






Disappearing Wetlands

Wetlands are called **wetlands** because the word describes the areas of land that can sometimes be wet! Unfortunately, we have only a little bit of our wetlands left in California. Too many people found other reasons to want to use the land, and destroyed this very important habitat. A **habitat** is a place where an animal lives in the wild - it provides the animal a place to rest, to eat, and hang out with its friends! For this activity, we will see what difficulties wildlife will experience if their habitat begins to disappear as it did with the wetlands and the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse.

You will need:

- 10 copies of the wetland picture (on the next page) spread out on the floor, or any 10 place markers
- Space for all students to stand and move from picture to picture across the room

Instructions:

-  To begin, explain to the students they are a **Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse**. These small mice only live in our salt marshes here in California. They feast on the marsh plants and make their homes in the grasses. They are good swimmers and climbers, but only like to live in the wetlands they are named after.
-  Spread out the wetland pictures around the room with at least 2 feet between them to differentiate the space.
-  Tell the students (now mice) they are to go and put one foot on one wetlands picture. This shows them living in their habitat in the wild. Explain that there is enough room at each wetland for 4 mice to live comfortably—any more than that and there is not enough food to them to survive. If a picture has more than 4 students, one student must move to another open spot or will not survive (if they do not survive, they must sit out the rest of the activity).
-  Now, you will read through different scenarios. After each scenario, one or more of the wetland pictures will be removed. Each time, the students who were “living” there must find another open spot at another wetland picture or they will “not survive” that round.
 - o **Scenario:** When people first saw the wetlands, they thought they were just stinky swamps that didn't do any good for anybody. So they filled up the wetlands and built houses on top of them instead. Remove ONE wetland picture.
 - o **Scenario:** Some people thought the wetlands along our coastline were taking up too much space, so they filled them in and built factories there instead. Remove ONE wetland picture.
 - o **Scenario:** People didn't want to move too far out to continue farming, so they drained and filled in the wetlands to have more grazing land. Remove TWO wetlands pictures.
 - o **Scenario:** Oh no! Someone saw the wetlands and thought it would be great spot to instead build an airport. Remove THREE wetlands pictures.
 - o **Scenario:** With all the traffic to get to the new airport, they decided to fill in more of the wetlands to build enough roads and highways for all the people. Remove TWO pictures.
-  Now what's left is what is actually what is left of all of California's wetlands! About 90% of California's wetlands have disappeared in the last century for similar reasons as to our scenarios. So what happened to the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse that only makes its home in the wetlands?
 - o Ask the students how they felt when their wetlands picture was removed. Do they think the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse would understand why its home was no longer there? Why would having too many mice in one spot be bad for the mice? Why would it be bad for the habitat?

Discussion: Conclude the activity by asking what things we can do to help make sure our wetlands don't continue to disappear. Is there any way of bringing them back? What other animals might we see during the WildCare Nature Van visit that live in or have been affected by our wetlands?



76 Albert Park Lane, San Rafael, CA 94901
415-453-1000 www.discoverwildcare.org

WETLANDS

