



Washington State Wetland Rating System

**For Western Washington
2014 Update Version 2.0**

By

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For the

Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program

Washington State Department of Ecology

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DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

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Preface

This document is version 2 of the *Washington State Wetland Rating System for Western Washington, 2014 Update*. It includes clarifications, improvements in formatting to meet accessibility requirements—including the addition of alt text and corresponding updates to figures and figure labels, updated web addresses and links, a glossary, and minor grammatical and punctuation edits to the text. The annotations in this document were developed in response to questions and comments we have received since the publication of the 2014 update.

New text added for clarification is prefaced by the bolded header “**Annotation**,” instead of as comments in track changes to improve readability of the document. Any deleted content is indicated by annotation or an introductory sentence to the section, except for updates to web page addresses, figure labels, and minor edits to grammar and punctuation, or as otherwise noted. Web page addresses were incorporated as links in the text and the addresses provided as footnotes. The instructions for identifying Wetlands of High Conservation Value (WHCV) were updated to reference the Washington Natural Heritage Program’s new [Data Explorer web map viewer](#)⁴ that is now the primary method for accessing their rare plant and rare plant community data. Instructions for using other map tools like Ecology’s Water Quality Atlas were also added. These instructions reflect the current state of the web map tools at the time of this publication but may change in the future as websites are updated. Additionally, the rationale and instructions for assessing the landscape potential of habitat functions were improved and clarified.

Electronic forms and mapping: Ecology developed a web application with an electronic version of the rating form and mapping tools to generate figures. The Washington Tool for Online Rating (WATOR) is available through [Secure Access Washington](#).⁵ Instructions for accessing WATOR are available on Ecology’s [Wetland Rating System webpage](#).⁶

The 2014 wetland rating system was an update of the *Washington State Wetland Rating System for Western Washington*, published by the Department of Ecology in 2004 (Hruby, 2004b). The 2014 update went into effect on January 1, 2015. It was the fourth edition of the rating system since the Department of Ecology published the first one in 1991. The original document was published with the understanding that modifications would be incorporated as we increase our understanding of wetland systems, and as many different people use the rating system.

The need to update the 2004 version of the rating system became apparent as we learned more in the decade between versions about how wetlands function and what is needed to protect them. Furthermore, statistical analyses of the data collected during the use of the 2004 version indicated that scoring functions from 0-100 could not be supported by the science. The

⁴ <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/174566100f2a47bebe56db3f0f78b5d9/page/Rare-Plant-and-Ecosystem-Locations/>

⁵ <https://secureaccess.wa.gov/>

⁶ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Wetlands>

method can accurately document the levels at which wetlands function only to three qualitative ratings of High, Medium, or Low.

We called the 2014 version an update of the 2004 edition rather than a revision because the changes made were not as significant as those made between the 1993 and the 2004 versions. Much of the information and text remained the same and changes were made only if new scientific information indicated that changes were needed. Likewise, we are calling this version 2 of the 2014 rating system because it contains clarifications for the existing text and some updated processes but does not make any significant changes to the underlying model of the wetland rating system.

Abbreviations for standard units of measure used in this document

inch = in.	centimeter = cm
foot = ft	meter = m
mile = mi	kilometer = km
acre = ac	hectare = ha
horsepower = hp	parts per thousand = ppt

Acknowledgements

This document would not have been possible without the participation and help of many people. The document is an update of existing tools, and thus represents the culmination of three decades of development, review, and field testing. Special thanks go to the technical committee of wetland experts and planners from local governments and Ecology’s Wetlands Technical Advisory Group who helped develop the objectives for the rating system in 2004, reviewed and field tested the Credit Debit Method in 2010 (Ecology publication #10-06-011), and provided feedback on these tools. Special thanks to Joe Rocchio of the Natural Heritage Program for refining our list of bog species and those found in calcareous fens and for feedback on Wetlands of High Conservation Value. We received valuable comments from 19 individuals and organizations who took the time to review the draft sent out for public comment in 2014, and we wish to acknowledge their efforts. These include: Suzanne Anderson, Confluence Environmental Services, Kathy Curry, Geoff Gray, Grette Associates, Patricia Johnson, Kennewick Irrigation District, Mike Layes, Torrey Luiting, Jeff Meyer, David Moore, Hugh Mortensen, Brad Murphy, NW Ecological Services, Scott Rozenbaum, Rebecca Rothwell, Lee Stragis, Doug Swanson, and Patrick Togher. Amy Yahnke compiled the annotations and edited the final draft with Yolanda Holder, Dana Mock, Neil Molstad, and Rick Mraz. Thank you all.

1. Introduction

The wetlands in Washington State differ widely in their functions and values. Some wetland types are common, while others are rare. Some are heavily disturbed, while others are still relatively undisturbed. All, however, provide some functions and resources that are valued. These may be ecological, economic, recreational, or aesthetic. Managers, planners, and citizens need tools to understand the resource value of individual wetlands in order to protect them effectively.

Many tools have been developed to understand the functions and values of wetlands. The methods range from detailed scientific analyses that may require many years to complete, to the judgments of individual resource experts done during one visit to the wetland. Managers of our wetland resources, however, are faced with a dilemma. Scientific rigor is often time consuming and costly. Tools are needed to provide information on the functions and values of wetlands in a time- and cost-effective way. One way to accomplish this is to categorize wetlands by their important attributes or characteristics based on the collective judgment of regional experts. Such methods are relatively rapid but still provide some scientific rigor (Hruby, 1999).

The Washington State Wetland Rating System categorizes wetlands based on specific attributes such as rarity, sensitivity to disturbance, and the functions they provide. These attributes are not comparable, and thus cannot be rated on the same scale. Only the functions are actually rated on a qualitative scale. The term “rating,” however, is being kept in the title to maintain consistency with the previous editions.

This rating system was designed to differentiate among wetlands based on their sensitivity to disturbance, their significance, their rarity, our ability to replace them, and the functions they provide. The rating system, however, does not replace a full assessment of wetland functions that may be necessary to plan and monitor a project of compensatory mitigation.

The intent of the rating categories is to provide a basis for developing standards for protecting and managing the wetlands. Some decisions that can be made based on the rating include the width of buffers needed to protect the wetland from adjacent development and permitted uses in, and around, the wetland. Many local jurisdictions have included language on buffers in their critical areas ordinances based on [Ecology’s CAO guidance](#).⁷ The update of the rating systems provides a more accurate rating of the functions and values of a wetland but keeps the same four wetland categories.

The rating system is intended for use primarily with vegetated, freshwater wetlands as identified using the federal wetland delineation manual and the appropriate regional supplements. It also categorizes estuarine wetlands but does not rate their functions. The rating system also does not characterize streambeds, riparian areas, or other valuable aquatic resources.

⁷ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Wetlands/Regulations/Local-regulations>

The rating system also has not been calibrated to montane wetlands generally found above 3000 ft elevation. We do not recommend that the rating system be used to rate functions in these montane wetlands.

Annotation: Wetland ratings are valid for only five years because wetlands and their functions will change with time. This time limit was chosen to be consistent with time that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' jurisdictional determinations are valid per RGL 05-02 (Corps, 2005). If a wetland rating is older than five years, the rating should be reviewed and may need to be redone.

A companion document, *Washington State Wetland Rating System for Eastern Washington: 2014 Update* should be used for wetlands in eastern Washington. The boundary between eastern and western Washington for the purpose of rating wetlands is defined in [WAC 222-16-010](#).⁸

Western Washington means the geographic area in Washington west of the crest of the Cascade Mountains from the international border to the top of Mt. Adams, then west of the ridge line dividing the White Salmon River drainage from the Lewis River drainage and west of the ridge line dividing the Little White Salmon River drainage from the Wind River drainage to the Washington-Oregon state line.

Changes made to the 2004 Rating System in the 2014 update

Chapters 2-4 and the scoring for the site potentials in Chapter 5 are carried over from the 2004 version of the rating system. Some changes in these sections were made to reflect the annotations added in 2006 and to include current definitions used by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Washington Natural Heritage Program.

The substantive differences between the 2014 update of the rating system and the 2004 version are the conversion of scores for each function to ratings of High, Medium, or Low, and the replacement of the Opportunity section with two new sections (Landscape Potential and Value). Only the ratings of functions are assigned a score rather than using the raw scores of the indicators. The range of possible scores for a wetland category based on function was reduced to 9-27 (from 1-100) to better reflect the accuracy of the method (see box on next page).

The field indicators for Site Potential are the same as in the 2004 version of the rating system and that were also kept in the more recent Credit/Debit Method developed by Ecology in 2012 (Ecology publication #10-06-011). The new sections on Landscape Potential and Value in Chapter 5 of the 2014 update are the same as in the Credit/Debit Method. Also, we have added interdunal wetlands with High habitat scores to the list of Category I wetlands based on our field work on barrier beaches along the coast (see Chapter 2).

⁸ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=222-16-010>

The distribution of categories of reference wetlands in the updated rating system

Data were collected at 122 wetlands to calibrate the rating system in 2004. Data from 111 of these could be used to re-calibrate the scoring for the 2014 update. Some wetlands were lost through natural and human alterations, and some could not be re-located.

