

# Why Do We Manage Salt Marshes?

## Ecosystem Benefits

Salt marshes provide a unique ecosystem where wildlife intersects with human development, offering habitat for a variety of migratory and resident species. They also filter excess nutrients and pollutants, protect coastal communities from flooding, and support a variety of recreational activities.

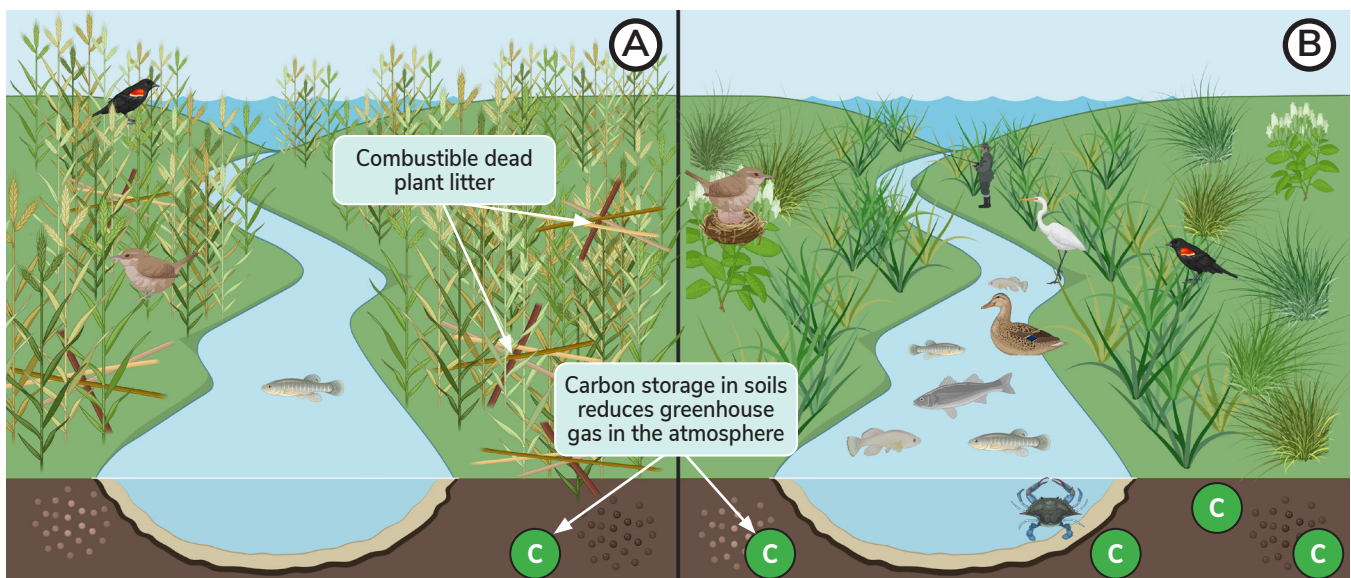
## Prescribed Burning for Marsh Management

Prescribed burns were historically used to improve marsh access for hunting. Today, this practice continues to reduce dead plant material that fuels wildfires, protecting nearby communities, reducing invasive species like *Phragmites*, and promoting native plant growth.



## Invasive *Phragmites* Management

*Phragmites* is an invasive grass species that affects many marshes in Delaware, often displacing native grasses. It provides some benefit—such as habitat for certain animals, shoreline protection, and nutrient and carbon storage. Storing carbon in soils helps reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, which contributes to climate change. However, many marsh organisms prefer native grasses for food and habitat. To manage *Phragmites*, prescribed burns can be combined with other *Phragmites* removal methods and native plant restoration.



An unmanaged marsh with *Phragmites* (A) has lower biodiversity and accumulated dead plant material that can fuel wildfires. In contrast, a marsh managed with prescribed burns to remove *Phragmites* (B) supports a greater variety of plant and animal species, enhances recreational opportunities, and reduces fire risk. Created using BioRender.com with an image from IAN ([ian.umces.edu/media-library](http://ian.umces.edu/media-library)).