

## IMPORTANCE OF WETLANDS

Wetlands form an important link and transition zone between our land and water and perform several functions vital to our environment and economy which depend on clean water. With their characteristic *hydric* (wet) soil, shallow water table, and unique plant life, wetlands, are considered the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems. Wetlands provide water purification, flood protection, groundwater recharge, and essential habitat for wildlife. Wetland soils globally store twice the amount of carbon as all the world's forests. However, about 60,000 acres of wetland in the US are lost to development each year!

Water Purification: Similar to how a kidney functions to cleanse waste from the bloodstream in the human body, wetlands trap sediments and pollutants, and filter excess nutrients from water before it enters another water body.

Flood Protection: Wetlands are crucial to preventing environmental and property damage from extreme weather events by absorbing and storing excessive rainfall. The excess water is then slowly released helping to alleviate the affects of prolonged periods of drought.

Groundwater Recharge: Wetlands have many intricate connections with groundwater, streamflow, and lake levels, making them essential in the proper functioning of the *hydrologic* (water) cycle.



Unlike most typical wetlands, the Preserve showcases a complex upland/wetland mosaic. It is classified by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as *Palustrine Scrub-Shrub Wetland* and *Forested Wetland*. The movement, distribution and quality of water (*hydrology*), nutrient cycling, soil composition, and climate come together in the Preserve to form a unique wetland ecosystem of skunk cabbage mixed with spruce and cottonwood/aspens forest.

Two branches of Viking Creek join in the Preserve to form the main channel of Viking Creek which then flows beneath Wisconsin Avenue through a culvert to its outfall into Whitefish Lake. This wetland improves water

quality before it enters Whitefish Lake and offers safe breeding and rearing areas for elk and deer, nesting sites for avian species, habitat for fish, beavers, and aquatic insects, and room to roam for bears, mountain lions, and foxes.

***Return to the Living Wetlands***