

**Wetland Function Assessment Project  
Update No. 5  
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**Westside methods nearing completion**

The Washington State Wetland Function Assessment Project is finalizing the methods for assessing wetlands in the lowlands of western Washington. Distribution of the Riverine and Depressional wetlands methods is planned for May of 1999.

The methods are presented in two volumes. Volume I contains the actual methods and Volume II contains the procedures for collecting field data.

Copies of the method documents will be available to the public from Ecology. There will be a charge to cover the cost of production of the documents. We will send out a mailing with information on how to obtain your copy as we get closer to their release.

**Training for users in the works for summer '99**

The function assessment methods are rapid when applied in the field. However, they are fairly detailed, and accurate results depend upon standardized application and careful attention to data collection procedures. In other words, training is recommended for accurate application.

Ecology will be offering training for consultants, agency staff, and others who want to use the methods. The training will include both a field and an office component and will last 4-5 days. (Note: A free, one-day training will be offered for people who helped collect data used in developing the methods.)

**Training for wetland decision-makers**

It is also important that local planners, wetland specialists, and other wetland decision-makers know how to interpret the results of method application. A half-day training will be offered for wetland decision-makers.

If you are interested in participating in a training, contact Emily Teachout at [etea461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:etea461@ecy.wa.gov), or (360) 407-6172 for more information.

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**Results of User's Test**

Questionnaires about the *Draft Methods for Riverine and Depressional Wetlands in the Lowlands of Western Washington* were sent out to approximately 200 wetland professionals throughout the state.

The intent of the questionnaires was to solicit user's observations and suggestions so that we could use them to revise the draft methods and plan future training sessions.

Of the 200 sent out, we received 22 responses. Twelve respondents were environmental consultants, four represented local government, four were from state or federal agencies, and two represented an environmental organization.

Six of the respondents reviewed the methods in the office, four tested the methods on a wetland of their choice with no training, one tested the methods at a control site with no training, and eight tested the methods at a control wetland after being trained by Ecology staff.

Of those that responded to the question of whether training is important (10), all agreed that the training is very important to understanding and applying the methods appropriately.

Twelve of the 18 people responded to the question of whether the methods were scientifically acceptable felt that they were. Most also thought they were easy to understand, relatively rapid, and comparable in difficulty to existing function assessments such as the Wetland Evaluation Technique (WET).

The most commonly observed problems with the methods were personal proficiency with plant identification throughout the year, and difficulty in determining aerial estimates of plant assemblages and cover types over a large area.

Many of the respondents indicated that additional information is needed (such as social/ political and site specific) beyond what the methods supply for making decisions about avoidance, buffer widths, mitigation, restoration, conservation and preservation.

Thanks to all those who took the time to respond to our questionnaires:

Timothy Acker, Joe Arnett, Elizabeth Binney, Mason Bowles, Ken Brunner, Darin Cramer, Jerry Gorsline, Doug Gresham, Kim Harper, Bill Kerschke, Kirk Lakey, Brian Landau, W. David Loggy, Chris Mendoza, Lyn Morgan-Hill, Francis Naglich, Brid Nowlan, Bill Null, Cynthia Prehmus, Klaus Richter, Lizbeth Seebacher, and T.J. Stetz.

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## **Implementation Issues to Resolve**

The Wetland Function Assessment Project's Implementation Committee is made up of local, state and federal wetland decision-makers. This group is scheduled to meet this month to discuss several remaining policy-oriented issues.

The issues to be addressed include:

- How will the methods relate to the protection of endangered species?
- How will the methods be used with compensatory mitigation and monitoring?
- How can one compare scores between wetlands of different classes and subclasses?
- What minimum qualifications does the person applying methods need?
- What level of training should be required or recommended?

After coordinating with the Statewide Technical Committee and the Assessment teams on these issues, Ecology has drafted proposed positions on these issues. These positions will be used as springboards for discussion at the Implementation Meeting.

Watch for an update on the results of the Implementation Committee meeting on this webpage.

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## **SWTC and A-teams Ponder Remaining Questions**

Despite the dreariest, wettest winter on record, the project's dedicated Statewide Technical Committee (SWTC) and Assessment Teams (A-Teams) allowed themselves to be locked in windowless rooms with flip charts, markers, and overzealous agendas in order to hammer out the last details of method development.

In addition to the questionnaires, we received comments on the draft methods from several people who reviewed them, page-by-page. Either the SWTC or the A-teams considered each comment (with the exception of strictly editorial comments).

- Some examples of changes to the draft methods that resulted from issues raised by commentators are:
- Canopy closure was dropped as a reducer in the bird model for Riverine Flow-through wetlands.
- Freezing was dropped as a reducer in the bird model for all subclasses.
- Birds and animals that are modeled in the methods are now referred to as "wetland-associated" birds or mammals, instead of "wetland-dependent" or "aquatic".
- A reducer (Vupcover) was added to a Depressional model. (It was already in a Riverine model).
- Scaling of the canopy closure variable was revised to:
  - >60% = 0.5
  - 30-60% = 1
  - 10-30% = 0.5
  - <10 = 0

The above is just a sampling of the changes that have been made since the draft methods were released. For more information on responses to comments and revisions to the methods watch this webpage.

For the most part, the duties of the SWTC and the A-teams have been completed. A couple of issues remain, however, and at least a few members of the SWTC will be reconvening to address a few remaining questions.

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## **Eastern WA Draft Methods Nearing Completion**

The Wetland Function Assessment Project began developing methods for eastern Washington in the summer of 1997. This effort is coordinated by Stephen Stanley of Ecology's Northwest Regional Office. Draft methods for Depressional wetlands in the Columbia Basin are nearly complete. Training for those that will be collecting calibration data for the draft methods is scheduled for this month. The eastern Washington effort is following the same steps used to develop the western Washington methods. For information on the eastern Washington methods, contact Stephen Stanley at [ssta461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:ssta461@ecy.wa.gov) or by phone at (425) 649-4210.