



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Wetland Plants

Common plants, how to identify them, and what they may mean for identifying a potential Food Security Act - defined wetland.

Wetland Plant

- The definition, according to the Food Security Act, is:

A plant growing in water or a substrate that is periodically saturated with water during the growing season.

Therefore, the same species can be considered a wetland plant on a saturated site and an upland plant on an upland site.

When determining whether an area is a wetland, we consider the plants growing at that location and the “wetland indicator status” of each plant species, as well as the soil and the hydrology of the site.

Wetland Indicator Status

- Each Plant in Alaska has been assigned an indicator status
- Five indicator statuses include:
 - Obligate – 99% of the time found in wetlands
 - Facultative wetland – usually found in wetlands
 - Facultative – half the time it is found in wetlands and half the time it is found in uplands
 - Facultative upland- usually found in the uplands
 - Upland – 99% of the time found in uplands

Shrubs, Forbs, Grasses, Sedges, and Rushes

Shrubs:

Perennial; woody; grow from the tips of branches; may be large or very small

Forbs:

Annual or perennial; herbaceous; grow up from the ground every year; typically have wide leaves (not grass-like)

Sedges:

Annual or perennial; herbaceous; stems are triangular

Grasses:

Annual or perennial; herbaceous; round; hollow stem with narrow, linear leaves and nodes

Rushes:

Annual or perennial; herbaceous; round stem that is not hollow

Wetland Plants

- A wetland plant can exhibit any of the growth forms
- Generally speaking, sedges and rushes are most likely to be found in wetlands (there are exceptions)
- Willows (shrub) are commonly found in wetlands
- Species with an indicator status of “obligate” can be considered a “wetland plant” 99% of the time

