



Focus

Best Available Science For Wetlands

The Department of Ecology is coordinating the development of a new document that will summarize the current scientific information on freshwater wetlands and provide management options and recommendations for local governments. The Department of Fish and Wildlife is providing technical support to the project, with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency providing grant funds to both agencies.



Why is “best available science” important?

A 1995 amendment to the Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that all cities and counties in Washington include the best available science when developing their critical-area policies and regulations. However, many local governments adopted their current critical-area ordinances prior to the amendment, and some did not incorporate science-based standards in their regulations. In addition, the GMA requires all local jurisdictions to review and revise their policies and regulations by September 2002. The state Shoreline Management Act (SMA) also requires local governments to use good scientific information in developing their shoreline master programs.

What is best available science?

The GMA does not define best available science (BAS), but the Washington Office of Community Development adopted regulations in 2000 that provided clarification. The regulation describes what constitutes best available science and how local governments should identify, evaluate and include it in their critical-area policies and regulations. BAS can be described as research conducted by qualified individuals using documented methodologies, the information reviewed by qualified scientific experts, and the criticisms addressed by the proponents.

How can the departments of Ecology and Fish & Wildlife help?

Ecology and Fish & Wildlife are committed to:

1. Identifying and summarizing the best available scientific information on freshwater wetlands, and
2. Providing management options and recommendations for local governments to consider when adopting their growth management policies and regulations.

Many local governments lack the resources to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of available scientific information on wetlands and interpret how to use that information. Ecology and Fish & Wildlife obtained grants from the EPA to help address this need.

What will a “best available science” document contain?

The two-volume document will be written for the local planners. It will address freshwater wetlands only. The first volume will be a synthesis of the best science currently available. The scientific information documented in the literature will be collected and summarized.

The second volume will provide management options and recommendations for protecting wetlands and managing the effects from development and other human activities. Based on the information presented in volume one, the options and recommendations will include best management practices, mitigation measures, buffers and other effective measures.

When will review drafts of this document be available?

Peer review of the drafts of each volume will occur sequentially. Ecology expects a draft of volume one to be ready for review during the spring of 2002, with volume two distributed for review in summer 2002.

Who will be involved?

Ecology staff will coordinate the project, and the Department of Fish & Wildlife will provide technical support. Local government staff, and state agency staff who work with them, will be asked to provide advice about the scope and format of the document. The consulting firm of Sheldon and Associates, Inc. will conduct the literature review and develop drafts of both volumes.

Ecology will distribute the drafts of each volume for peer review as they are completed. Ecology will ask the scientific community and local governments, among others, to review the volumes. Sheldon and Associates, Inc. will revise and complete the drafts in response to the comments, and Ecology will distribute the final products.

How will you keep me informed?

Ecology has developed a home page on the agency's Web site at ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/bas_wetlands to distribute news about the project, and will post the document there after it is completed. Ecology also will construct a project mailing list, based on requests from people who receive this fact sheet or learn about the project from articles in organization newsletters. Notices will be sent to everyone on the mailing list when a draft document is available for peer review.

How do I get involved?

Contact Teri Granger, project coordinator, if you have questions or to make sure you are on the mailing list and get announcements.

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