

WETLANDS



Land is considered wetlands if it has soils formed under wet conditions and water at or near the surface often enough to support plants adapted to wet conditions.

Wetlands such as swamps and marshes are obvious. But some wetlands are not easily recognized because they are dry during part of the year or "just don't look very wet." Some common wetland names are bottomland forests, pocosins, bogs, fens, hammocks, wet prairies, sloughs, tundras, estuaries, floodplains, savannahs and potholes.

In the past, wetlands have been viewed as either an unnavigable waterway or unplowable fields. They were rarely seen as having enough value to exist on their own merits without alterations. One-half of Florida was made up of wetlands. Currently only one-third of Florida remains.

Nature designed wetlands to:

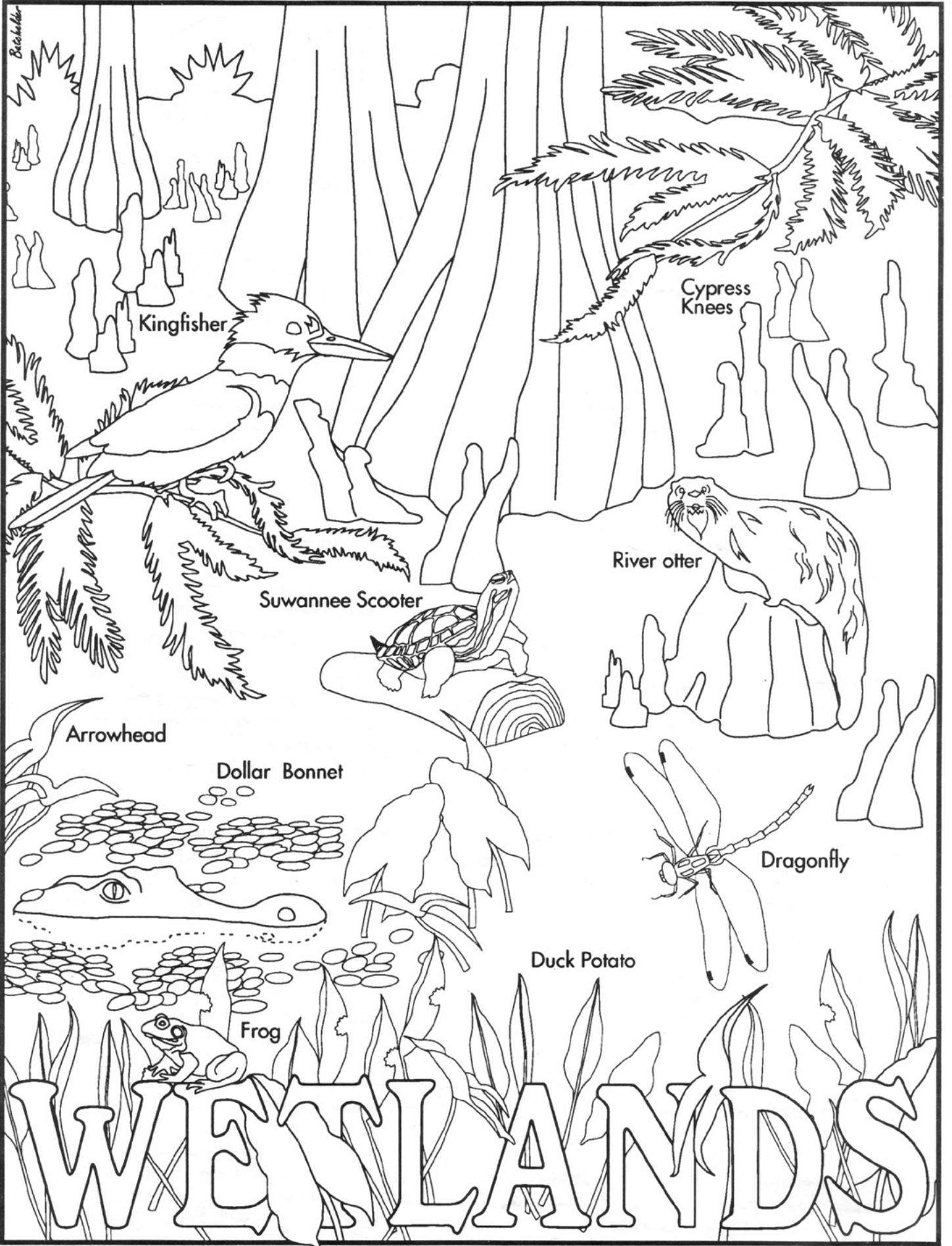
1. clean and filter water,
2. provide habitat for plants and animals, especially many endangered species,
3. assist with flood prevention and control,
4. recharge our aquifer system, (Note: Not all wetlands recharge the aquifer.)
5. assist the water cycle. They provide a wide variety of vegetation which assists in the transpiration process and provide large areas of water for the evaporation process.

Wetlands act as energy and nutrient traps. Certain wetland plants are extremely efficient at capturing the sun's energy and storing it as a carbohydrate. This stored energy is the foundation of the food chain. Wetlands provide food, water, shelter and space for many different species of plants and animals. Birds, both migratory and year round residents; endangered species (black bear, panther, orchids, etc.); plants both big and small; and fish use wetlands for homes, grocery stores, and nurseries.

Wetlands are very efficient at filtering and cleaning water that enters the system. They remove unwanted pollutants and nutrients from the water and have been called "nature's kidneys." Wetlands moderate the land's ability to absorb and disperse the water falling on or flowing through it. They act as sponges to absorb excess water and hold it for absorption into the aquifer system.

Water essentially drowns terrestrial plants by depriving their roots of vital oxygen needed to breathe. Wetland and aquatic plants, called hydrophytes, have developed special adaptations to deal with this problem. One adaptation is a distinctive oxygen-carrying, spongy tissue, that allows their roots to be anchored in the oxygen poor, submerged or water logged soils of wetlands. In a sense, wetland plants "breathe through straws" located in their stems. Many wetland plants prefer different depths of water. Some like it wetter while some prefer drier conditions. Most can tolerate temporary differences in water levels.

Historically, wetlands expand their areas during very rainy years. Their expansion is curbed by the encroachment of upland plants during dry years. Nature controls the changeover to upland species by fire. Fire can encourage the growth of natural and native habitats. Wetlands are not static eco-systems. Their composition or make-up varies with the amount of available water.



Beckler

Kingfisher

Cypress Knees

Suwannee Scooter

River otter

Arrowhead

Dollar Bonnet

Dragonfly

Duck Potato

Frog

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