



# Wetland Protection



Learn more at: [www.townofbethlehem.org/940/Zoning-Update](http://www.townofbethlehem.org/940/Zoning-Update)

## ! Wetland protection to enhance natural resiliency is a priority identified in the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

**Harmony with Nature**, which seeks to ensure that the contributions of natural resources to human well-being are explicitly recognized and valued. Potential regulatory approaches identified in the plan for increased wetland protection are further defined and explored on this board.

## What is a wetland?

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil, or is present either at or near the surface of the soil all year or for varying periods of time during the year, including during the growing season.

The Town includes inland/non-tidal wetlands on floodplains along rivers and streams (riparian wetlands), in isolated depressions surrounded by dry land, and in other low-lying areas where the groundwater intercepts the soil surface or where precipitation saturates the soil (vernal pools and bogs). Inland wetlands include marshes, meadows, and swamps with various vegetation.

## Why are wetlands important?

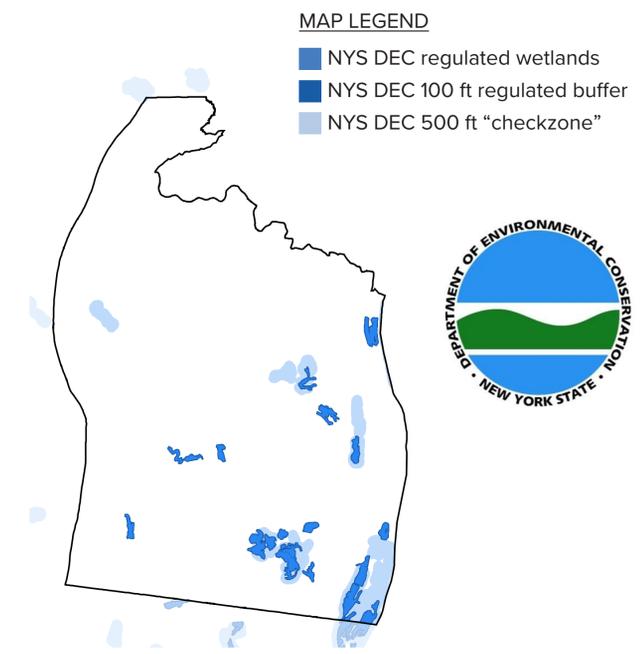
Wetlands have many beneficial functions, such as protecting and **improving water quality, floodwater storage, erosion control, and habitat enhancement.**

## ? We Want to Hear From You!

### How should wetlands in Bethlehem be regulated?

The Town has several inland wetlands, some of which are already recognized and regulated by NYS, but there are many other unprotected wetland areas that **if conserved may play an important role in mitigating flood impacts with future storm events.** To address this, there are many regulatory approaches the Town may wish to consider. **Place a dot next to the statements you support.**

## Regulations already in place to protect wetlands



In the Town of Bethlehem, **Wetlands 12.4 acres in size and larger, as well as a 100-foot buffer around these wetlands**, are regulated by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) per the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act.

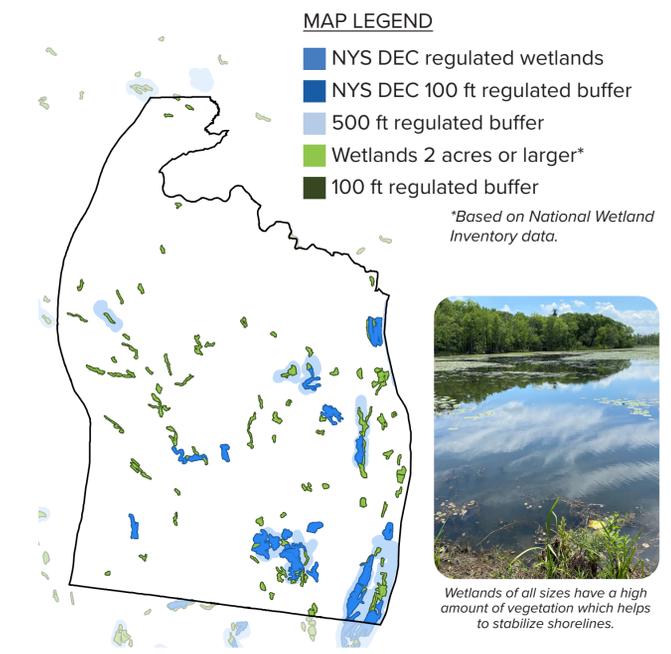
**What's required?**  
A permit is required to conduct any activity (including development) that may disturb these wetlands or their adjacent buffer areas. Proposed projects within "check zone" areas must include on-site verification of the regulatory wetland boundaries and may also require a permit. These State regulations are found in **Town Code Chapter 72 Freshwater Wetlands**. The Town does not have any local regulations on top of the State regulations.

