



# Wetland Classification Key

A Made-in-Manitoba  
Climate and  
Green Plan



## What you should know when applying for authorization under The Water Rights Act

### What is a wetland?

The Water Rights Act defines a wetland as “a) a marsh, bog, fen, swamp, or ponded shallow water, and b) low areas of wet or water-logged soils that are periodically inundated by standing water and that are able to support aquatic vegetation and biological activities adapted to the wet environment in normal conditions”. The Steward and Kantrud (1971) marsh classification system is the standard in administration of The Water Rights Act with respect to water control works. (<https://pubs.usgs.gov/rp/092/report.pdf>).

### Authorization required for wetland drainage

Under The Water Rights Act and the Water Rights Regulation, Class 3 (seasonal) wetlands are eligible for drainage through authorization by licence. Any proposed loss of wetland benefits must be offset by compensation for lost acres of wetlands as required by The Water Rights Act and the Water Rights Regulation.

Under normal circumstances, a water rights licence **will not** be issued for the drainage of Class 4 (semi-permanent), and 5 (permanent) wetlands. Licences may be issued for projects that impact Class 4 and 5 wetlands under exceptional circumstances. For example, licences impacting Class 4 and 5 wetlands may be issued where a project provides significant benefit to society (such as a highway, transmission line, flood infrastructure, etc.) and the impacts to the wetlands are unavoidable. In these

situations compensation for the loss of wetland benefits is required to meet the no net loss of wetland benefits mandate in the Water Rights Act.

Class 1 and 2 wetlands are eligible for drainage without mitigation/compensation. Authorization of the proposed water control works can follow the registration process (assuming all other requirements are met).

**Excess moisture:** A water rights licence may be issued for works constructed to regulate maximum water levels of Class 3, 4 or 5 wetlands for the purposes of flood mitigation during extreme wet conditions. Works authorized under this policy cannot alter a Class 3, 4, or 5 wetland. This means works cannot change the natural boundary of the wetland by reducing its area or result in the reduction of the class of the wetland as it exists under normal conditions.

### Where Can I Get More Information About Wetland Classification?

- ✓ Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation
- ✓ Ducks Unlimited Canada
- ✓ Delta Waterfowl
- ✓ Native Plant Solutions
- ✓ Your local conservation district ([www.manitobawatersheds.ca](http://www.manitobawatersheds.ca))



# Wetland Classification

## Eligible wetlands for registration process

### Class 1 and 2 Wetlands

- First wetlands to fill with standing water after snowmelt or storm events.
- Shallow water lasting only a few weeks after spring snowmelt and for several days after heavy rainstorms.
- Usually cultivated in the spring and can be seeded in dry and normal years. Class 2 wetlands can be flooded in wet years through spring seeding and sometimes seeded later than the rest of the land.
- Class 1 wetland vegetation in cultivated fields are more likely to have annual weedy species due to high levels of disturbance. Class 1 wetlands in areas of permanent cover (native and tame pastures, haylands) are more likely to have perennial species like goldenrod, aster and Kentucky bluegrass.
- **PROCEED TO REGISTRATION PROCESS**

### Class 1 and 2 wetlands



Class 1 wetland in early spring



Class 2 wetland in spring

## Eligible wetlands for licensing process

### Class 3: Seasonal Wetlands

- In average years, water depths may be around 18 inches or less depending on moisture levels and precipitation.
- Usually dry by mid summer (June/July) in normal to dry years.
- These wetlands are often hayed but can be cultivated in late spring or early summer in average to drier years.
- Dominated by shallow marsh vegetation including sedges, reed grass and whitetop in the deepest flooded areas.
- **PROCEED TO LICENSING PROCESS**

**Class 3 wetlands may be drained with a Water Rights Licence. Applicants must consider all options to avoid and minimize impacts prior to applying for a Water Rights Licence.**



Class 3 wetland in spring



# Wetland Classification

## Ineligible wetlands for registration and licensing process

### Class 4: Semi-Permanent Wetlands

- Water depths generally around 24" to 36" in the middle deep marsh zone depending on the moisture levels, precipitation, and runoff that year.
- Water persists to late summer or early fall in most years.
- Dominated by deep marsh zone.
- Tall growth form plants. Major plant species are cattail and bulrushes.
- Vegetation distribution may be solid, patchy or open water.

**Class 4 wetlands are protected. Please contact your local water resource officer for further information.**



Class 4 wetland in summer

### Class 5: Permanent

- Dominated by permanent open water zone, more than 75% of total basin surface area; deep marsh and shallow marsh zones present depending on surrounding land management.
- Depths of water can be greater than 3 feet in open water zone.
- May go dry during extreme droughts, otherwise has water all year.
- Bulrush and cattail most often found in these ponds.

**Class 5 wetlands are protected. Please contact your local water resource officer for further information.**



Class 5 wetland in fall



# Wetland Classification Key

Is the wetland found within Agro-Manitoba? If yes, proceed to the next question. If the wetland is found outside of Agro-Manitoba, please contact Manitoba Conservation and Climate, your local water resource officer or [drainage@gov.mb.ca](mailto:drainage@gov.mb.ca).

Is the wetland found adjacent to any large water bodies? If yes, this is considered a coastal wetland. Please contact your local water resource officer or [drainage@gov.mb.ca](mailto:drainage@gov.mb.ca).

