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## Wetland Watchers Procedure and Safety Guidelines

### Your role

By becoming a Wetland Watcher, you have committed to monitoring a wetland of your choosing once a week between the hours of 10 am and 1 pm. The species data your weekly surveys provide will help us learn where turtle species occur in the Land Between and will allow us to identify important wetlands that need protection.

### Submitting Data

You can fill out the online observations Google Sheet (sent to you when you signed up) on a device as you survey your wetland and submit the form when you have access to the internet.

Alternatively, if you do not want to bring an electronic device into the field, you can record your observations on the paper copy of the form and then fill out the online form within 48 hours.

### Selecting your wetland

Things to keep in mind when selecting your wetland are:

- Is it easily accessible?
- Is it on private property? If it is not your own property, we will need to obtain written permission from the property owner to enter for the duration of your volunteering. If you are interested in doing so, simply let us know the contact information of the property owner (email, phone number and address) so we/you can obtain a liability release from them.
- Is there a safe route to walk most if not all of the perimeter?
- Is it a reasonable size for the amount of time you want to survey for?
- Is the invasive plant species *Phragmites australis* present?

\*It is important to avoid walking around wetlands with *Phragmites australis* because this can spread this very aggressive invasive plant. For pictures and a description that can help you identify this invasive, please see the [Wetland Plants Species Guide](#) included in your volunteer package.

If you do see invasive phragmites in any wetland or along a road side we highly encourage you to report it so that conservation organizations can try to remove and manage it. You can report it on the EDDMaps Ontario app - it is a bit of a tricky app so we have included an

information sheet on how to use it. Also, if you are interested in invasive Phragmites control - consider checking out our Phrag Fighters Citizen Science program 😊

## **Safety Guidelines for Wetland Monitoring**

### *What to wear*

We recommend wearing sunscreen, a sunhat and a bug jacket while monitoring wetlands to prevent sun burns and to minimize bug bites. Appropriate footwear is important - rubber boots with good tread are ideal, at minimum make sure to wear closed toed shoes, ideally ones that are waterproof. We recommend long pants to protect you against ticks and other bug bites, and any irritation that may occur from walking through tall vegetation or poison ivy.

### *Staying hydrated*

Bring a water bottle to stay hydrated while monitoring, especially on hot sunny days. Having some snacks on hand is also a good idea.

### *Checking in*

If monitoring alone, check in before and after your session with someone you trust and make sure to give them specific information about where you will be monitoring and for how long you expect to be out. Bring a charged cell phone with you while monitoring, although be mindful that you may not have cell service in all locations. If monitoring with a partner ensure there is one charged cell phone and have the emergency contact information for your partner on hand.

### *Traversing around wetlands*

Stay around the edges of the wetland, you do not need to enter the wetlands to collect observations. It is especially important not to walk on bogs or fens, as they can be dangerous. If you are unsure what a bog or fen is do not walk on any spongy mossy waterlogged ground (this is found in fens and bogs) because these moss mats are floating on water and it is possible to fall through. You do not need to wade into standing or moving water.

While walking around the outskirts of a wetland scanning for wildlife, make sure to look where you are placing your feet. Carry monitoring supplies like your clipboard and sheets in a small backpack while not using them to keep your hands free while walking.

## What to bring

- Rubberboots or footwear you can get wet
- Sunscreen and bug spray/ bug jacket
- A hat
- Binoculars
- A camera/ phone with a camera
- A GPS/ phone with GPS app
- A device to record observations directly into online form, or a clipboard with hard copy of observation sheet and a pencil
- Long pants, long sleeves

## Survey Protocol

- A. Make sure you have been assigned a unique wetland identification code before heading out on your first trip to your wetland. You will need this code before you start doing any field surveys. If you have not received a code yet, please contact us.
  - B. Check the weather before heading out to monitor. Ideal conditions for wetland monitoring for turtles are cooler sunny days on which they will come out to bask, but you can still see them in other conditions. Do not go out to monitor in inclement weather such as thunderstorms, or high winds.
  - C. On your first trip out to your wetland, please complete the **Register Your Wetland** Google Form (you can use the printable version, **Getting to Know Your Wetland Activity**, in the field and then fill out the Google Form with the information you collected when you get home). It is a good idea to have your **Wetland Plant Species Guide** on hand when you complete this activity to help identify plant species.
  - D. Next, select the method you will use to monitor your wetland. You will need to use this same method for all your monitoring sessions. There are two options:
    - a. The *perimeter method*, which involves walking around the entire, or most of the outside edge of the wetland.\*
    - b. The *spot method* involves selecting at least three points along the edge of the wetland to monitor from for 5 minutes each.
- \* If you are able to walk around the entire wetland (or the vast majority of it), the perimeter option is preferable.
- E. Record your name, assigned unique wetland identification code, wetland type(s), date, weather conditions, and the time at which you officially start monitoring the wetland on your survey form (on paper on your field data sheet, or directly into the online data sheet on a device).

- F. If you chose the perimeter method, slowly walk the perimeter of the wetland, watching where you place your feet. Walk slowly so you scan the water, shoreline and potential basking sites for turtles and other wildlife. Take 3 pictures of the wetland from different points along the perimeter. With each photo you take, record the GPS coordinates of the location you are standing in when taking the photo. Please use the *Decimal degrees* coordinate system, and record all numbers after the decimal point (you may need to change your GPS settings, as this is not always the default).
- G. If you chose the spot method, select at least 3 points along the outer edge of the wetland that you can access and that provide good views of the wetland. At each of these points scan the water, shoreline and potential basking sites for turtles for at least five minutes. Be careful not to count the same turtle twice when changing vantage points. Take a picture of the wetland from all 3 points and record the GPS coordinates of the location you are standing in when taking the photo. Please use the *Decimal degrees* coordinate system, and record all numbers after the decimal point (you may need to change your GPS settings, as this is not always the default).
- H. When you see a turtle, make sure to use binoculars to look for distinguishing features to identify its species. Observe its behaviour to determine what it is doing (swimming, basking, mating or nesting). Record the species and its activity in the observations form on your device, or on paper. \*Please reference the species ID sheets and behaviour description section of that document for helpful information.\*
- I. If you are unable to identify the species, record the observation as an unknown turtle, and still describe its behaviour.
- J. If you see other wildlife that you would like to record, add this to the non-turtle observations section of the form.
- K. When you are finished, record your end time on the survey form.
- L. If you have recorded your observations on paper, please input them into the online Google Sheet when you get home and submit them within 48 hours.

### **Kayak/ Canoe option**

If there is enough open water in your wetland and a safe access point into the water you can monitor your wetland from a canoe or kayak. This option is *use at your own risk*, and we recommend having a buddy with you or close by on shore if using this method for safety reasons. You can use the same data field sheets, and online data form and take three photos (with GPS points) of the wetland from your canoe/ kayak if possible. Record the start and finish time as you would with the perimeter and spot method.