*NOTE: New York's Freshwater Wetlands Act was recently amended to include the regulation of wetlands of "unusual importance" by 2025, and wetlands of 7.4 acres or more by 2028.*

### Keep regulations as is.

Place a dot below if you agree.

## One approach: regulate wetlands 2+ acres in size



In addition to State regulations, the Town could choose to create local regulations for wetlands *smaller* than 12.4 acres in size. One approach could be to **regulate wetlands 2 acres in size or larger, as well as a 100-foot buffer around those wetlands.**

**What's required?**  
A permit would be required from the Town Planning Board to conduct any activity that may disturb these locally regulated wetlands or the 100-foot buffers around them.  
*CASE STUDY: The Village of Trumansburg in Tompkins County established a Wetland Overlay District that creates a 100-foot buffer around wetlands 2 acres in size or larger, within which building projects require site plan review.*

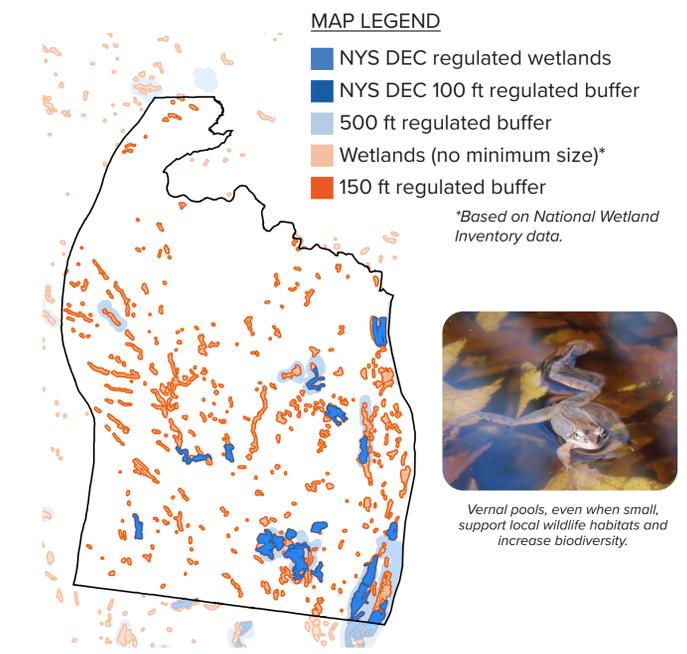
### Regulate wetlands of a minimum size.

Place a dot below if you agree.

**What should the minimum size be?**  
Write your answer below.

**Should there be a buffer around the wetlands? If so, how big?**  
Write your answer below.

## Another approach: regulate all wetlands



Another approach could be to **regulate all wetlands regardless of size, as well as a 150-foot buffer around those wetlands.**

**What's required?**  
This approach is the most expansive and would protect small wetland areas (including vernal pools) which play a critical role in providing habitat for environmentally sensitive species and in maintaining ecological diversity. A permit would be required to conduct activity that may disturb these wetlands or the 150-foot buffers around them.  
*CASE STUDY: The Town of New Castle in Westchester County established an Environmental Protection Overlay District that creates a 150-foot buffer around all wetlands in the town, within which permits are required.*

### Regulate all wetlands.

Place a dot below if you agree.

**Should there be a buffer around the wetlands? If so, how big?**  
Write your answer below.