

What's So Wonderful About Wetlands?

What Makes a Wetland?

Wetlands are areas covered by shallow surface water or areas where soils are saturated by groundwater. Wildlife that use wetlands are dependent on different plant types for food, cover, and nesting. Wetland plants are very unique and diverse. Permanent wetlands have surface water present at all times, while Intermittent wetlands, more common in arid Arizona, are infrequently flooded. Regardless of how often they're flooded, all wetlands are very productive due to higher water and nutrient abundance compared to adjacent habitats.

All Wetlands Have:

- **Saturated wetland soils**
- **Wetland vegetation**
- **Water**



Photo courtesy of Lloyd Pentecost

Wetland Function and Benefits

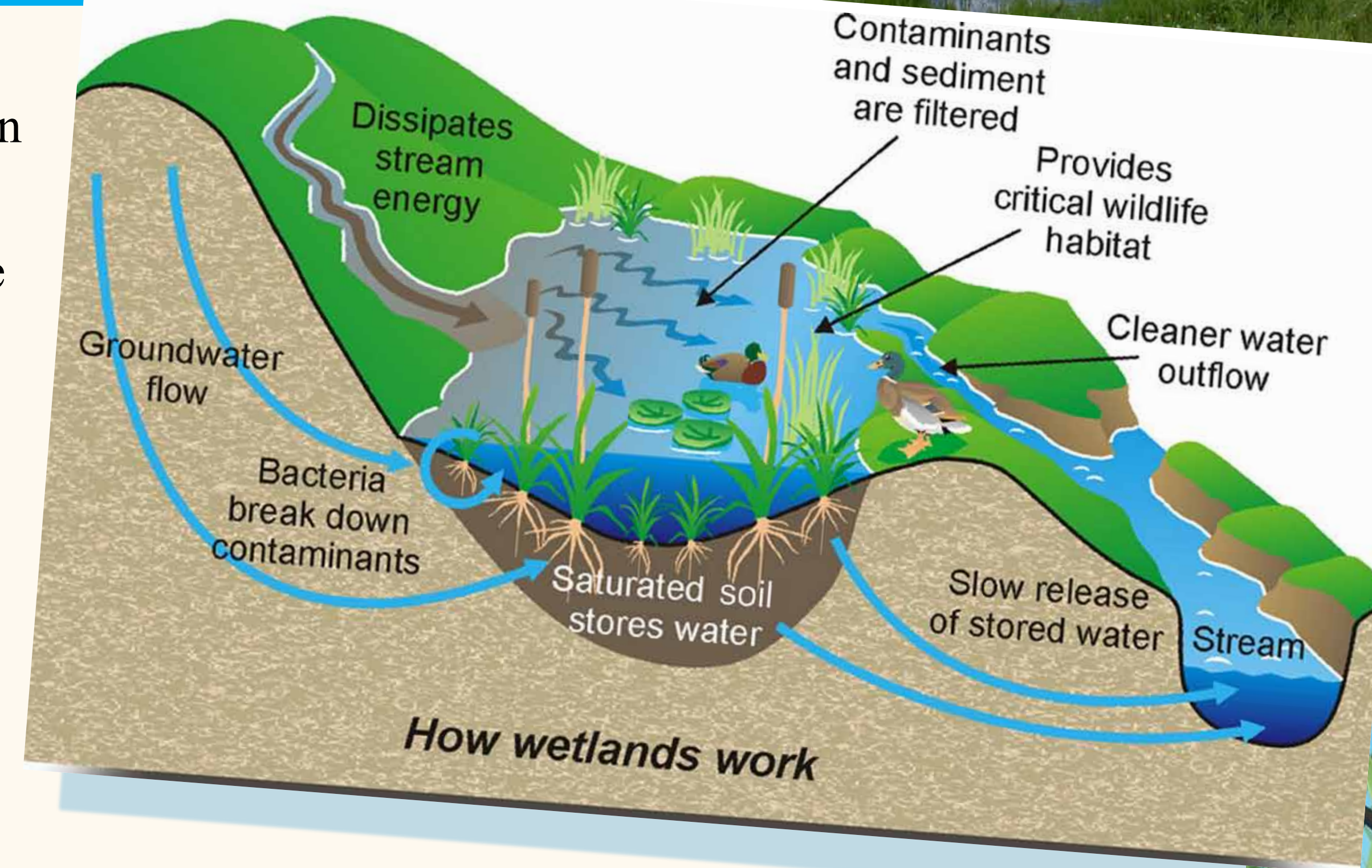
Water Purification – Wetlands are nature's water purifiers. Vegetation and microbes filter and purify water, remove toxins and excess nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous, and trap polluting sediments.

Water Table Recharge – Wetlands hold and allow water to slowly percolate into the water table below, recharging limited water supplies.

Flood & Erosion Control – Wetlands are natural sponges that capture, store, and slowly release water over time, reducing the impact of floods. Plant roots bind the soil and plants bend flat during high flows to prevent erosion.

Wildlife & Fish Habitat – Wetlands provide habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife species, and support a complex food web. Wetlands constitute one of our most productive habitats found in Arizona.

Big Springs Pond



Emergent Cattails

Wetland Vegetation

Wetland plants are characterized by where in a wetland they are adapted to grow and thrive. Wildlife that use wetlands are tied to different plant types. The plant types listed below provide food, cover, and nesting for birds, fish, and amphibians.

Shore Plants – Grow in the moist soil fringe surrounding wetlands.

Emergents – Rooted in shallow water with stems growing above water.

Submergents – Plants that grow underwater.

Floating plants – Their leaves float on the surface.

