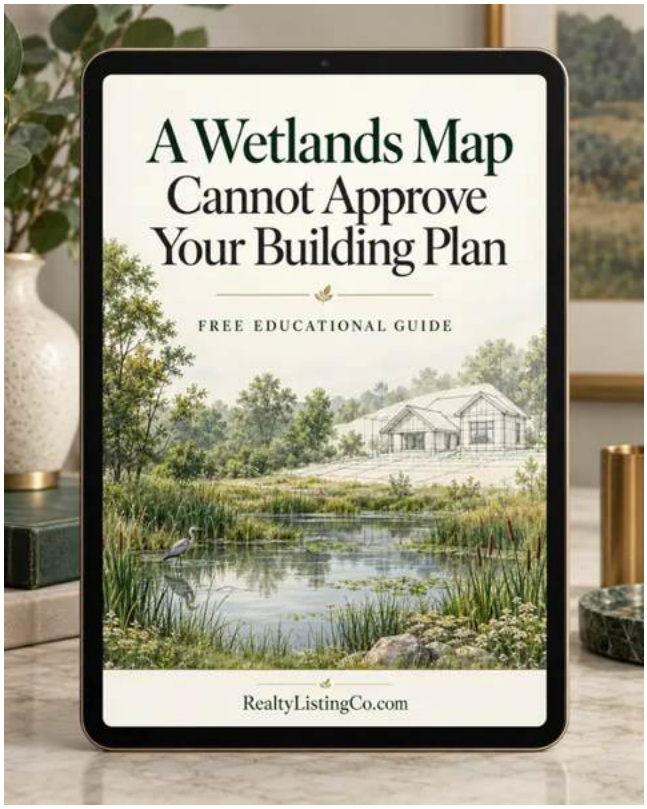
FREE EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

# A Wetlands Map Cannot Approve Your Building Plan

Use mapped wet areas to prepare a site-specific review before relying on a layout.




Read the current online edition:

realtylistingco.com/learn/land-and-acreage/wetlands-map-before-building-plan/

# The Problem

A parcel map appears to leave room for a house, driveway and wastewater system. That picture can help you ask questions, but it cannot confirm where regulated waters begin or whether the proposed work is allowed. Start by identifying which parts of your plan still depend on an actual site review.

Your goal: Prepare a dated map packet and a short list of location-specific questions for the relevant authorities and a qualified wetlands professional.

# Keep each map tied to its source

Save the map name, date, legend, scale and parcel reference. Mark whether a line came from a public viewer, seller sketch or professional report. Do not merge those lines into one apparently authoritative drawing. A missing map feature is a question to investigate, not proof that the feature is absent.

# Show the work you are actually considering

Mark approximate locations for buildings, access, grading, fill and utilities on a separate concept sketch. Label every location provisional. Ask which parts of the work require further review and whether state, tribal or local requirements apply in addition to any federal process.

# Ask what field evidence is needed

EPA describes wetlands identification using vegetation, soils and hydrology. Ask the appropriate agency and qualified professional what investigation, documentation and determinations are needed for this parcel. A dry visit cannot replace that work. Do not disturb soil, vegetation or drainage to make a site appear drier.

# Connect unanswered questions to your decision date

List the review scope, expected response date, person responsible and any contract date affected. Ask your own attorney about transaction options before a deadline passes. Leave construction area, costs and schedule unresolved until the necessary evidence is available.

# A Practical Example

Illustrative example: A buyer sketches a driveway across a low strip between the road and a proposed home site. Instead of assuming the unshaded strip is clear, the buyer sends the dated map and concept sketch for professional review. The driveway route remains provisional while the review is arranged.

Illustrative example, not a case history or a recommended legal outcome.

# When to Get Help

Use a qualified wetlands professional and the responsible agencies. Ask a local land-use attorney about restrictions and contract consequences. This preparation exercise is not a delineation or permitting determination.

# Sources and Further Reading

Source guidance reviewed October 31, 2026. The organizing steps and example are RealtyListingCo's educational framework.

• US Fish & Wildlife Service - Wetlands Map Limitations

https://www.fws.gov/page/wetlands-data-limitations-exclusions-and-precautions

• EPA - Wetlands Identification and CWA Section 404

https://www.epa.gov/cwa-404/how-wetlands-are-defined-and-identified-under-cwa-section-404

YOUR NEXT STEP CHECKLIST

# Your next step checklist

[ ] Save map dates and legends

[ ] Identify the exact parcel

[ ] Mark proposed disturbance separately

[ ] Request the applicable review process

[ ] Assign open questions and decision dates

One thing to do today: Save one dated map and write down the first proposed activity that could affect a wet area.

# Professional Advice Disclaimer

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