The range of scores for wetland categories based on functions in the 2014 update is between 9-27 rather than the 0-100 possible in the 2004 version. This change was necessary because a statistical analysis of data collected in the last decade indicated that rapid methods such as these are not scientifically accurate beyond a qualitative rating of High, Medium, or Low (unpublished data collected at reference sites during the calibration and field testing of the method).

Choosing the score at which we separate levels of functioning is a decision that is based on best professional judgment in rapid methods such as these. For example, in the 2004 Rating System we chose to call wetlands with a very high level of function (Category I) those with a score of 70 or more, while those with a high level of function (Category II) scored between 51-69, those with a moderate level of function (Category III) scored between 30-50, and those with a low level of function (Category IV) scored less than 30 points. These divisions were based on the judgment of the teams of wetland experts that developed the rating system in 2004. It reflects the teams' scientific consensus on what is meant by very high, high, moderate, and low levels of functions after visiting the reference sites. The divisions also reflected the teams' observations that most reference wetlands function at high or moderate levels and there are fewer that function at very high or low levels.

The divisions between wetland categories based on levels of function in the 2014 update were chosen to match as closely as possible the distribution of ratings found for the 111 reference sites when rated using the 2004 method. However, given that the range of possible scores was reduced, it was not possible to get the exact same distribution. The number of Category I and IV wetlands are about the same (see table below), but the number of Category II and III wetlands differs. In the 2004 method 47% of the 111 sites were Category II whereas in this update only 40% of the sites are Category II. On the other hand, only 35% of the sites were Category III in 2004 while 44% are Category III in the 2014 update. Lowering the score between Category II and III wetlands by one point would have created an even bigger discrepancy in the other direction when using the updated method (58% of the sites would be Category II and only 26% would be Category III).

Number of Wetlands in Each Category Based on Their Score for Functions

Category	2004 Rating System	2014 Rating System
I	13	11
II	52	44
III	39	49
IV	7	7

Peer and public review

The 2004 version of the rating system went through a thorough peer and public review process as did the Credit/Debit Method. The new sections on Landscape Potential and Value were field tested for one year prior to publication in 2012. Over 40 individuals and groups provided [comments on the Credit/Debit Method](#).⁹ In addition to the 40 reviewers of the Credit/Debit Method, we received comments from 19 reviewers of a draft of the 2014 update prior to its publication.

The annotations and edits in Version 2 of the 2014 update are based on questions and comments received since publication of the first version. Generally, as requests for clarification were received, the edits herein were incorporated into the training Ecology provides on the wetland rating system as part of the active, iterative process of engaging with users of this method. Because we made no substantive changes to the underlying model, Version 2 did not go through a formal public comment period.

The rating system is based on the best information available at this time and meets the criteria for “best available science” under the Growth Management Act.

We anticipate that the method will be further modified over time as we keep increasing our understanding of our wetland resources.

⁹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1206005.html>

2. Rationale for the Categories

This rating system is designed to differentiate among wetlands based on their sensitivity to disturbance, significance, rarity, the functions they provide, and whether we can replace them or not. The emphasis is on identifying those wetlands:

- Where our ability to replace them is low.
- That are sensitive to adjacent disturbance.
- That are rare in the landscape.
- That perform many functions well.
- That are important in maintaining biodiversity.

The following description summarizes the rationale for including different wetland types in each category. As a general principle, it is important to note that wetlands of all categories have valuable functions in the landscape, and all are worthy of inclusion in programs for wetland protection.

2.1 Category I

Category I wetlands are those that 1) represent a unique or rare wetland type; or 2) are more sensitive to disturbance than most wetlands; or 3) are relatively undisturbed and contain ecological attributes that are impossible to replace within a human lifetime; or 4) provide a very high level of functions. We cannot afford the risk of any degradation to these wetlands because their functions and values are too difficult to replace. Generally, these wetlands are not common and make up a small percentage of the wetlands in the region. Of the 111 wetlands used to field-test the current rating system, only 11 (10%) were rated as a Category I.

In western Washington the following types of wetlands are Category I:

Large Undisturbed Estuarine Wetlands. Relatively undisturbed estuarine wetlands larger than 1 ac are Category I wetlands because they are rare and provide unique natural resources that are considered to be valuable to society. These wetlands need a high level of protection to maintain their functions and the values society derives from them.

Estuaries, the areas where freshwater and saltwater mix, are among the most highly productive and complex ecosystems where tremendous quantities of sediments, nutrients and organic matter are exchanged among terrestrial, freshwater, and marine communities. This availability of resources benefits an enormous variety of plants and animals. Fish, shellfish, birds, and plants are the most visible. However, there is also a huge variety of other life forms in an estuarine wetland: for example, many kinds of marine diatoms, macro-algae, and invertebrates are found there.

Estuarine systems have substantial economic value as well as environmental value. All Washington State estuaries have been modified to some degree, bearing the brunt of coastal development pressures through filling, draining, port development, and disposal of urban and industrial wastes. The over-harvest of certain commercial species has also modified the natural functioning of estuarine systems. Many Puget Sound estuaries, such as the Duwamish, Puyallup, Snohomish, and

Skagit, have been extensively modified. Up to 99% of the wetlands in some estuaries in the state have been lost.

Estuarine wetlands are also put into a separate category because the indicators used to characterize how well a freshwater wetland functions cannot be used for estuarine wetlands. No rapid methods have been developed to date to characterize how well estuarine wetlands function in the state at the time of the 2014 update.

Wetlands of High Conservation Value (formerly called Natural Heritage Wetlands). These Category I wetlands have been identified by scientists from the Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP) as important ecosystems for maintaining plant diversity in our state.

Annotation

Text describing numbers of rare plant communities was removed because the numbers were outdated. The text that follows was updated with information about using the mapping resources available at the time of publication.

We use the term **Wetland of High Conservation Value** (WHCV) to describe a wetland that supports rare species or a rare or high-quality ecosystem type. These are known and historical locations of any plant, nonvascular species, or ecosystems considered to be Endangered, Threatened, or Sensitive; or ecosystems prioritized by the WNHP based on a combination of the plant community type's rarity or risk of extinction and its ecological integrity. The WNHP refers to those data as "Element Occurrence (EO) records."

Historical data are records where species have not been observed in >40 years, but the area may not have been surveyed during that time. Historical data indicate the potential for rare plants to occur in the area and they are considered when applying a wetland rating.

All wetlands that overlap occurrences of rare species or rare ecosystem types, regardless of their condition, are considered to be WHCV, while occurrences of wetlands with common ecosystem types are WHCV only if they are in good to excellent condition, as determined by the WNHP (e.g., reference standard wetlands, Rocchio & Ramm-Granberg, 2017).

The [WNHP Data Explorer](#)¹⁰ displays locations of known and historical rare plants and rare and high-quality ecosystems at three levels of data precision, General, Minute, or Second. If any part of a wetland overlaps data from any of those layers at Second-level precision, regardless of the plants' wetland indicator status, the wetland meets the criteria for WHCV.

Minute-level data will require some additional information to make a determination about the status of the wetland as a WHCV. Use General-level EO polygons as an indicator to look for presence of the element in the field.

If you find a rare plant species, rare ecosystem (e.g., plant community), or high-quality common ecosystem that you believe would qualify the site as a WHCV but is not currently documented in the [WNHP Data Explorer](#),¹¹ you should submit the information to the WNHP. If the WNHP staff

¹⁰ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPdata>

¹¹ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPdata>

have the capacity to review the information they will make a determination about whether sufficient information exists to designate the site as a Wetland of High Conservation Value. If the WNHP does not respond within 30 days, then the wetland cannot be rated as a WHCV at this time. The [Washington Natural Heritage Program Rare Plant Sighting Form](#)¹² includes information required for documenting a new rare plant location.

Visit the WNHP's website for resources to assist in identifying rare plants and classifying the ecosystem:

- [Online Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington](#)¹³
- [Wetland and Riparian Vegetation Types](#)¹⁴

By categorizing these wetlands as Category I, we are trying to provide a high level of protection to these important and rare wetlands. These natural systems and species will survive in Washington only if we give them special attention and protection.

Bogs. Bogs are Category I wetlands because they are sensitive to disturbance and have not been successfully re-created through compensatory mitigation.

We use the term bogs to represent a range of acidic peat wetlands. The criteria we have been using in the rating system encompass a broader range of wetlands than what many scientists consider to be true bogs. Many scientists consider bogs to be peat wetlands that receive almost all of their water from rainfall (J. Rocchio, Washington Natural Heritage Program, personal communication, March 2014). Since many of the acidic peat wetlands in the state also get some of their water from the surrounding landscape or groundwater, they cannot be considered true bogs, but should rather be called "acidic fens." The criteria we use define a group of wetlands that should be called acidic peatlands, but we are not changing the name in the 2014 update to avoid confusion and because we have not changed the criteria for identifying bogs.

Bogs are wetlands with peat soils and a low pH, usually a pH <5. The chemistry of these wetlands is such that changes to the water regime or water quality of the wetland can easily alter their ecosystem. The plants and animals that grow in bogs are specifically adapted to such conditions and do not tolerate changes well. Immediate changes in the composition of the plant community often occur after the water regime changes. Minor changes in the water regime or nutrient levels in these systems can have major adverse impacts on the plant and animal communities (e.g., Grigal & Brooks, 1997).

