



Hello friends,

This is Oscar the Great-Horned Owl reporting to you to talk about local **ecology**, specifically a **wetland** I found! As an owl, it is rare that I am awake in the daytime, because I am **nocturnal**. However, I couldn't help but go out and explore the parks in the Milwaukee area.

The other day, I flew on over to Lilly Heights Park in Brookfield, Wisconsin to learn more about the **ecology of Southeastern Wisconsin**. I learned so much! In particular, I learned about the abundance of **wetlands** and similar areas right in our own backyards. HOO knew?!

Wait a second... What's a wetland you ask?

→ A wetland is an area of land consisting of **marshes or swamps**. Wetlands are actually a distinct ecosystem that flood during some seasons, or are flooded all the time! As I like to simply say, a land that is very wet. 😊

Due to the abundance of wetlands in Wisconsin, you can see a wide variety of plants and insects in these areas! At Lilly Heights Park, I saw many **woody plants** and **grasses**. Because wetland ecosystems have a lot of *different* organisms living there, we say that they have **high biodiversity**. **Diversity** is always a good thing, in plants, wildlife and humans! It makes systems healthier.

In addition to adding diversity to our ecosystems, wetlands do a bunch of other cool things! According to the National Park Service, wetlands...

- Improve our **water quality** by acting as natural filters.
- Supply delicious, clean **water**!
- Make storms not as scary by reducing the impact of **heavy rains and floods** and absorbing storm water.
- Prevent **erosion**, by sticking their plant roots deep into the soil which stops the water from pushing it away.
- Can be AWESOME homes for a lot of cool animals! Everything from a **Tiger Salamander** (amphibian) to an **Elk** (mammal) to a **Sandhill Crane** (bird) can be found thriving in wetlands. And of course, where there's water, usually there's fish too. This is definitely the case in bigger wetlands.
 - Are even better homes for **endangered species**. When a species is endangered, it means that for any number of reasons, it is not easy for that species to survive. The National Park Service "About one-third of all plants and animals listed as *threatened or endangered species in US depend on wetlands for their survival.*"
Woah!



Hobbes, a Tiger Salamander that served as an UEC animal ambassador. If he didn't live at the UEC, he would LOVE to live in a wetland. (left) Photo taken by Kayla Grotsky at our Riverside Park branch.

A Sandhill Crane walking through the wetlands. (below) Photo taken by Larry Golopol in Anchorage, Alaska.



Once upon a time, Wisconsin had **10 million acres** of wetlands but as people started to alter the landscapes to build towns and to grow plants, wetlands were also altered as well. This resulted in a big loss of **biodiversity** and **all the other services wetlands provide for us** in Wisconsin.

We still have about **5 million acres** of wetlands left, so now we better protect them! Like other ecosystems, you can help protect wetlands by having **Earth** friendly habits. For example, reduce your waste, recycle when you can, and always pick up trash and litter outside.

Thanks so much for tuning in, and good luck on your own wetland adventures!

Sources: Some of the facts in this Puppet Adventure were taken from The National Parks Service Website posting "Why are Wetlands Important?" Link: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/wetlands/why.htm>