughts. Successive years of high water or drought draws out this cycle on a longer time frame of five to 20 years. Wetlands are important for so many reasons besides production of plants and animals. Wetlands control floodwaters, recharge groundwater, filter pollutants, and store carbon. They are the nurseries and kidneys of the land.

The prairie is North America's grassland biome. It extends from central Canada to Texas, from the Rocky Mountains to Ohio. The prairie pothole region is defined geographically as the northern portion of the prairie. This region has the greatest density of wetlands in North America. About the size of Texas, it covers approximately 300,000 square miles within five states and three Canadian provinces including the western edge of Minnesota, about half of Otter Tail County, and all of Fergus Falls. The prairie and its potholes, rivers, and lakes are the place we call home, the landscape that our cities, roads, and farms are built upon, the land of which remnants can be found in places like the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC). The PWLC has 330 acres of prairie with 28 wetlands embedded within. Each wetland is unique in its size, shape,

depth, and variety of plants and animals. Besides prairie potholes, Minnesota's most common wetlands also include forested wetlands and bogs.

Spring is an excellent time to explore wetlands. The peaceful winter months have melted away, and many bird species are migrating through our area. Some stay to nest, noisily calling to competitors and mates. Thawing wetlands means frogs are stirring from their long hibernation, ready to sing out to attract a mate. The refreshing smell of water long locked in ice floats on the air once again, soothing human skin covered all too long by layers of clothes. Students witness the renewal of life and greening of the waterscape including cattail spears piercing through soil and water, duckweed floating on the surface, and coontail submerged beneath it. They may watch a muskrat silently swim by or a painted turtle play peek-a-boo, poking its head out of the water. They can listen to a symphony of bird sounds from marsh wrens, red-winged blackbirds, Canada geese, and mallards. A full sensory experience, they can find beauty, delight in the discoveries they make, and benefit from the exercise and fresh air in their classroom without walls and ceiling, the prairie wetlands.

### *Teacher Preparation*

We highly recommend conducting one or more of the suggested extensions before your visit in order to integrate this field investigation into the classroom study of wetlands, habitat, nature, senses, or other topics. We believe such integration enhances student motivation for learning in other curricular areas. Please see section, "Teacher-Led Extensions/Adaptations/Assessment Ideas."

### *PWLC Staff Preparation*

Prepare and organize materials. Select wetland location, either Adams Pond or Mallard Marsh.

### *Field Investigation Procedure*

1. Welcome students, teachers, and chaperones to the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center at the cement sign near the parking lot.
2. Organize students into as many small groups as possible with the number of chaperones on hand. Each chaperone is responsible for helping their students to follow-through with directions and with dispersal and collection of materials.
3. Sit in a large circle as a whole class on the floor.
4. Ask students if they know what the second word in our name means? What is a wetland? How do you know you are in a wetland and not a forest or prairie? (This is the K of the KWL model – what do they already *know* about wetlands?)
5. Ask students what questions they have about wetlands – what do they *wonder* about them? (This is the W part of the KWL model.) Write their questions down on a paper and clipboard. Add one more question: are wetlands special places? Students who think they are may stand; those who don't may remain seated; and those who don't know may kneel. On the clipboard, record how many students answer yes, no, and I don't know. Today they will have a great chance to think more about if wetlands as special places.

6. Tell students they will use their senses to explore a wetland and answer some of their questions. Review the five senses together and gesture to illustrated symbols of the senses for a visual aid.
7. Before heading out on the trail, review the rules of respect for the trail – just the same as at school, plus special trail rules (such as no picking plants, follow the leader, be kind to animals, etc.)
8. Walk to a nearby wetland with water access. Lead any combination of the following activities, using as many different senses as time and conditions allow. Lead the whole class initially, and then each chaperone may follow-through with their small groups. As needed, float from small group to small group to provide assistance, to encourage active searching, and to answer questions.
  - SOUND: Near the wetland, stand with eyes closed and listen to sounds around you. Count on fingers each time a different sound is heard. How many different sounds did they hear? How would they describe the sounds? (shrill, bubbly, loud, soft, quiet) What made the sounds? (likely candidates include crickets, ducks, geese, wind, people, traffic)
  - SIGHT: Watch the cattails blow in the wind. Which way is the wind blowing from? To? What do the cattails remind them of?
  - SIGHT, TOUCH: On the bridge, stop where cattails grow on both sides. Who is taller, the cattails or the students? How about the adults? Touch the leaves – what do they feel like? Where are the roots? What are the seed heads made out of? How do the seeds feel?
  - SIGHT: Out over the open water, search for muskrats, birds, turtles.
  - SIGHT: Lie on the bridge and look into the water. What colors do they see? Any creatures? What are they doing? Any plants?
  - TOUCH, SIGHT: Chaperones may help to fill dish pans with about half full with water. Students may use nets to scoop up bugs and plants and place them in the tubs. Watch them swim – do they all swim the same way? Are they all the same size? What colors do they see? Are they all the exact same color? Do the plants have roots, leaves, stems, flowers?
  - TOUCH, SMELL: On the way back through the cattails, each chaperone may scoop up some muck for students to touch and smell. What does it feel like? What color is it? How does it smell?
9. To wrap-up, sit together as a whole class back in the classroom and share what they smelled, saw, heard, and felt. Answer the questions that students generated as recorded on the clipboard. Ask them what they discovered today in the wetland that they never knew before. (This is the L part of the KWL model – what did they *learn*?) Take a vote again as in step 5. Compare their numbers to the first “vote.” Did anyone change their minds? Thank them all for coming!