In addition to being sensitive to disturbance, bogs are not successfully re-created through compensatory mitigation. Researchers in northern Europe and Canada have found that restoring bogs is difficult, specifically in regard to plant communities (Bolscher 1995; Grosvermier et al.,

¹² https://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/amp_nh_sighting_form.pdf

¹³ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPfieldguide>

¹⁴ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPwetlands>

1995; Schouwenaars, 1995; Schrautzer et al., 1996; Mazerolle et al., 2006), water regime (Grootjans & van Diggelen, 1995; Schouwenaars, 1995), and/or water chemistry (Wind-Mulder & Vitt, 2000). In fact, restoration may be impossible because changes to the biotic and abiotic properties preclude the re-establishment of bogs (Schouwenaars, 1995; Schrautzer et al., 1996), although one study (Lucchese et al., 2010) did find that a sphagnum layer did become re-established after 17 years. Furthermore, bogs form extremely slowly, with organic soils forming at a rate of about 1 in. per 40 years in western Washington (Rigg, 1958).

Wetlands with Mature and Old-Growth Forests. Mature and old-growth forested wetlands over 1 ac in size are rated as Category I because these wetlands cannot be easily replaced through compensatory mitigation. A mature forest may require a century or more to develop, and the full range of functions performed by these wetlands may take even longer (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). Placing mature and old-growth forests into a separate category makes it easier to address the temporal losses that accrue when forested wetlands are impacted and mitigation is required.

Wetlands in Coastal Lagoons. Coastal lagoons are shallow bodies of water, like a pond, partly or completely separated from the sea by a barrier beach. They may, or may not, be connected to the sea by an inlet, but they all receive periodic influxes of salt water. This can be either through storm surges overtopping the barrier beach, or by flow through the porous sediments of the beach.

Relatively undisturbed wetlands in coastal lagoons that are larger than $1/10$ ac are placed into Category I. They probably cannot be reproduced through compensatory mitigation (we have no record of restoration or creation of coastal lagoons in Washington), and they are relatively rare in the landscape. No information was found on any attempts to create or restore coastal lagoons in Washington that would suggest that this type of compensatory mitigation is possible. Any impacts to lagoons will, therefore, probably result in a net loss of their functions and values.

In addition, coastal lagoons and their associated wetlands are proving to be very important habitat for salmonids. Unpublished reports of ongoing research in the Puget Sound (Hirschi et al., 2003; Beamer et al., 2003) suggest that coastal lagoons are heavily used by juvenile salmonids.

Interdunal Wetlands Larger than 1 ac and Score High for Habitat. Interdunal wetlands form in the deflation plains and swales that are geomorphic features in areas of coastal dunes. These dune forms are the result of the interaction among sand, wind, water, and plants. The dune system immediately behind the ocean beach (the primary dune system) is very dynamic and can change from storm to storm (Wiedemann, 1984). For the purpose of rating, any wetlands that are located west of the upland boundary mapped in 1889 (western boundary of upland ownership) are considered to be interdunal.

The wetlands that form in the interdunal ecosystem are not well understood and most indicators used to rate the hydrologic and water quality functions of Depressional wetlands are not applicable. As a result, interdunal wetlands cannot be rated using the three-function approach used for freshwater wetlands elsewhere. However, the wetland resource is an important but small part of the total dune system (Wiedemann, 1984), and needs to be protected.

Some of the interdunal wetlands that have developed since 1889 have had time to develop a complex ecosystem with many habitat niches. Interdunal wetlands that score 8 or 9 points for habitat, and are larger than 1 ac, are Category I because they provide critical habitat in this ecosystem. Until we know more about how interdunal wetlands function, we need to provide adequate protection for this resource.

Wetlands That Perform Functions at High Levels. Wetlands scoring 23 points or more (out of 27) on the questions related to functions are Category I wetlands.

Not all wetlands function equally well, especially across the suite of functions performed. The field questionnaire was developed to provide a method by which wetlands can be rated based on their relative performance of different functions. Wetlands scoring 23 points or more were judged to have the highest levels of functions. These wetlands are also relatively rare. Of the 111 wetlands used to calibrate the rating system in western Washington, only 11 (10%) scored 23 points or higher based on their functions.

2.2 Category II

Category II wetlands are difficult, though not impossible, to replace, and provide high levels of some functions. These wetlands occur more commonly than Category I wetlands, but still need a relatively high level of protection. Category II wetlands in western Washington include:

Smaller Estuarine Wetlands. Any estuarine wetland smaller than 1 ac, or those that are disturbed and larger than 1 ac, are Category II wetlands. Although disturbed, these wetlands still provide unique natural resources that are considered to be valuable to society. Furthermore, the questions used to characterize how well a wetland functions cannot be used for estuarine wetlands.

Wetlands That Perform Functions Well. Wetlands scoring between 20-22 points (out of 27) on the questions related to the functions present are Category II wetlands. These wetlands were judged to perform most functions relatively well or performed one group of functions very well and the other two moderately well.

Interdunal Wetlands Larger than 1 Ac or Those in a Mosaic. The wetlands that form in the interdunal ecosystem are not well understood, and most indicators used to rate the hydrologic and water quality functions of Depressional wetlands are not applicable. As a result, interdunal wetlands cannot be rated using the three-function approach used for other freshwater wetlands. However, these wetlands are an important but small part of the total dune system (Wiedemann, 1984) and need to be protected.

Wetlands larger than 1 ac and that score 7 or lower for habitat, or those found in a mosaic of wetlands and dunes larger than 1 ac, are Category II because they also probably provide important habitat in this ecosystem that cannot be rated using the indicators in this method. Since we know so little about them, the precautionary principle was chosen to protect them.

2.3 Category III

Category III wetlands are 1) wetlands with a moderate level of functions (scores between 16-19 points), 2) can often be adequately replaced with a well-planned mitigation project, and 3) interdunal wetlands between 0.1 and 1 ac in size. Wetlands scoring between 16-19 points generally have been disturbed in some ways and are often less diverse or more isolated from other natural resources in the landscape than Category II wetlands.

2.4 Category IV

Category IV wetlands have the lowest levels of functions (scores fewer than 16 points) and are often heavily disturbed. These are wetlands that we should be able to replace, and in some cases be able to improve. However, experience has shown that replacement cannot be guaranteed in any specific case. These wetlands may provide some important functions, and also need to be protected.

3. Overview for Users

3.1 When to use the wetland rating system

The rating system is designed as a rapid screening tool to categorize wetlands for use by agencies and local governments in protecting and managing wetlands. It should be used only on vegetated wetlands as defined using the delineation procedures in WAC 173-22-035. The rating system does not try to establish the economic values present in a wetland; it only helps to identify its sensitivity, significance, rarity, and functions.

Two versions of the rating system have been developed, one for western Washington and one for eastern. This broad division of the state into east and west may not reflect all regional differences in the importance of wetlands. Developing special measures to protect locally unique wetlands is recommended where local governments need to provide a level of protection that would not be otherwise provided by the rating system.

3.2 How the wetland rating system works

The Wetlands Rating Form (the rating form) in Appendix A of this document asks the user to collect information about the wetland in a step-by-step process. We recommend careful reading of the guidance and taking one of the classes on the rating system given by the Department of Ecology before filling out the form. A wetland may be rated in two different categories based on the different criteria used in this method. It is important, therefore, to fill out the entire rating form. If two categories can be applied to a wetland, it is the one that provides the most protection that applies.

If you are interested in learning more about how the rating system was developed, details are described in Hruby (2001, 2009). In addition, Appendix D discusses rapid methods for characterizing functions and how this rating system was calibrated.

3.3 General guidance for using the Wetland Rating Form

Land-owner's permission

It is important to obtain permission from the landowner(s) before going on their property.

Time involved

Over the last decade the scientific community has standardized how we group assessment methods based on the information collected and the time required (Kentula, 2007). The rating system is classified as a "rapid method" or "Level 2 Assessment" (see definitions in box on next page). We define *rapid* as usually taking no more than two people a half day in the field and requiring no more than a half day of office preparation and data analysis to come to an answer (Fennessy et al., 2004). In some cases, however, it may be necessary to visit the wetland more than once. Some of the questions cannot be answered if the ground is covered with snow or the surface water is frozen. If this is the case at the time a wetland is being rated, it may be necessary to revisit the site later.

NOTE: We recommend that field work always be done by two people for reasons of safety.

Levels of assessment

Wetland assessment techniques are classified as Levels 1, 2, or 3 based on the scope and detail required to complete the assessment (Kentula, 2007). The levels are generally defined as follows:

- Level 1 Assessment: Expert systems that use readily available digital data to define ecological relationships based on best professional judgment.
- Level 2 Assessment: Rapid assessment based on data collection from easily observable field indicators. A Level 2 assessment usually lasts less than four hours in the field, has relatively simple metrics, and results in a single rating for each wetland.
- Level 3 Assessment: Comprehensive assessment in which quantitative data are collected on biological, physical, chemical, and/or morphological aspects of the ecosystem.

