



## WETLANDS GUIDANCE SHEET

Developments within unincorporated La Plata County are required to identify any wetlands within them. This identification must be done by a trained wetlands delineator in accordance with current Army Corps of Engineers manuals, procedures, and standards. Many environmental consulting companies have trained wetland delineators available for hire.

### **What are wetlands?**

Wetlands are areas inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

Wetlands are delineated on the basis of hydrology, soil type (hydric soils), and vegetation type (hydrophytes). All three of these need to be present to classify an area as wetlands.

### **Why are wetlands protected?**

Wetlands are a significant natural resource serving important functions relating to wildlife habitat, floodwater storage, groundwater recharge, and surface water purification. Additionally, wetland areas provide economic stimulation to local communities by supporting viable fish populations, providing recreational opportunities, and offering aesthetic tranquility for personal health. The services provided by wetland areas are of a finite capacity and offer benefits to the natural environment that cannot be found anywhere else, warranting robust safeguard measures.

### **How are wetlands protected?**

**Federal Clean Water Act:** Wetlands in unincorporated La Plata County are protected under the Federal Clean Water Act. Section 404 of the Act gives the Army Corps of Engineers jurisdiction over the dredging and filling of wetlands that are hydrologically connected to navigable waters of the United States or that otherwise could affect interstate commerce. The Army Corps of Engineers typically does not claim jurisdiction over normal agricultural practices, wastewater treatment systems, ditches, and erosional features such as gullies or small washes. A further explanation of exemptions can be found under section 404(f) of the Act.

**La Plata County Land Use Code:** All structures in unincorporated La Plata County must have a minimum fifty foot setback from wetlands. Structures are defined as any placement or combination of materials to form a construction or use for occupancy, whether installed on, above, or below the surface of land or water.

### **Army Corps of Engineers Contact Information**

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