

Swamps ^[1]

Swamps

by Bland Simpson, 2006; November 2022.

See also: [Great Dismal Swamp](#) ^[2]; [Pocosins](#) ^[3].



Duckweed and swamp tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*) Merchant's Millpond State Park from Flickr user bumeister1.

^[4]Most of the largest remaining swamps (or "dismals," as early settlers called them) in the eastern United States are located in North Carolina's coastal plain. Much of North Carolina's swamplands are bottomland hardwood river swamps, while other swampy areas, including the mysterious [Carolina Bays](#) ^[5], are in fact [pocosins](#) ^[3]—naturally occurring, freshwater evergreen shrub-bogs that are elevated above nearby lands. The definition of this Indian word, variously spelled "percoarson," "poquosin," and "pequessen," is "swamp on a hill."

The best-known North Carolina swamps include the [Great Dismal Swamp](#) ^[2] [National Wildlife Refuge](#) ^[6], the [Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge](#) ^[7], the [Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge](#) ^[8], the [Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge](#) ^[9], the East Dismal, the Great Alligator Dismal, the Little Dismal, the Angola Swamp, the Holly Shelter Swamp, the [Raft Swamp](#) ^[10], the Gum Swamp, and the Green Swamp. The alternating nature of North Carolina's eastern territories [rivers](#) ^[11], [sounds](#), [swamps](#), and [forests](#) ^[12] gave early travelers considerable difficulty moving from north to south, giving rise to a correspondingly considerable negative reputation for the coastal plain and sound country as being wet, wild, impenetrable, interminable, and monotonous if not downright terrifying. Along with the timbering operations that have gone on since European [colonization](#) ^[13], the North Carolina swamps have seen military activity during the [American Revolution](#) ^[14] and the [Civil War](#) ^[15]; been havens for freedom-seeking enslaved people (some of whom gathered and formed colonies and redoubts known as [maroons](#) ^[16], while others traveled in secrecy from swamp to swamp); served as sites for [illegal distilleries](#) ^[17], such as the famously huge moonshine operation in East Lake during [Prohibition](#) ^[18]; and been enormously altered by large-scale draining, land-clearing, and farming operations, particularly in the third quarter of the twentieth century (for example, First Colony Farms on the Albemarle peninsula and Open Ground Farms in the Open Ground Pocosin of eastern [Carteret County](#) ^[19]).

Because of the more recent allied efforts of many [conservation](#) ^[20] groups and state and federal agencies, significant eastern swamp and [wetland](#) ^[21] territories have become state forests, game lands, and national wildlife refuges. However forbidding the swamps may still seem to much of the population, there has nonetheless been a tremendous change in the general attitude about the necessity of preserving and protecting these swamps and lowlands as filters, habitats, [flood](#) ^[22] absorbers, and incomparable sources of renewal in every possible regard.

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bumeister1. *Duckweed and swamp tupelo (Nyssa aquatica) Merchant's Millpond State Park*. Digital photograph. Taken November 9, 2008. Available from Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bumeister/3104652467/> [4] (accessed May 14, 2012).

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