Several of the questions require analyzing and preparing figures. Aerial photographs downloaded from the internet, topographic, or other maps are useful for preparing these figures. The list of figures needed to correctly answer the questions is found on the back of the first page of the rating form in Appendix A.

Experience and qualifications needed

It is important that the person completing the rating have experience in the identification of natural wetland features, indicators of wetland function, vegetation classes, and some ability to distinguish among different plant species. Reviewers of the rating system should also be familiar with wetlands and how they function. We recommend that qualified wetland consultants or wetland experts be used to rate most sites, particularly the larger and more complex ones. This will help ensure that the results are repeatable.

Training is highly recommended

In addition, we highly recommend that users of this method take the training provided by the Department of Ecology on this method.

Users of this method who have not taken the training can expect that, on the average, their scores for the functions will be off by at least 1 point per function. This is based on data collected during the calibration of the 2004 Wetland Rating Systems and subsequent training sessions. Untrained users will underestimate, or overestimate, the scores for functions by 15%. This is an average, and actual differences may be as high as 40%.

Maps and figures

Some of the questions on the rating form can only be answered by drawing polygons on aerial photos of the site and by calculating the relative area of these polygons (as a percent of total area) within or surrounding the wetland. Visual estimates of area can be prone to large errors as high as 40%. **The pictures or figures used to make these estimates have to be included with the rating form for the rating to be considered as complete.** A list of the figures and photographs needed is provided in the rating form in Appendix A.

Rating the wetland

Each wetland can have several ratings: one resulting from its score for the functions, and one or more resulting from special characteristics it may have. The first page of the rating form contains a box for recording each rating. This box should be filled out after completing the form. If the wetland meets the criteria for two categories, select the one that will provide the higher level of protection for the wetland.

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4. Identifying Wetland Boundaries for Rating

To begin, determine the location and approximate boundaries of all wetlands at the site you are investigating. A surveyed delineation of the wetland is not necessary to rate the wetland unless this information is required for another part of your project. The boundary, however, will need to be verified during the field visit. Boundaries that are not verified by a field survey may cause problems in the scoring of the indicators. This is especially true in forested wetlands where the boundaries are difficult to determine from aerial photographs.

The rating form identifies the information that needs to be included on aerial photos or maps and submitted with the form. It is highly recommended that you obtain aerial photos of the site.

The entire wetland has to be scored. Usually, it is the entire delineated wetland that is scored. Small areas within a wetland (such as the footprint of an impact) cannot be rated separately. The method is not sensitive enough, or complex enough, to allow division of a wetland into smaller units based on level of disturbance, property lines, or plant communities. **DO NOT SCORE ONLY THE PART BEING ALTERED OR MITIGATED** (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Footprint of the impact is the yellow rectangle, but the unit for rating is the entire wetland (red line).

Furthermore, you do not subdivide a wetland into different hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classes if more than one is present. A wetland with more than one HGM class within its boundary is treated as one HGM class for rating (Figure 2). The second page of the classification key in Appendix A provides guidance on how to classify wetlands having more than one HGM class within its boundary.



Figure 2. A wetland with two HGM classes (Slope and Lake Fringe) within the delineated boundary. This wetland is rated as a Lake Fringe wetland.

There are, however, ecological criteria that can be used to separate very large wetlands into smaller units for scoring. These criteria are described below.

If you do not have access to the entire wetland because the wetland includes different properties or because parts of the site are impenetrable or not accessible, you should do the best you can to answer the questions from aerial photos, using binoculars, or any other additional information. Note your lack of access on the rating form and record which questions are based on incomplete data.

More detailed data are needed to adequately assess functions in only a part of a wetland

The rating of an entire wetland unit rather than just the part of it being mitigated or impacted is a trade-off made between scientific rigor and the need for a rapid method. None of the rapid methods developed by Ecology (the rating systems and function assessment methods) are rigorous enough to adequately assess the functions of only a small area within a wetland unit. We did numerous tests of this question, and both methods produced invalid results when applied to small areas within a wetland. More-detailed data are needed to adequately assess functions in only a part of a wetland. This would require monitoring and measuring the actual processes taking place in different parts of a wetland rather than characterizing the structural indicators present and would certainly require monthly sampling for at least one year.

4.1 Identifying unit boundaries in large contiguous wetlands in valleys (Depressional and Riverine)

Wetlands can often form large contiguous areas that extend over hundreds of acres. This is especially true in river valleys where there is some surface water connection among all areas of the floodplain. In these situations, the initial task is to identify the wetland unit that will be rated. A large contiguous area of wetland can be divided into smaller units using the criteria described below.

The guiding principles for separating a wetland in a valley into different units are changes in the water regime or a lack of wetland plants. Boundaries between different units should be set at the point where the volume, flow, or velocity of the water changes abruptly. These changes in water regime can be either natural or caused by humans (anthropogenic). The following sections describe some common situations that might occur. The criteria for separating wetlands into different units are based on the observations made during the calibration of the rating systems and the methods for assessing wetland functions. They reflect the collective judgment of the teams of wetland experts that developed and calibrated the methods.

Examples of changes in water regime

- Berms, dikes, cascades, rapids, falls, and culverts.
- Features that change flow, volume, or velocity of water over short distances.
- The presence of ditches that significantly reduce water detention in one area of a wetland.

Wetland units in a series of depressions in a valley

Wetlands that form ponded depressions in river corridors may contain constrictions where the wetland narrows between two or more depressions. The key consideration is the direction of flow through the constriction. If the water moves back and forth freely it is **not** a separate unit. If the

flow between depressions is unidirectional, downgradient, and has a change in elevation from one part to the other, then a separate unit should be created. The justification for separating wetlands increases as the flow between two areas becomes more unidirectional and has a higher velocity. Constrictions can be natural or made by humans (e.g., culverts) (Figure 3). Generally, if the high-water mark in the lower wetland is 6 in. or more lower than the high-water mark in the upper wetland, then the two should be considered as separate units for rating.

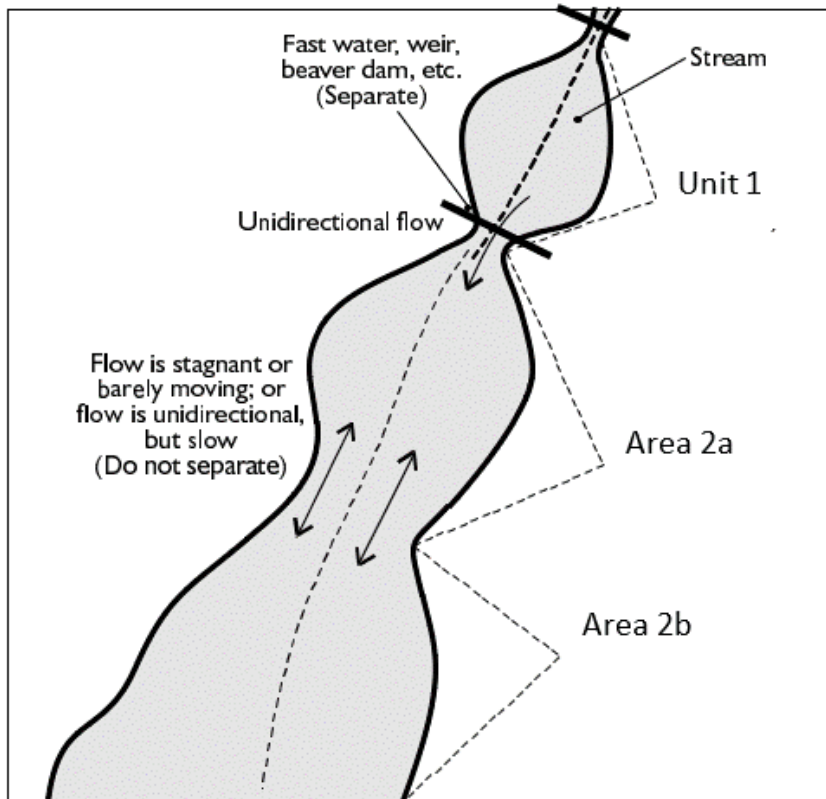


Figure 3. Determining depressional wetland units along a stream corridor with constrictions. Black lines show the break in units. Unit 1 is broken at a weir or beaver dam with fast water moving in one direction, and areas 2a and 2b have stagnant or very limited flow and should be rated as one unit.

4.2 Wetland units along the banks of streams or rivers

In western Washington, linear wetlands contiguous with a stream or river may be broken into units using criteria based on either hydrologic factors or the distribution of plants. Figure 4 presents a diagram of how wetland units might be separated along a stream corridor based on change in the water regime. Three changes in water regime are illustrated: 1) a weir or dam, 2) a series of rapids, and 3) a tributary coming into the main stream that increases the flow significantly (generally by > 25%).

NOTE: Unit 1 in Figure 4 should be classified as a Depressional wetland. Units 2, 3, and 4 would probably be Riverine or Slope, depending on the area of overbank flooding.

