

**Chapter 4**

Use with Section 4

**ENRICHMENT**● **Land****Saving the Wetlands**

A wetland is an area that is covered with shallow water or that has wet soils. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, fens, and bogs. Wetlands are home to a variety of plant and animal life and exist throughout the world.

For many years, people thought that wetlands were useless. For this reason, more than 35 percent of the wetlands in the United States had been drained and destroyed by the 1970s. Wetlands were drained or filled in to make way for houses, shopping malls, and other developments. However, since the early 1970s, there has been an increasing awareness of the ecological value of wetlands.

Wetlands help to minimize flooding because they absorb excess water and release it slowly, making flooding less likely. In addition, wetlands store large amounts of water for long periods.

Wetlands also provide rich environments for wildlife. Mammals such as moose, muskrats, and mink find food and shelter in the wetlands. Numerous varieties of birds make their homes there as well. Coastal wetlands are the breeding grounds for many species of fish and crustaceans. Many states have enacted laws to protect wetlands.

1. What are the two main purposes of wetlands?

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2. How do you think our environment would be different if our ancestors had not destroyed so many of the wetlands in the past?

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