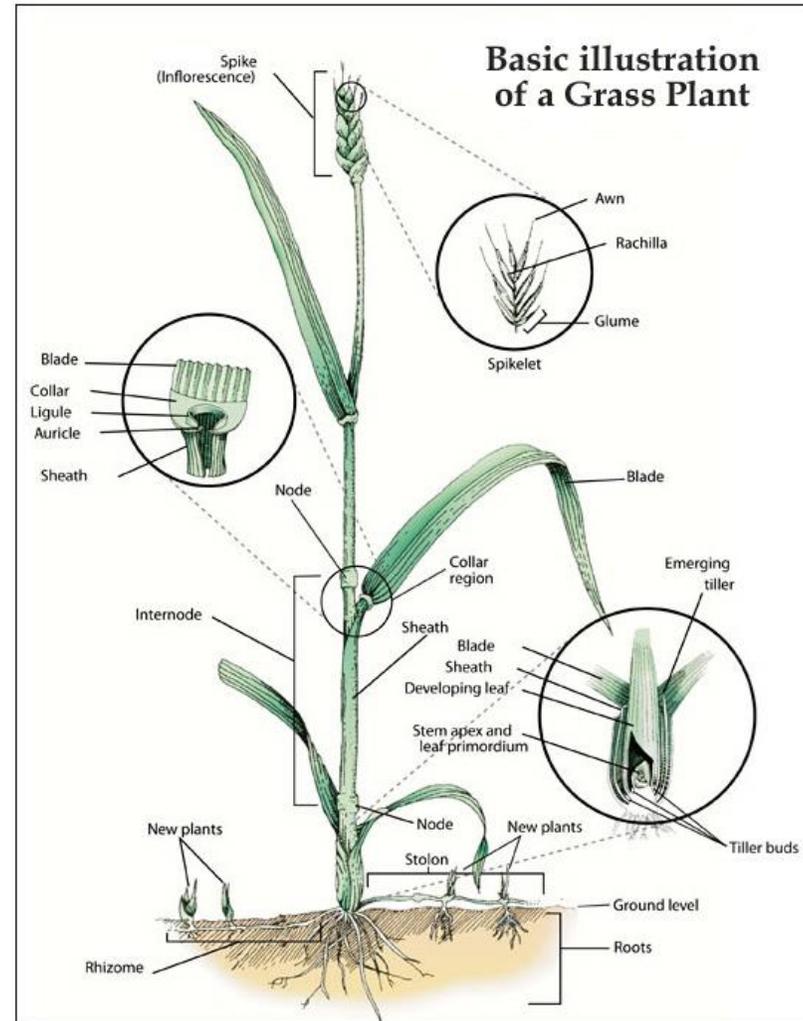
Sedges

- Triangular stem
- No nodes
- Wiry stem and leaves



Grasses

- Round stem
- Nodes on the stem
- Hollow stem
- Conspicuous flower



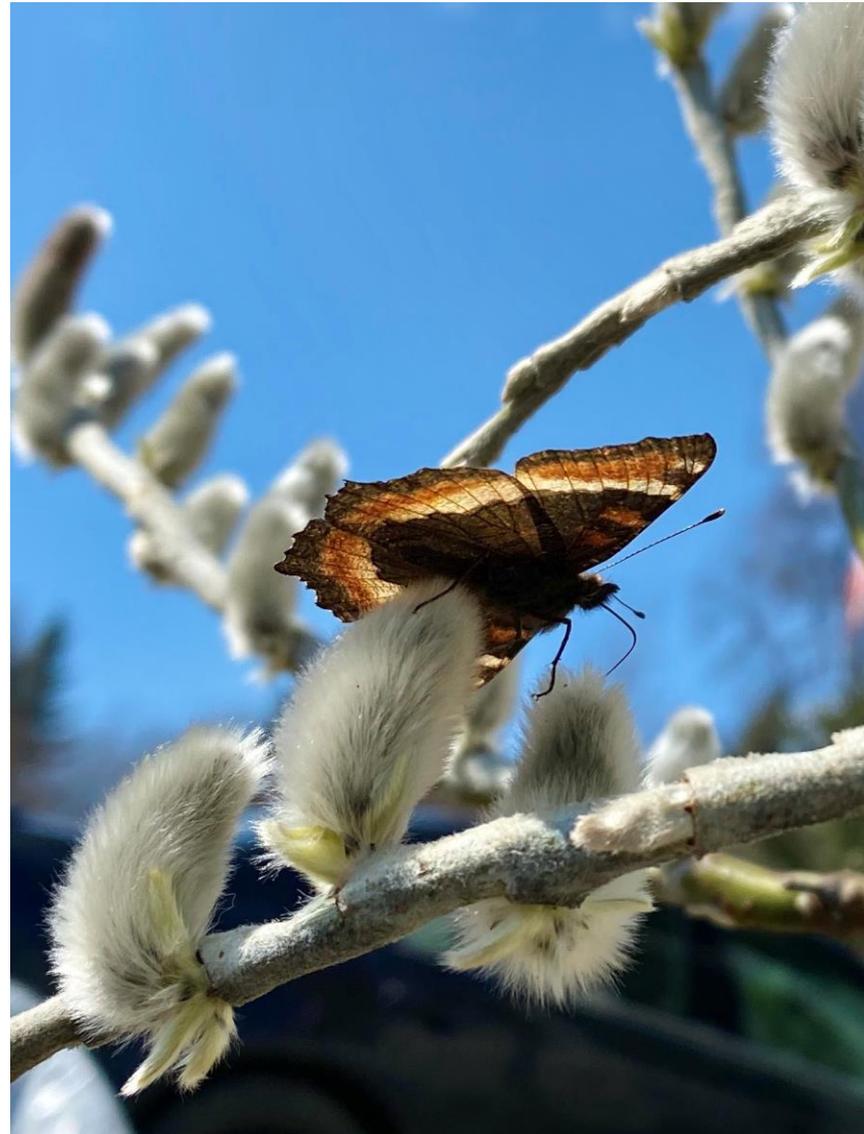
Rushes

- Round Stem
- Filled stem
- Wiry, scabrous



Willows

- Catkins or “pussy willows”
- Woody
- Shrubs



Is the site a wetland?

- The plants on a site are inventoried with the dominant plants identified. If 50% or more of the dominant plants have an indicator status of Obligate, Facultative Wetland or Facultative, the vegetation is considered to be “wetland vegetation.”
- However, the site must have all three to be considered a wetland:
 1. Wetland vegetation
 2. Hydrology indicators present
 3. Hydric soil criteria are met