

Wetland Mapping Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Wetland Mapping Being Updated?

The *Conservation Authorities Act* requires conservation authorities to regulate development within natural hazard areas like floodplains and unstable slopes, as well as wetlands, watercourses, and shorelines. On April 1, 2024, a new regulation came into effect under Section 28 of the *Act* (*Ontario Regulation 41/24: Prohibited Activities, Exemptions and Permits*). This regulation:

- Standardized regulated hazards across all conservation authorities, including wetlands
- Reduced the regulated area around wetlands from 120 metres to 30 metres
- Exempted certain low-risk activities from requiring a conservation authority permit

Conservation authorities are now updating their policies, procedures and mapping to comply with this new regulation, including the RVCA, South Nation Conservation and Raisin Region Conservation Authority who need to add additional wetlands to their mapping as they were only regulating provincially significant wetlands and wetlands identified in municipal official plans and zoning bylaws.

What Land is Considered Wetland?

Ontario Regulation 41/24 defines what land is to be mapped and regulated as wetland:

“wetland” means land that,

- (a) is seasonally or permanently covered by shallow water or has a water table close to or at its surface,*
- (b) directly contributes to the hydrological function of a watershed through connection with a surface watercourse,*
- (c) has hydric soils, the formation of which have been caused by the presence of abundant water, and*
- (d) has vegetation dominated by hydrophytic plants or water tolerant plants, the dominance of which have been favoured by the presence of abundant water. (“terre marécageuse”)*

The definition of “wetland” does not include periodically soaked or wet land used for agricultural purposes which no longer exhibits a wetland characteristic referred to in clause (c) or (d) of that definition.

Land that does not meet this definition will not be designated as wetland.

Are Conservation Authorities Designating Wetlands as “Provincially Significant”?

No. Conservation authorities are only identifying lands that meet the definition above. Conservation authority mapping simply delineates a boundary around wetlands that meet this

definition (area is shown in light green on RVCA's mapping) and then they delineate the required 30 metre buffer around it (area is shown in pink on RVCA's mapping).

RVCA's mapping also shows wetlands that were already regulated (area is shown in dark green) and the buffer area between 30 metres and 120 metres that is no longer regulated (area is shown in red).

What Happens if the Mapping is Wrong?

If RVCA mapping captures land that is not wetland it will be removed. Property owners are encouraged to review wetland mapping on their property and to contact the RVCA if they feel that any areas are incorrect. RVCA staff are available to complete complimentary site visits to confirm wetland boundaries and make corrections to mapping if needed. Once staff confirm that a wetland boundary needs to be corrected, online mapping is usually updated within a few days.

Staff also verify wetland boundaries when reviewing development applications and will remove land from the mapping that does not meet the wetland definition.

Wetland mapping is always being refined as site specific information becomes available and corrections can be made to mapping at any time and is not limited to the consultation period.

How Were Wetland Boundaries Mapped?

RVCA follows the Ecological Land Classification System to delineate wetland boundaries. It is a detailed desktop exercise that uses historical air photos as well as 2019 high resolution ortho-imagery and 2022 high-resolution LiDAR imagery.

RVCA does not enter onto private property without landowner permission, so wetland boundaries can only be ground truthed at the request of the property owner. If requested, staff will complete a complimentary site visit as noted above.

Is Any Development or Land Use Allowed in Wetlands?

Yes. Although wetlands are usually associated with unstable, organic soils that are not suitable for farming or development, where possible, some activities are allowed within the wetland or 30 metre buffer subject to permitting requirements. These include the following:

- Existing agricultural activities are allowed to continue, but new activities are only allowed within the 30 metre buffer (not in the wetland) so long as they do not negatively affect the function and characteristics of the wetland.
- Existing residential dwellings and septic systems can be maintained or replaced, new minor additions can be constructed (to a maximum of 50 m²), one accessory structure can be constructed (no greater than 50 m²) and small private docks are allowed.
- One dwelling unit may be allowed on existing vacant lots of record in newly regulated wetlands to respect existing development rights, however new development would remain prohibited in wetlands that are already regulated.

Please visit RVCA's website for a complete list of RVCA's updated [Development Policies](#).

What Happens if Wetlands are Lost?

Wetlands act like sponges on the landscape, absorbing and holding water when there is an abundance of it (like snow melts and heavy storm events). This reduces the amount of water entering creeks and streams, which reduces flooding. We know from modeling that wetlands in the Rideau watershed reduce flooding by 10% which means local flood peaks would increase if wetlands were lost. If wetlands are drained or filled, flooding often increases on the lands around them, which can damage a property owner's own lands and buildings, or flood nearby roads or properties.

Wetlands also release water slowly during dry months which can help alleviate droughts and replenish groundwater aquifers which supply drinking water to private wells. Wetlands also slow the movement of water and filter out contaminants and pollution which reduces soil erosion and improves water quality in lakes, rivers and groundwater. Of course, wetlands also provide habitat for a wide range of plants and animals, sequester carbon which helps mitigate climate change, and provide tourism and recreational opportunities.

Where Can I find RVCA's Wetland Mapping?

Please visit RVCA's website for more information including online wetland mapping:

- [Information about updated policies and wetland mapping](#)
- [Link to online wetland mapping](#)

Who Do I Contact If I Have Questions or Disagree with the Mapping?

We encourage anyone who has questions or concerns to contact RVCA staff:

- Call 613-692-3571 or 1-800-267-3504
- Email consultation@rvca.ca
- Submit an [Appointment Request Form](#)

People can also attend one of our public open houses from 3 pm to 8 pm:

- June 20 – Perth Civitan Hall, 6787 County Road 43, Perth
- June 25 – R.J. Kennedy Arena (Hall), 1115 Dunning Road, Cumberland
- June 26 – RVCA's Administrative Office, 3889 Rideau Valley Drive, Manotick