

News Release

WORLD WETLANDS DAY FEBRUARY 2

RIDEAU VALLEY, February 2, 2009 — The theme for this year's World Wetlands Day is Upstream-Downstream: Wetlands connect us all.

And that is as true in Russia, Argentina or Kenya as it is right here in Eastern Ontario. What happens in wetlands upstream has effects on natural and human communities further downstream. The reason is water storage. Water storage is the single most important characteristic of wetlands.

What is a wetland? Most scientists talk about them as shallow depressions on the landscape where runoff from rainfall or snowmelt is trapped, either in pore spaces within the thick marshy bottom or in open water within the wetland.

Storage of water in wetlands means less water flowing downstream following heavy rain or snowmelt. Downstream flooding is therefore not as high because of the water stored in the watershed's wetlands.

Water stored in wetlands is not held there forever. It slowly seeps into the ground and replenishes aquifers that eventually emerge at the surface feeding into a stream or lake. In the meantime, those aquifers are the source of drinking water for about 20% of Ontario families.

Wetlands also have a role in water purification, in protecting biodiversity, and in creating unique habitat for plants and animals which provide unique recreational opportunities for people.

But how can we actually measure the benefits of wetlands to people? Municipalities and residents spend thousands of dollars on flood-proofing parts of their communities, thousands more supplying bottled water during droughts, more thousands to attract tourists and residents to enjoy the natural amenities of their areas. Part of the solution might be to simply protect and maintain wetlands that do a lot of those jobs for free forever.

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority is in the final stages of a study to measure the role of wetlands in reducing floods in the Rideau watershed. About 15% of the area of the Rideau Valley is classified as wetland. The study question was: would the loss of more wetlands have an effect on floods and droughts in the watershed? This is an important question for watershed residents and municipalities. Watch for study results in the months ahead.

Indeed, wetlands do connect us all. Even right here at home in the Rideau Valley.

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