

Wetland Characterization

For each of the wetlands described, aerial imagery shows some overhanging canopy which obscures the wetland from overhead view. However, in each case, the overhanging canopy belongs to an upland forest community and is not a part of the wetland. As the Palustrine Plant Community Key for Pennsylvania describes, characterizing vegetative communities requires some consideration for whether overhanging vegetative cover represent a continuation of the vegetative community, or whether there is a distinct zonal difference in the underlying vegetation type. For example, small, open pockets of hydrophytic graminoid species interspersed throughout a low-lying sycamore stand may rightly be considered part of the forested wetland complex due to significant overhead canopy cover. However, a small pocket of wetland in which no trees or shrubs are rooted would not appropriately be described as a forested wetland simply due to the nearby presence of upland forest communities.

In the case of the wetlands in question, the latter situation applies. The hydrophytic, herbaceous vegetative communities growing within these wetlands are distinctly different from the herbaceous, shrub, and/or forest communities immediately adjacent to their limits. In most cases, canopy is visible over the wetland on aerial imagery only because of the diminutive size of the wetlands, which are contained within discrete topographic contours that are devoid, or nearly so, of tree or shrub species. Therefore, they are appropriately categorized according to the distinct vegetative communities within their limits, which represent clear zonal changes from the surrounding vegetative communities.

Specific Wetlands in Northampton County

052218_WA_003_PEM: This wetland is a PEM wetland which derives its hydrology from a small perennial stream. There are few or no trees growing within the wetland boundary, only some overhanging canopy from adjacent upland forest. Some shrubs [spicebush, (*Lindera benzoin*)] are within the wetland, but only 10% of the wetland is covered by shrubs. The herbaceous plant communities are distinctly different between the wetland and the surrounding forest community, and removal of the overhanging branches would not change the function of this streamside fringe wetland.

051415_JC_1001_PEM: This wetland is a very small PEM wetland which is supported by the collection of surface runoff sources in a topographically depressed landscape position. Due to the small size of this wetland, some of the canopy of trees growing in surrounding upland forest overhang the wetland. However, the vegetative community within the wetland is herbaceous and hydrophytic in nature, and distinct from the surrounding upland community. Note that the upland data point for this wetland also serves as a distinction between its boundary and the nearby forested wetland, 051415_JC_1002_PFO.