



Wetlands Are Alive and Well In United States

Since "no net loss" of wetlands became a major environmental goal for America in 1989, the home building industry has worked to achieve this goal through various means.

As a result, America is gaining thousands of acres of wetlands each year and "no net loss" is being, and will continue, to be achieved.

There are approximately 270 million acres of wetlands in the U.S. The top 10 wetlands states are Alaska, Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, Texas, North Carolina, Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia and Maine.

Wetlands in all states are protected under the Clean Water Act. Anyone doing any work that will impact a wetland, such as a home builder, land developer, farmer, miner, rancher, utility or state highway authority, is required under the Clean Water Act to follow the wetlands protection mantra of "avoid, minimize, mitigate." That is, first avoid the wetlands; if avoidance is not possible, minimize the impact. Once the impact cannot be minimized, mitigating, or offsetting, any impact allowed is necessary.

Mitigation involves the creation or restoration of wetlands either on-site or offsite. Most citizens probably do not know that many of the beautiful wetlands they admire have been restored from low-level wetlands into high-quality wetlands, or have been created from dry land or even farmland. Those wetlands now support a variety of wetland plant and animal life.

When mitigation comes into play, many landowners are turning to "wetlands mitigation banks" to mitigate their wetlands impacts. In 1995, for example, home building activities allowed through the use of the wetlands permit Nationwide Permit 26 caused 1.15 acres of wetlands to be restored or protected for every acre affected. In 1997, these wetlands gains were even higher; 3.69 acres of wetlands were created for every single acre of wetlands affected by development.

Home builders and land developers are not the only groups restoring, protecting and adding wetlands to preserve America's environmental legacy. The Wetlands Reserve Program, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners for Wildlife, and the Clean Water Act together restored more than 180,000 acres of wetlands in just a single year.

And we can do even more. Wetlands mitigation banks can be increased through federal legislation that would encourage the creation of more of these private-sector initiatives. The nation's home builders support efforts to increase wetlands mitigation banks to further the protection of this treasured natural resource.