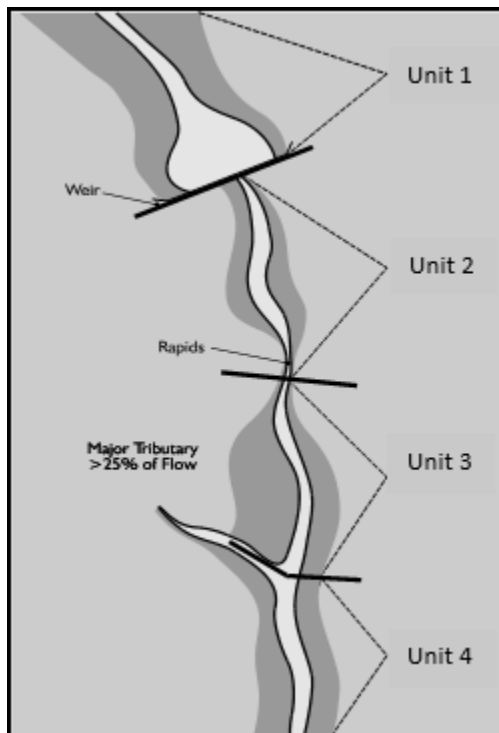


Figure 4. Determining wetland units in a riverine system based on changes in water regime. Black lines show the break in units. Unit 1 is broken at a weir, unit 2 is broken at rapids, and units 3 and 4 are broken where a major tributary inlets to the stream, contributing >25% of the flow.

Figure 5 illustrates how units can be separated based on the distribution of plants. Units can be separated when: 1) plants disappear and are replaced with unvegetated bars or banks for at least 50 ft along the stream, and 2) the wetland plant community is less than 30 ft wide along the shore for at least 100 ft.

In cases when a wetland contains a stream or river, you must also decide whether the stream or river is a part of the wetland. Use the following guidelines to make your decision:

- Wetland on one side only — If the wetland unit is contiguous with, but only on one side of, a river or stream, **do not** include the river as a characteristic of the wetland unit for rating.
- Wetland on both sides of a wide stream or river — If the river or stream has an unvegetated channel that is more than 50 ft (15 m) wide, and there are contiguous wetland areas on both sides, treat **each side as a separate unit** for rating. **Do not** include the river as a characteristic of the wetland unit for rating.
- Wetland on both sides of a narrow river or stream — If the river or stream has an unvegetated channel less than 50 ft (15 m) wide, and there are contiguous vegetated wetlands on both sides, treat **both sides together** as one unit, and **include** the river as a characteristic of the wetland.

Annotation: When the river is excluded as a characteristic of the wetland unit for rating it should still be considered when rating the hydroperiods in H 1.2, interspersions in H 1.4, special habitat features in H 1.5, and Priority Habitats in H 3.1.

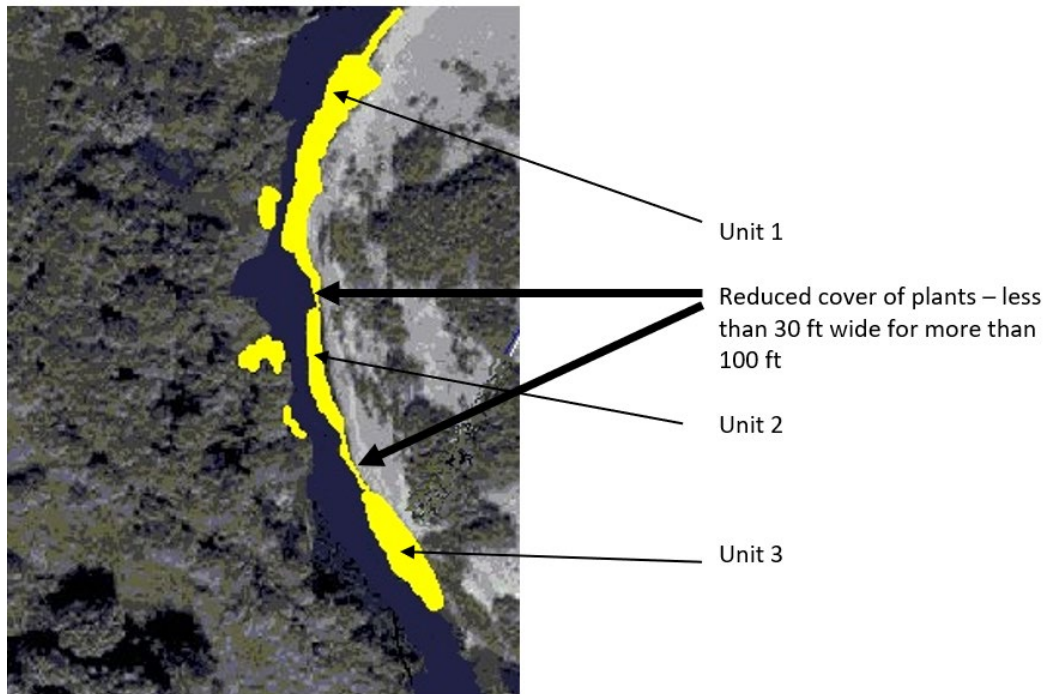


Figure 5. Determining wetland units in a riverine setting based on reduced plant cover. In this case the river is wider than 50 ft and the vegetated wetlands on either side are rated separately. Separate units for rating on the same side of the river are shown by thin arrows, and the break between units is shown by bold arrows, halfway along the distance where the cover of plants is less than 30 ft wide for more than 100 ft.

4.3 Identifying wetland units in a patchwork on the landscape (mosaic)

If the wetland area being scored contains a mosaic of wetlands and uplands, the entire mosaic **should be considered one unit** when:

- Each patch of wetland is less than 1 ac (0.4 ha), AND
- Each patch is less than 100 ft (30 m) away from the nearest wetland, AND
- The total area delineated as vegetated wetland is more than 50% of the total area of wetlands and uplands, open water, and river bars around which you can draw a polygon (see Figure 6), AND
- There are at least three patches of wetland that meet the size and distance thresholds.

If these criteria are not met, each wetland area should be considered as a separate unit for this method (see Figure 6).

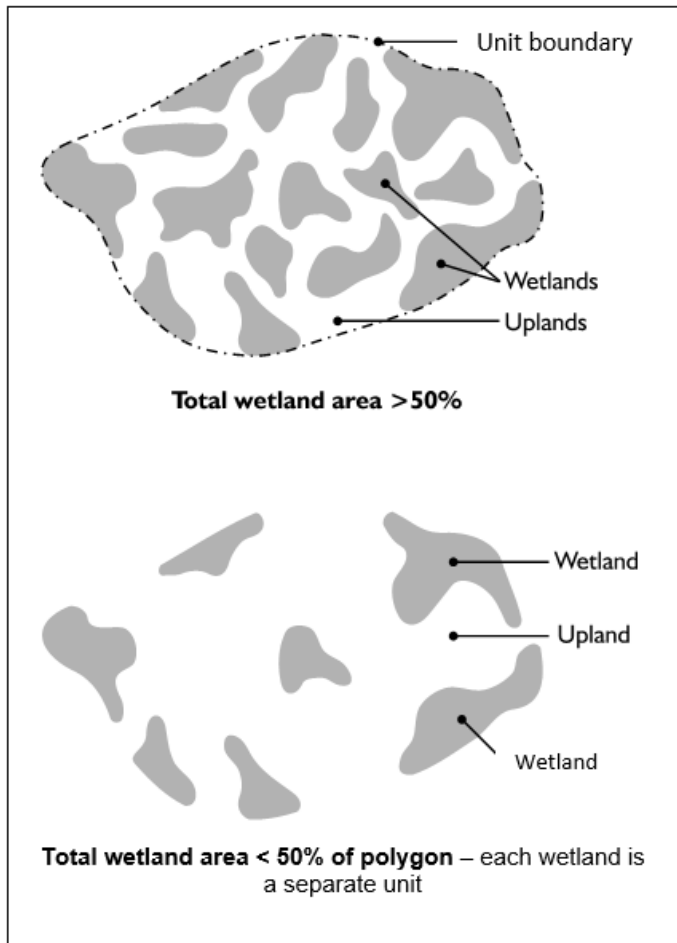


Figure 6. Determining unit boundaries when wetlands are in small patches. Each wetland polygon should be scored separately when the total area is less than 50% wetland. The group of polygons on top can be combined to cover >50% within the unit boundary and rated as one mosaic wetland. The polygons on the bottom cannot be combined to cover >50% of the area and must be rated as separate units.

4.4 Identifying wetland unit boundaries along the shores of lakes or reservoirs (Lake Fringe wetlands only)

Lakes or reservoirs will often have a fringe of wetland plants along their shores. Different areas of this vegetated fringe can be separated into different units if there are gaps where the width of plants narrows, or they disappear completely. Use the following criteria for separating units along a lakeshore.

Only the vegetated areas along the lake shore are considered part of the wetland unit for rating. Open water within areas of plants is considered to be part of the wetland, but open water that separates patches of plants along a shore is not considered to be part of the wetland (Figure 7).

If only some parts of the lakeshore are vegetated with wetland plants, separate the vegetated parts into different units at the points where the wetland plants thin out to less than a foot in width for at least 33 ft (10m) (Figure 8).

