

Dr. Cindy Skrukrud presented Tools for Protecting Wetlands in Northeastern Illinois at the January 2022 monthly meeting on January 13, 2022.

Skrukrud explained that wetlands matter because they provide:

1. Habitat – for further information regarding habitat (and other information related to wetlands), please see the *Development of a Natural Areas Integrity of Restorability Index and Application to Lands of the Chicago Area* listed in the Resource Guide, which Skrukrud prepared, at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HuKUBvFvLdQFBD0vz4PxyQ37MIT9t5S38sXWaATREAc/edit>
2. Water quality
3. Floodwater storage

Water quality is important because of the bacterial breakdown of contaminants and sediment is filtered and provides a critical wildlife habitat. The waters that flow out of the wetlands and into the streams and lakes are cleaner than water that comes into the wetlands. As such, the wetlands provide a very important role of cleansing the water before it moves downstream, which then provides flood storage. So, when it rains and the wetlands haven't been destroyed, these are places where water is held, which reduces flooding. Local decision makers care about water quality and flood storage.

What do you do when you have a wetland that is under threat? According to Skrukrud, individuals interested in saving threatened wetlands should engage with government entities to minimize the destruction of wetlands. Under the Clean Water Act there are federal protections for wetlands connected to other bodies of water. It's the Army Corps of Engineers' role to review any proposal to fill a wetland or dredge a wetland. The permit needed from the Army Corps is called a 404 Permit. If the vulnerable wetlands don't fall under federal jurisdiction, many have been adopted under county-wide ordinances. However, in Cook County, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District is responsible for these wetlands and considering that the ordinance is implemented well. Local municipalities can also be assigned as delegates to implement ordinances in their communities. Another helpful tool when advocating for threatened wetlands is the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Illinois Natural Area Inventory Sites, which evaluates the best areas of the state for specific habitat. The lists of federal and Illinois endangered and threatened species is another resource.

According to Skrukrud, "Birders, botanists, and other biologists are your good friends in helping to point out that your wetland is providing habitat for these species."

Skrukrud also emphasized that green infrastructure is also important, "Thinking about the green infrastructure in your community is a way to proactively protect the wetlands in your area."

Funding is also available through the Chicago Metropolitan Agency through their Planning Local Technical Assistance Program, which funds comprehensive and corridor plans. The 2021 Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act is also another funding source, especially for flood mitigation money and climate resiliency.

To view the presentation, visit <https://youtu.be/3WxtBwvl600>.