

Slide 1

EPA Logo

Title: Wetlands, Oceans & Watersheds

Slide 2

- Clean water is essential for all life on earth
- We all depend on clean water

Slide 3

The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds works to protect our marine and fresh water ecosystems

Slide 4

A watershed is an area of land that drains to a common body of water. Every watershed drains to a larger watershed that eventually flows to the ocean. We all live in a watershed even if we live in the desert or far away from the coast

Slide 5

- Healthy Communities depend on healthy watersheds

Slide 6

Resources

Slide 7

U.S. water resources: a large and diverse portfolio

- 88,000 square miles of estuaries and bays
- 42 million acres of lakes, ponds and reservoirs
- 3.5 million miles of rivers and streams
- 107 million acres of wetlands
- 54,000 square miles of ocean and near ocean coastal shores

Slide 8

Rivers and streams

- Like a network of blood vessels that supply oxygen and nutrients to the body rivers and streams carry essential water to all parts of the nation

Slide 9

"I started out thinking of America as a highways and state lines. As I got to know it better, I began to think of it as rivers. America is a great story, and there is a river on every page of it."

Charles Kuralt

American Journalist

Slide 10

Lakes and reservoirs

- Provide water for drinking
- Supply water for industry and irrigation

- Support recreation and tourism, including billion-dollar fisheries
- Serve as habitat for thousands of species of fish, birds, and animals

Slide 11

- Wetlands are the vital link between land and water
- Wetlands filter pollutants and protect drinking water

Slide 12

Wetlands:

- Offer recreation
- Buffer against floods and storm surges

Slides 13

Wetlands provide critical habitat

Slide 14

Estuaries are where rivers meet the sea. Also known as bays, harbors, sounds, or lagoons, these coastal areas are where fresh and salt water mix.

Slide 15

Estuaries are among the most biologically productive, economically valuable, and densely populated places on earth.

Slide 16

Estuaries foster an incredible abundance of wildlife. 80-90% of commercially and recreationally important fish depend on estuaries at some point in their life cycle.

Slide 17

- Oceans and coasts sustain the world
- Moderate our climate
- Provide food
- Support transportation and commerce
- Are home to countless species
- Serve as tourist destinations for nearly 200 million people annually.

Slide 18

While America's water resources are abundant, they are also in danger.

Slide 19

Impairments

Slide 20

About 40% of our assessed waters do not meet state uses such as swimming and fishing

Slide 21

Leading causes of water pollution today:

- Hydrological changes
- Nutrients
- Sediments
- Habitat loss
- Pathogens
- Mercury

Slide 22

Excess nutrients from farms and cities contribute to algae blooms that deplete oxygen levels- often causing widespread “dead zones” that suffocate fish and other aquatic life

Slide 23

Sediment from construction and erosion impairs drinking water and harms aquatic organisms

Slide 24

Sediment loads from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya River Basins empty into the Gulf of Mexico

Slide 25

Draining and filling of wetlands results in habitat loss and degradation

Slide 26

Pathogens can enter waterways from sewage overflows, stormwater runoff, farms, and other sources

Slide 27

Mercury from coal-fired power plants bioaccumulates in fish tissue- threatening human health

Slide 28

In partnership with states, tribes and others, the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds works “to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation’s waters.”

1972 Clean Water Act

Slide 29

Solutions

Slide 30

- EPA protects and restores watersheds
- Develops cleanup plans to restore impaired waters
- Controls polluted runoff
- Protects healthy waters

Slide 31

- EPA protects and restores wetlands
- Co-leads the aquatic resources permit program with the Army Corps of Engineers

- Fosters strategic partnerships with states, tribes and local governments to improve the quantity and quality of our nation's wetland resources

Slide 32

- EPA protects water quality and habitat in 28 estuaries
- Provides technical assistance and funding
- Partners with federal, state and local stakeholders to implement actions to protect and restore coastal ecosystems

Slide 33

- EPA protects and restores oceans and coasts
- Regulates and monitors ocean dumping
- Manages dredged materials reduces marine debris and manages waste from vessels

Slide 34

- EPA educates the public about the value of watersheds
- Partners with students, conservation corps, citizen groups, corporations, Boys and Girl Scouts, landowners and others

Slide 35

- EPA reports on the health of the nation's waters
- With state and tribal partners, conducts National Aquatic Resources Surveys of rivers and stream, lakes wetlands, and coastal waters
- Issues reports to Congress and the public

Slide 36

EPA's ocean-going ship, the OSV BOLD, reports on environmental conditions offshore.

Slide 37

No matter where we live, we all live in a watershed... and our actions have a direct impact on the health of local water resources.

Slide 38

We can help slow and filter runoff using green techniques, such as:

- Rain gardens
- Green roofs
- Permeable paving

Slide 39

We can help keep soil, fertilizers, pesticides, and animal wastes from running off fields and yards.

Slide 40

- Clean water is everyone's business
- Get to know your watershed

- Volunteer to monitor water quality
- Participate in the International Coastal Cleanup held every September

Slide 41

By preserving the ecological value of healthy waters and the landscapes and habitats that support them, we improve our quality of life

Slide 42

The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds works to protect our marine and fresh water ecosystems.

To learn more, visit www.epa.gov/owow

Slide 43

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