NOTE: If the open water is less than 20 ac, the entire area (open water and any other vegetated areas) is considered as one wetland unit and is a Depressional or Riverine wetland.



Open water inside the boundary of unit being rated.

Open water outside the boundary of unit being rated.

Figure 7. Lake fringe wetland with open water within the vegetated area. The circle inside the Lake Fringe wetland with the arrow pointing to it shows the open water that is included within the wetland boundary. The arrow pointing to the water outside the Lake Fringe wetland shows the open water outside of the unit boundary.



Figure 8. Break in lake fringe vegetation along a shoreline. The yellow arrow shows the absence of wetland plants along the shore that separates the wetlands into two units for rating.

Another common situation found in western Washington is a Lake Fringe wetland that is contiguous with a large wetland that extends far from the edge of the lake (Figure 9). These wetlands are usually classified as Depressional or Riverine. The entire unit of Riverine and Lake Fringe wetlands should be rated as one unit.

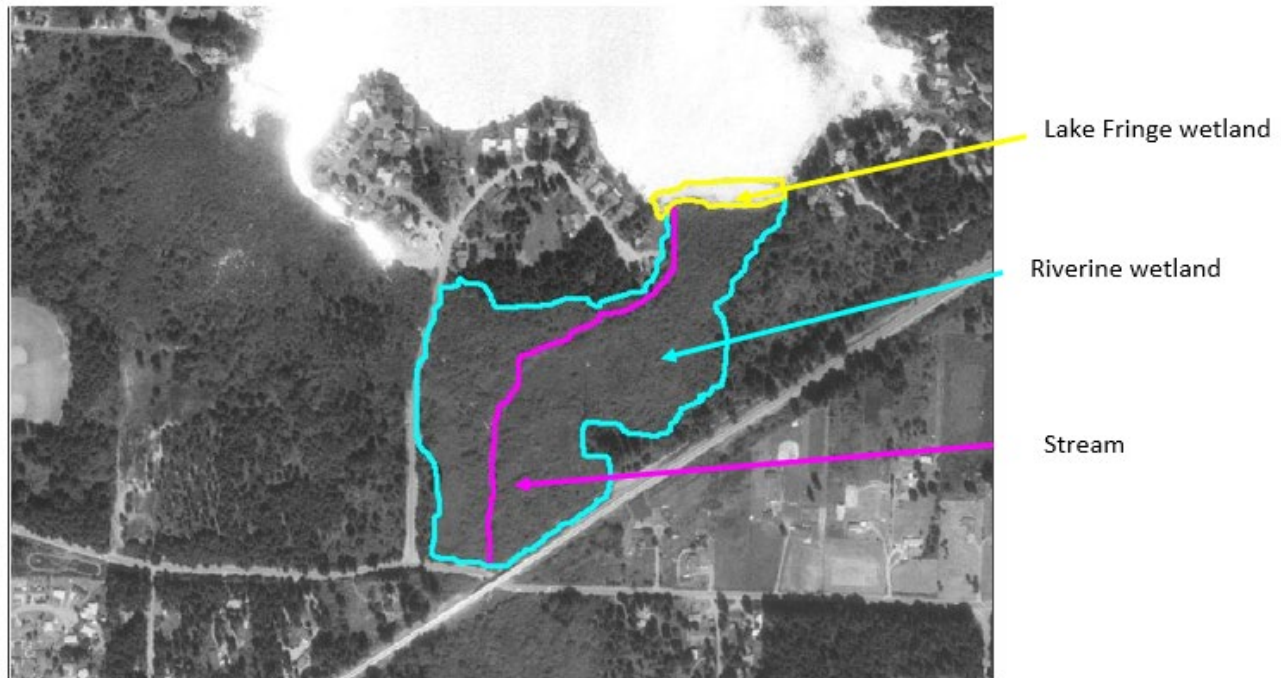


Figure 9. Aerial photograph of a Lake Fringe wetland connected to a Riverine wetland without any topographic or hydrologic breaks between them. Both classes of wetlands are rated as one using the questions for the Riverine class.

Sometimes a strip of open water is found between the wetland plants farther from shore and those closer to shore. In this situation, the open water is considered a part of one unit that encompasses both the rooted submerged plants offshore and the shore-side plants. The absence of plants in the area of open water may only be temporary, or the submerged plants are present but not visible because they do not grow to the surface. The plants may also be absent due to wave action or physical removal.

4.5 Wetlands bisected by human-made features

When a Depressional wetland is divided by a human-made feature, such as a road embankment, the wetland should not be divided into different units if there is a level surface-water connection between the two parts of the wetland. Water should be able to flow equally well between the two areas. For example, if there is a wetland on either side of a road with a culvert connecting the two, and both sides of the culvert are partially or completely underwater for most of the year, the wetland should be treated as one unit. Make the downgradient wetland a separate unit, however, if the bottom of the culvert is above the high-water marks in the receiving wetland, or the high-water marks on either side of the road or dike differ by more than 6 in. of elevation.

4.6 Cases when a wetland should not be divided

Differences in land use within a wetland should not be used to define units unless they coincide with the circumstances described above. Many functions that wetlands perform are independent of the land use in the wetland. For example, a Depressional wetland has approximately the same amount of live storage whether the surface is a shrub community or a pasture.

Furthermore, the rating system used in this method is not robust enough to capture slight differences in habitat functions within different portions of the same wetland unit. Attempts were made during the calibration of the 2004 Wetland Rating System (Hruby, 2004b) to score different portions of a wetland unit based on differences in land use, but the results did not provide an accurate representation of the system. This compromise is necessary in order to make the tool rapid and easy to use. For example, if half a wetland has been recently cleared for farming and the other half left intact, the entire area functions as, and should be categorized as, one unit. Figure 10 shows a wetland that is a lawn along one side and a wetland plant community on the other side. In this case, the entire wetland should be rated as one unit.



Figure 10. A wetland with two land uses and separated by a fence. The entire wetland should be treated as one unit.

4.7 Freshwater wetlands where only part of the wetland is a forest or a bog

Freshwater wetlands may be rated as Category I because they contain a smaller area of bogs or mature or old-growth forest. If the entire wetland (including the bog and forested areas) scores between 16 and 22 points for its functions (Table 1), it may be possible to assign a dual rating to the wetland (Category I/II, Category I/III).

Table 1. Situations where dual ratings may be possible.

Rating Based on Special Characteristics	Score for Functions 23-27	Score for Functions 20-22	Score for Functions 16-19
Cat. I bog	Not possible – Cat. I	I/II	I/III
Cat. I forest	Not possible – Cat. I	I/II	I/III

To develop a dual rating, you will need to establish a boundary within the wetland that clearly establishes the area that is the Category I bog or forest. If you are unable to clearly map the boundaries between the forest or bog and the rest of the wetland, it may be impossible to assign a dual rating.

Dual ratings are acceptable only when a wetland contains a small area of bog or forest, or in certain estuarine cases (see below). **Wetlands that are Category I Wetlands of High Conservation Value, Category I Coastal Lagoons, or Category I and II Interdunal Wetlands** cannot be assigned a dual rating.

The criteria to be used in establishing the boundary between the Category I part of a wetland and those that are either Category II or III are as follows:

- For wetland areas that are Category I as a result of the presence of a forest, the boundary between categories should be set at the edge of the forest.
- For small wetland areas that are Category I because they are bogs, the boundary between categories should be set where the characteristic vegetation of acidic peatlands changes (i.e., most of the plants that are specifically adapted to acidic peatlands are replaced with more common wetland species) and/or where the organic soils become shallow (less than 16 in.).

4.8 Category I estuarine wetlands with a fringe of *Spartina* species

A dual rating is also possible when an estuarine wetland that meets the criteria for a Category I estuarine wetland has a fringe along the seaward edge of the invasive *Spartina* species. The area that has more than 10% cover of *Spartina*, but no other invasive species, meets the criteria for a Category II estuarine wetland. The entire vegetated system can be categorized as an estuarine I/II. The boundary between the two categories is the zone where the cover of *Spartina* species

becomes 10%. The area of *Spartina* would be rated a Category II, while the relatively undisturbed upper marsh with native species would be a Category I.

4.9 Very small wetlands

Users often question the effectiveness of using rapid methods in wetlands that are $\frac{1}{4}$ ac or less. One tree or shrub may be all that is needed in a small wetland to score points on the rating form for certain questions. The data collected during the calibration of the rating systems, however, indicate that wetlands smaller than $\frac{1}{4}$ ac can be rated accurately. The smallest wetlands rated during the calibration were about $\frac{1}{10}$ ac in size (see Figure 11 for an example of a small wetland that is about $\frac{1}{10}$ ac in size), and all were judged by the field teams to be adequately characterized.



Figure 11. A Slope wetland near Padilla Bay that is approximately $\frac{1}{10}$ ac in size.

At present, the accuracy of the scoring has not been tested for wetlands smaller than $\frac{1}{10}$ ac, but the method may be applicable to even smaller wetlands because the scoring of water quality and hydrologic functions is not dependent on the size or the habitat niches in the wetland.

