

From the Director

Becky Abel, WWA Executive Director

The Language of Water and Wetlands



Swamp \`swämp\ *vt* (1784) to overwhelm numerically or by an excess of something <-ed with work>

Mire \`mīr\ *n* (14 c.) a troublesome or intractable situation <found themselves in a - of debt>

Bog \bäg\ *vi* bogged; (1599) to become impeded or stuck—usu. used with *down*

How does our language shape public opinion? In our efforts to understand why so much misunderstanding surrounds wetlands, we at Wisconsin Wetlands Association have become intrigued by how the public's perception of wetlands flows from the watery expressions and phrases they hear. What other valuable natural resource suffers from an ocean of such dubious expressions as "swamped," "mired" and "bogged down"? And what is the effect of common expressions related to wetlands that conjure up negative images?

Our staff members are hardworking, dedicated wetland crusaders who carry the weight of the world's water on their shoulders. In short, we are – as are most who work for nonprofits – overworked. But you won't find us slandering marshes in our efforts to describe our workloads. Here at the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, the expression we use to convey the magnitude of the task of protecting the many swamps, bogs and other wetland gems that are screaming for our attention (and in many cases, singing swan songs) is to say that we are "paved over."

Another way that people can elevate wetlands in the minds of Wisconsin citizens through their choice of words has simply to do with how we talk about the waters of Wisconsin. "Wisconsin" derives from a Chippewa word meaning "gathering of water." Wisconsin's gathering of water treasures includes a wide diversity of wetland types that are connected hydrologically to Great Lakes and inland lakes, rivers and streams. Yet too often when politicians, community leaders, journalists and even

conservationists talk about the waters of Wisconsin, they speak of Wisconsin's "lakes, rivers and streams." Have we filtered out the five million acres of wetlands that purify and enhance those waters?

Let's recharge the lexicon of water in the state! Let's insist that everyone – from our conservation partners to our newspaper reporters – talks about "lakes, rivers, streams *and wetlands*" when putting pen to paper or lauding the values of Wisconsin's water. Because words don't just represent ideas, they also shape ideas. Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, "Language is the armory of the human mind, and at once contains the trophies of its past and weapons of its future conquests." We must change the way we *talk* about our water resources in order to ensure that wetlands become an integral part of the water landscape in the minds of the people of Wisconsin.

A Primer in Wetland-Correct (WC) Language:

"Paved over" can be used in all instances where you might formerly have used the terms "swamped" or "bogged down" as in:

I can't meet with you this week because I'm too paved over.

"Paved over" serves the dual purpose of more accurately reflecting a state of impervious mounds of work and not maligning the values of wetlands through cliché.

WWA Board of Directors:

Alice Thompson- *Chair*
Mary Linton- *Vice Chair*
Galen Smith- *Treasurer*
Kim Genich- *Secretary*

Members:

John Ebsen
Gail Epping Overholt
Scott Froehlk
Don Gallo
R. Tod Highsmith
George Meyer
Bruce Moore
Jonathan Reed
Eugene Roark
Paul Zedler
Libby Zimmerman

WWA Staff:

Becky Abel
Executive Director
Katie Beilfuss
*Wetland Threats Analysis,
Membership & Operations
Coordinator*
Ashley Ellingson
Administrative Assistant
Laura England
Outreach Programs Director
Erin O'Brien
*Wetland Policy &
Conservation Specialist*

WWA Newsletter:

Laura England- *Editor*
Birgit Bach- *Design/Layout*
Photo & Art Credits- *Esther Alsum, David Carroll, Laura England, Jim McEvoy, Lisa Haufschild, Carolyn Kilberg, Jeff Kraemer, Laurie Lawlor, Bruce Moore, Gary Shackelford*

Please Contact Us!

WWA
222 S. Hamilton St. #1
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: (608) 250-9971

Online: www.wiscwetlands.org

ISSN# 1083-7841