

# Wetland Buffers

## Designing and Maintaining a Vegetated Wetland Buffer

Habitats for Healthy Waters—Fact Sheet #3

### Wetland Buffers—What are they and why are they important?

Wetlands provide many functions including flood moderation, groundwater recharge, water quality improvement, wildlife habitat, research and aesthetic values. An effective way to protect and enhance existing wetlands is to ensure there is an adequate vegetated buffer surrounding the wetland. Wetland buffers are areas of adjacent, undisturbed vegetation that reduce adverse effects to wetland function and value from adjacent development and activities. Adequate buffers are essential for “healthy” wetlands.

#### Buffer Functions:

- Reduce rapid water level fluctuations in wetlands.
- Maintain and improve water quality by trapping and absorbing sediments, nutrients and pollutants before they reach the wetland.
- Reduce field erosion into wetlands and stabilize riparian areas.
- Decrease wetland disturbance from activities in adjacent areas.
- Provide food, cover, travel corridors and breeding areas for wildlife.
- Properly designed buffers can minimize goose damage to adjacent crops in the spring by providing a physical barrier to young goose broods.



Source: Andy Graham (OSCIA)

*This livestock exclusion fence protects the vegetated buffer so that it can filter out nutrients coming from the adjacent pasture. Water for the livestock is pumped into a trough through a solar-powered system. Livestock can show better weight gain if provided with a clean water source compared to drinking directly from a wetland.*

### What makes a good buffer?

The most effective for both wildlife and water quality protection is a diverse, multilayered, undisturbed vegetation community. Trees and shrubs increase the effectiveness of the buffer and enhance attractiveness to wildlife. The buffer needs to be wide enough to slow and reduce surface runoff and provide wildlife habitat.

#### An Example of an Effective Buffer with High Wildlife Value



