



Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States 2004 to 2009



"Wetlands provide many ecological, economic, and social benefits, such as habitat for fish, wildlife, and a variety of plants. They serve as nurseries for saltwater and freshwater fishes and shellfish of commercial and recreational importance... We should all be concerned about the substantial loss of this diminishing resource, which helps ensure good water quality for local communities and provides vital habitat for a diversity of important wildlife species."

Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior

Status of the Nation's Wetlands, 2009

There were an estimated 110.1 million acres (44.6 million ha) of wetlands in the Conterminous U.S. in 2009¹. Wetlands composed 5.5 percent of the surface area of the U. S. An estimated 95 percent of all wetlands were freshwater and five percent were in the marine or estuarine (saltwater) systems. There were an estimated 104.3 million acres (42.2 million ha) of freshwater wetland and 5.8 million acres (2.4 million ha) of intertidal (saltwater) wetlands.

Wetland Change Between 2004 and 2009

The difference in the national estimates of wetland acreage between 2004 and 2009 was not statistically significant. Wetland area declined by an estimated 62,300 acres (25,200 ha) between 2004 and 2009. This equated to an average annual loss of 13,800 acres (5,590 ha) during the 4.5 year time interval of this study. There were notable losses that occurred to intertidal estuarine emergent wetlands (salt marsh) and freshwater forested wetlands.

Wetland Distribution and Types

Wetlands were found in all 48 states and in every physiographic region of the country as part of this study. Of the freshwater wetland population contained in the national sample, ponds were the most prevalent wetland type found in urban areas, whereas freshwater emergent wetlands were the least common type. On agricultural lands, there was a fairly even distribution of wetland types with forested, emergent and ponds represented. Land predominantly in silviculture had the highest percentage of forested and shrub wetland. Rural areas exhibiting growth had a mix of all freshwater wetland types, as this represented an interface with new development activities.

Saltwater Wetlands

Collectively, marine and estuarine intertidal wetlands declined by an estimated 84,100 acres (34,050 ha). The loss rate of intertidal emergent wetland increased to three times the previous loss rate between 1998 and 2004. The majority of these losses (83 percent) were to deepwater bay bottoms or open ocean. There were area gains in marine intertidal wetlands (beaches/shores) and estuarine non-vegetated wetlands including near shore shoals and sand bars. Over the period of this study non-vegetated intertidal wetlands increased in area by an estimated 2.2 percent.

Freshwater Wetlands

Freshwater vegetated wetlands continued to decline albeit at a reduced rate. The annual rate of loss for freshwater vegetated wetlands had been reduced by roughly 50 percent since 2004. The overall estimated net gain in all freshwater wetland area (vegetated and non-vegetated types) between 2004 and 2009 was 21,900 acres (8,870 ha). This estimate had declined substantially from a net increase in freshwater wetland of 220,200 acres (89,140 ha) reported for the period between 1998 and 2004.

Forested Wetlands

Forested wetlands sustained their largest losses since the 1974 to 1985 time period. An estimated 392,600 acres (158,950 ha) of forested wetland area was lost to upland land use types or deepwater between 2004 and 2009. Silviculture accounted for the greatest percentage of the losses to upland as an estimated 149,500 acres (60,500 ha) of forested wetland were lost. Urban and rural development accounted for an estimated 102,400 acres (41,460 ha) of the forested wetlands losses to upland.

Freshwater Ponds

Gains in freshwater ponds offset losses of vegetated wetland area² although the 3.2 percent increase in pond area was four times less than reported in prior studies. Farm ponds and ponds in urban (developed) areas increased, whereas ponds described as having natural characteristics and aquaculture ponds declined during the same time period.

Wetland Condition

Wetlands data in this report do not draw conclusions regarding the quality or condition of the nation's wetlands. Rather, it provides data regarding trends in wetland extent and type, and it provides information to facilitate ongoing collaborative efforts to assess wetland condition. Further examination of wetland condition on a national level has been initiated by the Environmental Protection Agency in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other Federal, State and Tribal partners.

¹ This estimate has been revised to reflect 2010 wetland status as well as the addition of wetland area in the coastal zone of the Pacific coast for WA, OR and CA that had not been sampled previously.

² This report did not draw any conclusions regarding trends in quality or condition of the any wetland type.