


Inland Wetlands, Watercourses and Upland Review Areas Frequently Asked Questions

This information has been prepared by the Old Saybrook Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission (IWWC) to help residents understand the values and functions of the town's inland wetlands and water resources and how the IWWC regulates certain activities in or adjacent to these resources to insure their long-term health and viability.

- **What are inland wetlands?** In Connecticut, inland wetlands are defined based on soil characteristics. All soils classified by the National Cooperative Soil Survey as poorly drained, very poorly drained, alluvial or floodplain are by definition inland wetlands. Poorly drained soils have water at or near the land's surface for at least part of the year, typically from late fall until early spring; very poorly drained soils have water at or above the land's surface (e.g. bogs and swamps) for much of the year; alluvial and floodplain soils are found along watercourses and were deposited by flowing water. Alluvial and floodplain soils can range from excessively drained to very poorly drained.
- **What are tidal wetlands?** Tidal wetlands are wetlands that have, or historically had, a tidal connection and that are capable of supporting specific wetland vegetation. In Old Saybrook, tidal wetlands along Long Island Sound are saline while those along the Connecticut River are more brackish in nature. Activities in tidal wetlands fall under the jurisdiction of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, not the Old Saybrook Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission.
- **What are watercourses?** Watercourses are broadly defined to include rivers, streams, brooks, waterways, lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps, bogs and all other bodies of water, natural or artificial, vernal or intermittent, public or private. The picture to the right of a dead wood swamp in Great Cedars West is an example of a watercourse.
- **What are Upland Review Areas (URA)?** URAs are areas adjacent to inland wetlands and watercourses. In Old Saybrook, all land within 100' of inland wetlands or watercourses is defined to be the URA. Activities in URAs can have significant impacts on adjacent inland wetlands or watercourses. Most activities occurring within URAs require a permit from the IWWC.
- **What does the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission regulate?** The Old Saybrook IWWC regulates activities in or adjacent to inland wetlands and watercourses that can have an impact on these resources. Regulated activities are broadly defined and include such things as excavating, grading, filling, dumping, removing vegetation, grubbing, construction, alteration, pollution, etc. The purpose of the town's regulations is to balance the use and protection of Old Saybrook's inland wetlands and watercourses. Copies of the IWWC Regulations can be downloaded from the town website by clicking on [Effective Wetlands Regulations \(2011\)](#) or visit the Land use Office, 2nd floor, Town Hall.
- **Why are inland wetlands and watercourses important?** Connecticut General Statutes, Section 22a-36, state "the wetlands and watercourses of the State are an interrelated web of nature essential to an adequate supply of surface and underground water; to hydrological stability and control of flooding and erosion; to the recharging and

purification of groundwater; and to the existence of many forms of animal, aquatic and plant life."

- **Is there a map that shows the locations of inland wetlands and watercourses in Old Saybrook?** Yes - and no. There is a map that shows the "general" location of inland and tidal wetlands, upland review areas and watercourses throughout the town. It is based on soil mapping that was done by the Natural Resources Conservation Service; however, the map only shows wetlands that are about 2 acres and larger in size. While this provides a good picture at a town wide scale, it is not accurate or detailed enough to show wetlands for individual parcels. The map can be viewed and downloaded from the town's website [here](#) or visit the Land Use Office, 2nd floor, Town Hall.
- **If the town Inland Wetlands Map shows no wetlands on my property, does that mean I don't need an Inland Wetlands Permit?** Not necessarily. As noted above, the town map is only a general guide. Many small wetland areas and watercourses are omitted from the map. Because inland wetlands are defined based on soil characteristics, only a certified soil scientist can determine the location - or absence - of inland wetlands on your property. If you need advice about determining if wetlands are on your property, the town's Environmental Planner may be able to help (860) 395-3131.
- **I've never had standing water on my property; does that mean I don't have inland wetlands?** Not necessarily. While standing water and/or wetness are good indicators of inland wetlands, lack of water does not mean there are no inland wetlands present. Inland wetlands are defined based on soil characteristics and some inland wetland soils, those classified as alluvial or floodplain, may be well drained.
- **Do I need a permit to dig a pond in an inland wetland or an upland review area?** Yes. Digging a pond involves "removal of material" which is a regulated activity. Such activities can significantly alter a wetland and therefore a thorough review and impact assessment is required.
- **I plan to build a garage 80' from an inland wetland. Do I need an IWWC permit?** Yes. While the construction is outside the wetland proper, it is within the Upland Review Area (URA) and many activities within the URA require a permit from the IWWC.
- **There aren't any wetlands in my yard but there are some nearby on a neighbor's property. Can they affect the use of my property?** Yes, if you plan to engage in a regulated activity within 100' of the wetlands on your neighbor's property, you will need a permit from the IWWC. Even though the wetlands aren't "yours," any portion of the URA on your property is still a regulated area since activities within the URA could impact the wetland.
- **Can I dump yard waste such as grass clippings, dead leaves and tree branches in an inland wetland or URA?** No. These activities are considered "deposition of material" and therefore require an inland wetlands permit. While such materials are natural in origin, they still can impact wetlands and watercourses by destroying natural habitats, interfering with the flow of water and by increasing nutrients getting into waterbodies thereby degrading water quality.

For additional information about inland wetlands or issues raised in any of the FAQs, contact the Environmental Planner, Old Saybrook Land Use Department at 860-395-3131.