## Weather Alternatives

Field investigations take place rain or shine. Everyone should dress appropriately for the weather. In the event of unsafe weather (lightning, high winds) or pouring rain, everyone must come indoors. PWLC staff make every effort to make your travel worthwhile despite the weather and prepare indoor, age-appropriate plans. PWLC staff welcome teacher input into these plans. Some possible alternatives might include:

- Go outside for a very short amount of time, even if only under the deck, to look and listen for wetland animals and plants.
- Tour the exhibit area and watch prairie wetlands videos with the objective of answering the questions generated for the investigation.
- Read Here is the Wetland by Madeleine Dunphy. Ask students to help you by repeating the last phrase on each page, “Here is the wetland.” You may also incorporate actions and sounds for each new item on each page, and repeat the previous ones. See the chart below for examples.

Word from story	Sound	Action
Water	<i>Drip-drop!</i>	Tilt head to right and left
Cattails	<i>Meow!</i>	Fingers pull on “whiskers”
Muskrat	<i>Munching</i>	Fingers near mouth
Mink	<i>Splash!</i>	Move hand downward
Bass	<i>Glub-glub</i>	Fish lips
Heron	<i>Ah-ronk!</i>	Flap arms slowly
Frog	<i>Ribbit!</i>	Jump up
Snake	(silence)	Stick tongue in and out
Blackbirds	<i>Konk-a-ree!</i>	Elbows up
Bulrushes	<i>Weeee!</i>	Sway back and forth
Coots	<i>Pidder-patter</i>	Wiggle fingers, move hand across
Ducks	<i>Quack!</i>	Flap arms quickly

### Teacher-Led Extensions/Adaptations/Assessment Ideas

- Read books about wetlands before and after your visit. See section “Reference and Resources,” for possible titles.
- Go for a walk to a neighborhood pond or marsh. Search for examples of animals and plants from the book(s) you read. Do the same plants and animals live in this wetland as the PWLC wetland? Why? Visit the wetland through the seasons and observe changes in weather, plants, animals, and water.
- If your students also visited the PWLC in fall, ask them to compare and contrast prairie and wetland habitats. Make a t-table or a Venn diagram. Which one is wetter/drier? Are the same plants and animals in both? Do both have shade? If so, where? Where is the sun the brightest, the wind the strongest, in both?

### Minnesota Academic Standards in Science

This lesson helps support the following state standards...

#### Strand I. HISTORY AND NATURE OF SCIENCE

##### Substrand B. Scientific Inquiry

**Standard:** The student will raise questions about the natural world.

**Benchmark 1.** The student will observe and describe common objects using simple tools.

#### Stand IV. LIFE SCIENCE

##### Substrand B. Diversity of Organisms

**Standard:** The student will understand that there are living and non-living things  
**Benchmark 2.** Compare and contrast them; group living things in simple ways

**Substrand G.** Human Organism

**Standard:** The student will understand that people have five senses that can be used to learn about the environment.

**Benchmark 1.** The student will observe and describe the environment using the five senses.

## References and Resources

### For Children

- A Wetland Habitat (Introducing Habitat) by Molly Aloian and Bobbie Kalman
- Come Out Muskrats by Jim Arnosky
- Here is the Wetland by Madeleine Dunphy
- Near One Cattail: Turtles, Logs, and Leaping Frogs (Sharing Nature With Children Book) by Anthony D. Fredericks
- Peek at a Pond by Neecey Twinem
- Squish! A Wetland Walk by Nancy Luenn
- Wetland Animals: Animals in Their Habitats by Francine Galko
- Wetland Food Chains by Bobbie Kalman and Kylie Burns
- Wetlands: Soggy Habitat by Laura Purdie Salas

### For Adults

- A Guide to Common Freshwater Invertebrates of North America by J. Reese Voshell, Jr.
- Animal Habitats! Learning About North American Animals Thru Art, Science, and Creative Play by Judy Press
- Aquatic Project WILD, Aquatic Education Activity Guide by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Western Regional Environmental Education Council
- Discover Nature in Water and Wetlands, Things to Know and Things to Do by Elizabeth P. Lawlor
- Natural Wonders: A Guide to Early Childhood for Environmental Educators by the Minnesota Early Childhood Environmental Education Consortium, Marcie Oltman, editor.
- Nature for the Very Young: A Handbook of Indoor and Outdoor Activities by Marcia Bowden.
- Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide by The Watercourse and Western Regional Environmental Education Council
- Sharing Nature with Children by Joseph Cornell
- The National Audubon Society Nature Guides: Wetlands by William A. Niering
- WOW! The Wonders of Wetlands, an Educator's Guide by Environmental Concern, Inc. and The Watercourse
- Biomes of Minnesota, <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/biomes/prairie.html>
- KinderNature, a Resource for Early Childhood Educators,

- <http://kindernature.storycounty.com/>  
Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/pwlc>

## *Credits*

This field investigation was developed and written by Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Staff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks to Prairie Science Class naturalist Deb Strege for reviewing this lesson. Thanks to the following teachers for reviewing this lesson plan: Shelley Schoeneck, Morning Sun Christian School, Fergus Falls; Sharon Tungseth, McKinley Elementary, Fergus Falls; and Angela Nord, home school parent/educator, Fergus Falls.