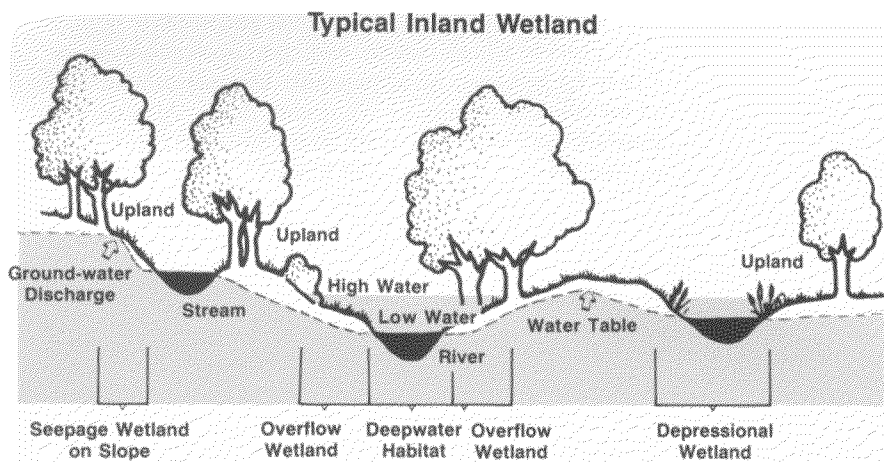


account for about 90% of all US. wetlands. They are inland, freshwater areas of marshes, bogs, and swamps, and some brackish and salt marshes in arid and semi-arid areas.

Wetland plants are particularly efficient converters of solar energy. Their major food value is achieved when they die and fragment to detritus. Numerous fish and wildlife species feed in marshes and swamps or on organisms that were produced in such areas. Some animals spend their entire lives in floodplain wetlands, while others use the wetlands primarily for reproduction,



nursery grounds, or for drinking water. About 50% of the endangered species in the United States require wetland habitat at some point in their life cycles; wetlands are crucial to the survival of the American crocodile, the manatee, the whooping crane, and the Mississippi sandhill crane. Both coastal and inland wetlands also provide valuable habitat for such furbearers as muskrat, beaver, otter, mink, and raccoon, as well as numerous reptiles and amphibians. Large mammals, such as black bears, white-tailed deer, and caribou, also find refuge and food in wetland areas.

Riparian Systems

Riparian floodplains are distinct associations of soils, flora, and fauna that occur in narrow strips along rivers, streams, or other bodies of water and depend for survival upon high water tables and occasional flooding. They are



Healthy riparian ecosystems are essential for maintaining the biological diversity of the nation's flora. They also provide aesthetic pleasure.

Wetland vegetation, Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, North Carolina

FLOODPLAINS AS HABITAT

- Black ducks migrating in the Atlantic flyway use the northern salt marshes as their primary wintering grounds
- Intertidal mudflats along the coasts are the principal feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds, most shorebirds breed in Alaskan and other tundra wetlands
- Mississippi River floodplains are the major resting and feeding grounds for ducks and geese during their fall and spring migrations
- During droughts in the prairie pothole region, Alaska's wetlands are heavily used for nesting by North American waterfowl
- Hawaii's wetlands are especially important to endangered birds
- Arizona's native cottonwood-willow associations support higher densities and a greater diversity of breeding bird species than any other desert habitat.
- The prairie pothole region of the Dakotas is the main breeding area for waterfowl in the United States.
- The San Pedro River's riparian ecosystem in southeastern Arizona provides nesting, migratory, or wintering habitat for at least 20 raptor species and about 210 species of other birds. A study recorded 78 species of mammals in the grasslands corridor between the riparian woodlands and adjacent mountains, the second-highest mammalian diversity in the world.



Canada goose, salt marsh, New England



Great blue heron, Merrimack River, New Hampshire