4.4 Impact to Wetlands

If a landfill is located in or near a wetland, it is important to not cause or contribute to the degradation or damage of the wetlands. (18 AAC 60.315)

Why do we worry about wetlands and landfills?

Waste in wet environments produces leachate! Wetlands in Alaska are often underlain by clay soils and/or permafrost, which have minimal drainage that result in large ponded areas. This means that if a landfill produces leachate, that leachate can quickly and easily spread throughout the surrounding environment.

Above-grade area fill surrounded by wetlands.

Since wetlands can be easily impacted by landfills, it is important to not pick berries or harvest wild foods or medicinal plants in a wetland near the landfill. Wetlands slow down water flow, which can allow plants to uptake any contamination the water may be carrying.

Helpful tips:

- It is vital to establish good storm water management to reduce leachate and keep wetlands clean.
- Windblown litter can be difficult to collect in wetland areas, so it is best to prevent it by adding cover material to trash regularly and by maintaining fencing. A second fence or a vertical mesh extension for an existing fence may be a good alternative to prevent windblown litter, if cover material is not readily available.
- When building a landfill in wetlands, a permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers may be required.
- Consistent and regular waste compaction combined with frequent cover decreases the percolation of water through the waste and the production of leachate.

Examples:

Berms and fencing surrounding an above-grade area fill in wetlands. The berms provide a wall against which to compact waste and help keep the landfill separate from the wetlands, while the fencing helps to contain windblown litter.