



Best Available Science for Freshwater Wetlands Update

A periodic bulletin on Washington's effort to synthesize the best available science on freshwater wetland and develop guidance to protect and manage wetlands in Washington.

Legislature passes bill that delays dates for GMA updates

The legislature passed SSB 5841 during the 2002 session. The bill delays mandatory GMA updates, including wetlands ordinances, which were previously scheduled for September 2002. As a part of the updates, local governments are required to include the best available science into the revisions of their critical areas ordinances.

The new deadlines are staggered, with GMA updates for more urbanizing counties due by December 2004. Deadlines for the remaining counties are spaced over the next three years (December 2005 - December 2007).

The bill also specifies that subsequent updates occur every seven years rather than the current requirement for every five years.

GMA updates are staggered, with the first of four deadlines being December 2004.

In addition, the bill allows any county or city required to update by December 2004 to skip the first deadline if they finalized an update after January 1, 2001, but before December 2004.

As a result of SSB 5841, and the lengthy time needed to complete the literature searches and read papers, the BAS project is revising our target dates.



BAS Project revises target dates for products

We are changing our schedule. We have postponed the completion dates for Volume One and Volume Two of our BAS document.

The Best Available Science (BAS) Project was funded to assist local governments include best available science in their revised GMA wetlands ordinances. Volume One is the first of two documents we have planned to provide technical assistance. It will be a synthesis of the science. We also will be producing Volume Two, which will contain updated management measures based on Volume One.

With postponement of the mandatory updates to critical areas ordinances specified in

SSB 5841, we can now do a better job of collecting and reading articles and summarizing scientific information.

According to our new schedule, a draft of Volume One will be ready for peer review by mid-December 2002. We expect the final version of Volume One to be ready for distribution by spring 2003.

We will begin working on Volume Two while the first volume is out for review. We expect a draft to be ready for comments by summer 2003, with a final completed by fall 2003.



A draft of Volume One, the synthesis of the science, will be ready for review in mid December 2002.

Update on our progress

Since January 2002, we have completed additional searches of the data bases using new key words. Local government staff, participating in two focus groups held in January, identified the new key words. We reviewed the new "hits" from the searches and added titles to the list of articles we continue to collect.

To date, we have obtained several hundred titles and are very busy reading. As we read, we are placing notes in a ProCite data base. We will use the data base to write the text of Volume One and produce a bibliography of cited references.

Volume One will NOT contain management options and recommendations.

Although reading and note-taking are time consuming, we hope to start writing the text for Volume One mid-summer. We plan to develop graphics in the text, such as matrices, to allow the reader to quickly reference key pieces of information.

We are also exploring software that will allow users to search for key words in the titles and notes included in our data base.

We will send a notice to everyone on our mailing list when Volume One is available for review.

Email Teri Granger at the address on the next page if you are not on the BAS mailing list.

Revisions to the rating systems

The Department of Ecology is revising the Washington State Wetland Rating Systems for both eastern and western Washington. The new rating systems will place wetlands in one of four categories just like the old one. Category I will again be based on factors such as difficulty of replacement (e.g. mature forests), sensitivity (e.g. alkali wetlands and bogs), and local

importance (e.g. salt marshes.) In addition, however, wetlands can be a Category I based on its functions.

We are revising the rating system to incorporate the best available science on wetland functions. We reviewed the science on wetland functions during the development of the Washington State Wetland Function Assessment Methods. We will also incorporate any new information on wetland functions as it is revealed during the literature review for the BAS project. The revised rating system will become part of Volume Two of the BAS document.

Be ready to comment on a draft of the rating system for eastern Washington toward the end of summer, with the final released this fall.

First we are working on the rating system for eastern Washington. We have met several times with a review team of regional wetland experts and local government staff. We have taken their suggestions and developed a draft. Ecology and the review team will be field testing the draft this summer. We will be distributing a draft for external review toward the end of summer, with the final released this fall.



We will continue work on the western Washington rating while the eastern Washington system is being reviewed. We held preliminary meetings with the western Washington review team last fall. We will develop the draft this summer, with field testing this winter. We hope to have the western Washington rating system completed by spring 2003.

We will be using the BAS mailing list to inform people of the review periods for the rating systems. If you are not already on the BAS mailing list, email Teri Granger at the email address provided. If you have specific questions about the rating systems, contact Tom Hruby at thru461@ecy.wa.gov.

New model ordinance for wetlands available

The Department of Ecology has been working with the Office of Community Development (OCD) to produce an updated model ordinance. The ordinance will cover all five critical areas, with wetlands being one of them.

The administrative portion of the model ordinance is the same for all critical areas. Specific protection measures are provided for individual critical areas such as wetlands and geologically hazardous areas.

The draft model ordinance was formulated based on legislative and administrative rules and guidance, best available science and recommendations from the departments of Fish & Wildlife, Natural Resources and Ecology as well as other agencies.

The wetlands part of the model ordinance is based on the BAS listed in "Recommended Sources of BAS for Designating and Protecting Critical Areas" offered through OCD. The ordinance will be revised next year if the synthesis of the literature reviewed by the BAS project reveals a need to do so.

Elements of the wetlands portion of the model ordinance will ultimately be incorporated into Volume Two of the BAS document as appropriate.

Contact Chris Parsons at the Office of Community Development (chrisp@cted.wa.gov) for a copy of the draft model ordinance for designating and protecting critical areas or the recommended sources of best available science. You can access these documents on their web site at <http://www.oed.wa.gov/growth>. If you have specific questions about the wetlands portion of the model ordinance, contact Andy McMillan at anmc461@ecy.wa.gov.

For information about the project, contact the project coordinator: Teri Granger by email at tgra461@ecy.wa.gov or by phone at 360-407-6857 or visit our web site at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/bas_wetlands

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