

Wetlands



Wetlands provide some of the most valuable ecosystems in Southland. The benefits of wetlands include:

- they act as a filter – trapping sediment and improving water quality
- they are part of the water cycle – which means they reduce the impact of floods
- they act as a buffer zone – protecting streams and waterways on-farm from erosion and nutrients
- they provide recreational opportunities – wetlands are great places to fish, duck shoot, and have picnics
- they provide habitats – many native species of birds, fish and plants live in wetlands.

Southland has lost 90% of its original wetland area. The proposed Southland Water and Land Plan (pSWLP) has provisions to protect the remaining wetlands.

Use of land within a wetland is only a permitted activity if the purpose is to maintain or enhance the wetland, or maintain existing authorised structures within the wetland, providing certain criteria are met.

A consent is required if you cannot meet the permitted activity conditions, or you want to use the land within a wetland for a different purpose. Commercial peat harvesting within a wetland also requires a consent.

The majority of rules in the pSWLP have restrictions on activities that can be undertaken around natural wetlands, and set backs are often required. Please see the relevant rules in the plan for specific requirements.

The National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (2020) also introduced regulations that apply to wetlands.

The plan refers to three types of wetlands:

Wetland – means permanently or intermittently wet areas, shallow water, land-water margins that support an ecosystem of plants and animals that are adapted to wet conditions and includes wetlands constructed by artificial means.

Natural wetland – has the same meaning as a ‘wetland’, but specifically excludes wet pastures, damp gully heads, ponding of rainwater, pastures with rushes, artificial storage facilities, reservoirs, and erosion control structures.

Regionally Significant Wetlands – are special wetlands listed in Appendix A of the plan, and mapped in Part B.

Please read the plan for full definitions.

Common questions and answers

We've listed the answers to some commonly asked questions here. If you're still not sure about what you need to do or have another question you want help with, give our consents team a call on 0800 76 88 45.

Q: What is a wetland?

A: A wetland includes wet areas, shallow water and land-water margins that support an ecosystem of plant and animals that are adapted to wet conditions.

Q: What is a natural wetland?

A: Natural wetlands are a subset of 'wetlands' and includes those that have been artificially constructed to offset impacts on, or restore, an existing or former wetland. A wetland with more than 50% coverage of exotic pasture species that has temporary pools after rain is not considered a natural wetland.

Q: Do I need a consent to create a wetland?

A: In general no, however, we recommend you contact Environment Southland's land sustainability team so they can provide advice about the best wetland options for your particular piece of land.

Q: Does Environment Southland provide funding for the creation or protection of wetlands?

A: Yes, in some circumstances. Please contact the land sustainability team for more details.

Q: Why would I want to have a wetland on my farm?

A: Wetlands are great sediment traps, they can reduce nutrient losses from farms, increase biodiversity, and provide vital habitats for many native species. They are essential for the healthy functioning of our environment.

Q: How do I know if my wetland is Regionally Significant?

A: Appendix A of the proposed Southland Water and Land Plan lists Regionally Significant Wetlands, and maps showing the location of the wetlands are included in Part B of the plan.

Q: Can I turn a wetland on my farm into a duck pond?

A: If the duck pond will maintain or enhance the wetland, yes. You may wish to talk to the land sustainability team for advice about whether your duck pond plans would maintain or improve the wetland. You will need a consent to alter the wetland for any purpose that is not to maintain or improve the wetland.

Q: I have fenced off a wetland, but the neighbouring paddock gets wet in winter, can I put a drain around the wetland?

A: No. You will need to apply for consent, as the ring drainage may affect the water levels in the wetland.

Q: Can I let sheep graze in my constructed wetland to control the weeds?

A: No. Vegetation clearance by stock grazing is prohibited under national regulations. You cannot apply for a consent for this activity.

Q: How do I know where the edge of a wetland is to ensure I meet the set backs in the rules?

A: Generally where the land becomes dry and vegetation suited to wet conditions becomes less visible. However, every wetland is different due to differences in soils, topography, climate, hydrology, water chemistry, vegetation, and things like human disturbance. We recommend you contact the land sustainability team for advice on the boundaries of your wetland.

Q: Why does the rule restrict what I can do on a boggy area of my farm that grows cutty grass and rushes?

A: It is important to protect wetlands because of the important services they provide for the environment, such as filtering nutrients, and reducing the impact of flood events.

Q: Can I plant crack willow around the edges of my wetland?

A: No. Crack willow is a pest plant under the Biosecurity Act.

Q: Are 'peat bogs' wetlands?

A: Yes.

The information provided is based on Rule 74 in the appeals version of the proposed *Southland Water and Land Plan*, March 2021

If you're thinking about making a change to your farming activity, it's important to remember what the proposed Southland Water and Land Plan is striving towards. Don't forget to address the objectives and policies alongside the relevant rules when you are making an application for resource consent. The objectives and policies are the key drivers of the rules and need to be considered carefully.