For example, the ability of a square yard of organic soil in a wetland to remove nitrogen is not dependent on the size of the wetland. A square yard of soil in a wetland of $\frac{1}{10}$ ac can be just as effective at performing a function as a square yard in a large wetland. The same is true for the hydrologic functions. A small wetland that stores 3 ft of water during a flooding event is more effective, on a per-acre basis, than a large wetland that stores only 1 ft. The larger wetland may store a larger volume overall, but it is the volume per unit area that needs to be characterized.

Impacts to wetlands are usually calculated by area. For example, an impact to $\frac{1}{10}$ ac of a wetland that stores 3 ft of water needs to be mitigated by replacing a similar amount of storage (i.e., 3 ft over $\frac{1}{10}$ ac). It makes no difference if the size of the wetland impacted is $\frac{1}{4}$ ac, 10 ac, or 100 ac.

The field testing, however, indicated that the method will not work well for scoring habitat functions in wetlands smaller than $\frac{1}{10}$ ac (4000 ft²). For example, one large tree may cover 400 ft² of a 4,000 ft² wetland and this would give it a "forested" class. It is not expected, however, that the tree will provide functions to the same level as a forested class in a larger wetland. On the other hand, wetlands that are larger than $\frac{1}{10}$ ac are adequately characterized. This is based on the consensus of the different teams (function assessment and rating) that went out into the field when we were developing the methods.

Also, very small wetlands may not provide good habitat for some of the larger wildlife species such as otter or beaver, but they are known to provide critical habitat for many smaller species. For example, amphibians were found using and breeding in wetlands as small as 270 ft² in the Palouse region of northern Idaho (Monello and Wright, 1999).

Thus, very small wetlands may be less important for large wildlife but more important for smaller wildlife. Since the methods were judged to be accurate for wetlands as small as a $\frac{1}{10}$ of an acre, the review team and the Department of Ecology staff decided not to develop additional questions for very small wetlands less than $\frac{1}{10}$ ac in size. Very small wetlands can be rated with the understanding that the results are not as robust as in larger wetlands.

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5. Detailed Guidance for the Rating Form: Scoring Functions

This chapter provides detailed guidance for answering the questions on the rating form (Appendix A). The questions are listed in the order they appear on the form. Results from each section should be summarized on the first page of the form. More than three-fourths of the questions are the same as, or similar to, those used in the previous version of the Washington State Wetland Rating System for Western Washington (Ecology publication #04-06-025).

A correctly filled out Wetland Rating Form requires maps or figures to correctly answer the questions. Most of these maps are needed to estimate the area covered by different environmental indicators, but several can be combined in one figure. The second page of the rating form lists the figures and photographs needed to correctly fill out the form.

NOTE: Do not estimate area visually without a graphic aid such as a gridded overlay or GIS program. Visual estimates of area can be off by 30-40% and this will change the results.

Training is highly recommended

An analysis of data collected during training sessions and field tests suggest that untrained users of this method can expect that, on the average, their scores will be off by at least 4 points out of 27. One-third of untrained users will have errors of 8 points or more.

5.1 Classifying the wetland

Scientists have come to understand that wetlands can perform functions in different ways. The way wetlands function depends to a large degree on hydrologic and geomorphic conditions (Brinson, 1993). As a result, we group wetlands into categories based on the geomorphic and hydrologic characteristics that control many functions. This classification system is called the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) Classification.

The rating system described here uses only the highest grouping in the HGM classification (i.e., wetland class). The more detailed methods for assessing wetland functions developed for eastern and western Washington (Hruby et al., 1999; Hruby et al., 2000) refine this classification and subdivide some of the classes further.

A classification key is provided with the rating form to help you identify whether the wetland is Tidal Fringe, Flats, Lake Fringe, Slope, Riverine, or Depressional. The key contains eight questions that need to be answered sequentially. Each question is described below in more detail than that found in the key.

Question 1: Tidal Fringe Wetlands

Tidal Fringe wetlands are found along the coasts and in river mouths to the extent of tidal influence. The dominant source of water is from the ocean or river. The unifying characteristic of this class is how water moves in the unit. All Tidal Fringe wetlands have water flows dominated by tidal influences, and water depths are usually controlled by tidal cycles in the adjacent ocean.

This method does not rate the functions and values of estuarine wetlands, but it can be used to rate the functions of freshwater Tidal Fringe wetlands.

Tidal Fringe wetlands in which the water has a salinity higher than 0.5 parts per thousand are classified as “Estuarine” and not scored for functions. Tidal Fringe wetlands in which the waters are tidal but freshwater (salinities below 0.5 parts per thousand), are scored using the form for Riverine freshwater wetlands.

There are numerous Tidal Fringe wetlands in the estuaries and tidal sloughs in the Puget Sound region as well as in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. The difficulty is in identifying the boundary between fresh and brackish waters. In the absence of local information (e.g., the salt wedge in the Snohomish River extends upstream to the Route 2 bridge), users will have to rely on plants to identify the boundaries between fresh and salt water. Appendix B lists common wetland plants that are tolerant of salt (from Hutchinson, 1991). If the dominant plants in the community are those listed as “Tolerant” or “Very Tolerant,” it can be assumed that the waters in the slough or river at that point are saline.

Figure 12 shows Edison Slough, which has a fringe of *Triglochin* sp. and *Carex lyngbyei* along the edge of the mudflat and a fringe of freshwater plants above the area of those salt-tolerant species. Based on the salt-tolerant plants, the wetland is classified as “estuarine.” If you have a situation with salt tolerant plants and a fringe of freshwater plants such as the one presented in Figure 12, you should consider the entire unit as estuarine. See question 8 on the classification key in the rating form.



Figure 12. An estuarine slough at low tide with salt-tolerant plants along the edges and a fringe of freshwater plants above the salt-tolerant plants.

Question 2: Flats Wetlands

Flats wetlands occur in topographically flat areas that are hydrologically isolated from surrounding groundwater or surface water. The main source of water in these wetlands is precipitation directly on the wetland itself. They receive virtually no groundwater discharge or surface runoff from the surrounding landscape. This characteristic distinguishes them from Depressional and Slope wetlands. In western Washington such wetlands are very rare. They occur in areas raised above the surrounding landscape and underlain by glacial till. It is highly unlikely that you can find a Flats wetland in areas where the rate of evapotranspiration is greater than rainfall, such as eastern Washington.

Wetlands that should be classified as Flats may be hard to distinguish from flat Depressional wetlands that are fed by groundwater. This need not be a concern, however, because both Depressional and Flats wetlands use the same questions in the rating form.

Question 3: Lake Fringe Wetlands

Lake Fringe wetlands are on the water side of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) of lakes. Lake Fringe wetlands are separated from other wetlands based on the area and depth of open water adjacent to them. If the area of open water next to a vegetated wetland is larger than 20 ac (8 ha), and more than 6.6 ft deep (2 m) over 30% of the open water areas, the wetland is considered to be Lake Fringe. The criterion here is 20 ac of open water without any aquatic plants.

The Shoreline Management Act (SMA) requires that a water body have 20 ac within the OHWM in order to be considered a lake under shoreline jurisdiction. Thus a 20-ac shallow pond that is completely vegetated would be a lake under the SMA but a Depressional wetland for the purpose of this method.

The definition of lakes in this rating system is based on limnological characteristics and not the criteria used in the SMA. Lakes have different environmental processes than do small ponds (e.g., stratification, spring turnover, etc.). In general, these processes occur in western Washington only in systems that have at least 20 ac of open water that is deeper than 6.6 ft. Figure 13 shows a Lake Fringe wetland in Snohomish County with aquatic bed plants and a fringe of wetland shrubs.

Wetlands found along the shores of large reservoirs such as those found behind the dams along the major rivers are also considered to be Lake Fringe. Although the area was once a river valley, the wetlands along the shores of the reservoirs function more like Lake Fringe wetlands rather than Riverine wetlands. The technical teams developing the 2004 Wetland Rating Systems (Hruby, 2004 a; b) decided to include wetlands along the shores of reservoirs as Lake Fringe if they meet the thresholds for open water and depth.



Figure 13. Lake Fringe wetland with an area of aquatic bed plants and a narrow band of wetland shrubs along the shore.

Question 4: Slope Wetlands

Slope wetlands occur on hill or valley slopes where groundwater surfaces and begins running along the surface, or immediately below the surface. Water in these wetlands flows only in one direction (down the slope) and the gradient is steep enough that the water is not impounded. The downhill side of the wetland is always the point of lowest elevation in the wetland. Figure 14 shows a Slope wetland that formed where the slope of the hillside changed and caused groundwater to come to the surface.

Slope wetlands with surface flows can be distinguished from Riverine wetlands by the lack of a defined stream bed with banks. Slope wetlands may develop small rivulets along the surface, but they serve only to convey water away from the wetland. There is no surface flow coming into the wetland through channels. Also, Slope wetlands do not impound water except in very small depressions that may form on the surface. These are only a few inches in diameter and a few inches deep.

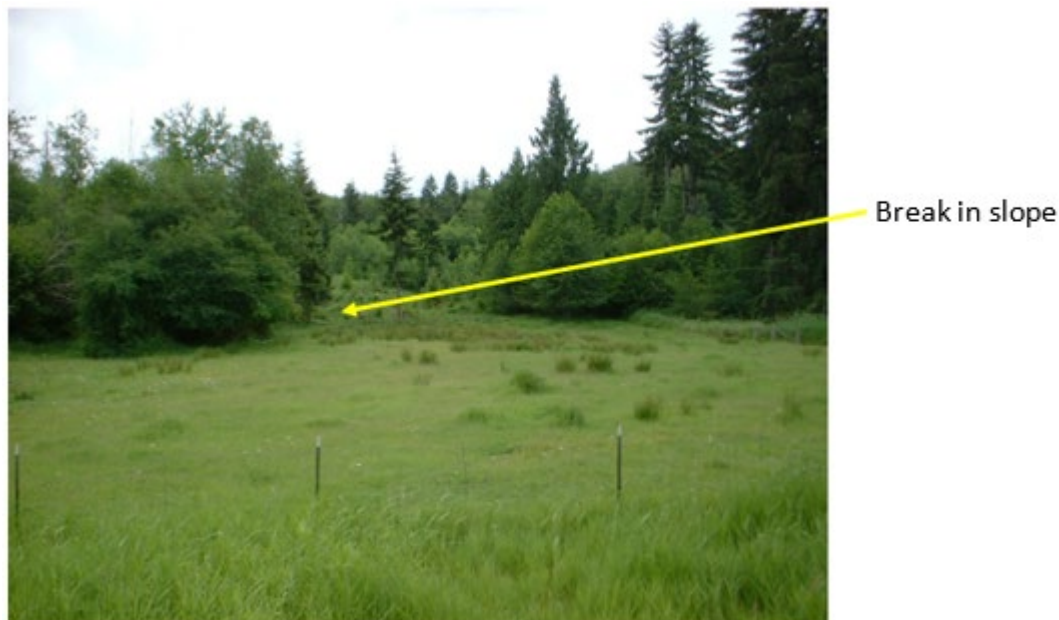


Figure 14. Slope wetland in Lewis County identified by the presence of wetland plants (*Carex* spp., *Juncus* spp.) and hydric soils. Wetland occurs where there is a break in the slope of the hillside.

Question 5: Riverine Wetlands

Riverine wetlands occur in valleys associated with stream or river channels. They lie in the active floodplain and have important hydrologic links to the flows in the river or stream. Their proximity to the river facilitates both the rapid transfer of floodwaters in and out of the wetland and the import and export of sediments. The distinguishing characteristic of Riverine wetlands in western Washington is that they are flooded by overbank flow from the river at least once every 2 years on average over a 10-year period. Riverine wetlands, however, may also receive significant amounts of water from other sources such as groundwater and slope discharges.

Wetlands that lie in floodplains but are not as frequently flooded by the river are **not** classified as Riverine. Also, wetlands behind dikes are usually disconnected from the active floodplain and are no longer regularly flooded. In cases where wetlands in floodplains are not flooded frequently enough to meet the flooding criterion, they should be classified as Depressional or Slope.

Riverine wetlands are often replaced by Depressional or Slope wetlands near the headwaters of streams and rivers, where the channel (bed) and bank disappear, and overbank flooding grades into inundation by surface or groundwater. In headwaters, the dominant source of water becomes surface runoff or groundwater seepage. However, for the purposes of classification, wetlands that show evidence of frequent overbank flooding, even if from an intermittent stream, are considered Riverine even if they receive water from surface flows or groundwater.

Riverine wetlands normally merge with Tidal Fringe wetlands near the mouths of rivers. The interface occurs where tidal fluctuations become the dominant hydrologic driver (Brinson et al., 1995). This interface has been significantly modified in western Washington by diking. Many wetlands that were once freshwater tidal are now either Riverine or Depressional (depending on the frequency of flooding).

The operative characteristic of Riverine wetlands in Washington is that of being “frequently flooded” by overbank flows (Figure 15).

In western Washington the technical committees developing wetland methods decided that the frequency of overbank flooding needed to call a wetland Riverine is at least once in 2 years (2-yr return frequency). This characteristic, however, cannot be easily measured in the field and needs to be established from field indicators. The following are some field indicators that can be used to classify a wetland as Riverine:

- Scour marks common in the wetland.
- Recent sediment deposits.
- Plants bent in one direction or damaged.
- Soils with layered deposits of sediment.
- Flood marks on plants along the edge of the bank at different levels.

Wetlands that are created in a stream channel by impounded water from an obstruction such as a beaver dam, weir, or debris dam are considered to be Depressional rather than Riverine. The major hydrologic factor that maintains and provides the structures in these systems is the ongoing flow that is impounded. The overbank flooding is not as important a factor. A wetland would be considered Riverine, however, if the dam or weir impounds water for only a short time, such as a single storm. The impounded water must be present for at least two months every year to be considered Depressional.



Figure 15. A Riverine wetland inundated by flood waters from North Creek. The creek is in the background. This creek floods the wetland at least once a year.

Question 6: Depressional Wetlands

Depressional wetlands occur in topographic depressions where the elevation of the surface within the wetland is lower than in the surrounding landscape. The shapes of Depressional wetlands vary, but in all cases, the movement of surface water and shallow subsurface water is toward the lowest point in the depression. The depression may have an outlet, but the lowest point in the wetland is somewhere within the boundary, not at the outlet.

Depressional wetlands can sometimes be hard to identify because the depressions in which they are found are not very evident. By working through the key, it may not be necessary to look at topographic maps or try to identify whether the lowest point of the wetland is in the middle of the depression. If a wetland has surface ponding, even if only for a short time, and is not Lake Fringe or Riverine, it can be classified as Depressional (Figure 16).



Figure 16. A Depressional wetland. Note the surface ponding in the low point of the wetland where the cattails are found.

Question 7: Flat Areas Maintained by High Groundwater

Many wetlands have developed on the outwash plains left by the glaciers. These are maintained by high levels of groundwater in the region and do not easily fit into either the Depressional, Riverine, or Flats class. These wetlands are fairly flat, are often ditched, and do not seem to have an identifiable natural outlet (Figure 17). If they pond water, it is usually only because groundwater levels are high in the entire region and the water has nowhere to drain. These wetlands are classified as Depressional for the purpose of scoring them.



Figure 17. Wetland maintained by high levels of groundwater. It is not in an easily identified topographic depression and has Slope wetlands along its upper edge.

Question 8: Wetland Is Hard to Classify

Sometimes it is hard to determine whether the wetland unit you are scoring meets the criteria for a specific wetland class. You may find characteristics of several different hydrogeomorphic classes within one wetland boundary. For example, seeps at the base of a slope often grade into a Riverine wetland, or a small stream within a Depressional wetland has a zone of flooding along its sides that would be classified as Riverine.

If you have a wetland with the characteristics of several HGM classes present within its boundaries, use Table 2 to identify the appropriate class to use for rating. Use this table only if the area encompassed by the “recommended” class is at least 10% of the total area of wetland being rated. For example, if a Slope wetland grades into a Riverine wetland and the area of the Riverine wetland is $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total wetland unit you are rating, use the questions for Riverine wetlands. However, if the area that would be classified as Riverine is less than 10% (e.g., < 1 ac of a 10-ac unit is frequently flooded), use the questions for the Slope wetlands. The same applies for other combinations of classes. A unit in which the Depressional area is only 5% of the entire unit that is otherwise a Slope should be rated as a Slope wetland. If, however, the area classified as Depressional is 15% of the area of the unit, it should be rated as Depressional.

Table 2. Classification of wetlands with multiple hydrogeomorphic classes for the purpose of rating their functions.

HGM classes found within one wetland unit	HGM Class to use if area of this class > 10% total area of unit
Slope + Riverine	Riverine
Slope + Depressional	Depressional
Slope + Lake Fringe	Lake Fringe
Depressional + Riverine	Depressional
Depressional + Lake Fringe	Depressional
Riverine + Lake Fringe	Riverine
Salt Water Tidal Fringe and any other class of wetland	Treat as ESTUARINE and do not score. Categorize the wetland based on the Special Characteristics section.

If you are still unable to determine which of the above criteria apply to your wetland, or you have more than two HGM classes within a wetland boundary, classify the wetland as Depressional. Hydrologically complex wetlands found in western Washington during the calibration of the methods have always had some features of Depressional wetlands, and thus, could be classified as Depressional.

Once you have classified the wetland, you will need to answer only the questions that pertain to the HGM class of the wetland being rated. The first letter of the question on the rating form identifies the wetland class for which the question is intended:

D = Depressional or Flats

R = Riverine or Freshwater Tidal Fringe

L = Lake Fringe

S = Slope

The guidance in the following sections is divided according to the HGM class of the wetland being rated. Each question on the rating form is addressed in turn.

NOTE: The questions for scoring habitat functions are labeled [H] and apply to all HGM classes of wetlands.

5.2 Classifying the plant communities

There are several questions on the data sheet that ask you to classify the plant communities found within the wetland unit. This should not be confused with classifying the wetland unit as described earlier. The rating system uses several different classification schemes for plant communities; only one of which is the commonly used Cowardin classification (Cowardin et al., 1979). The Cowardin classification is the most complex one and is described in more detail below. You will need to carefully read the description of each question to ensure that you use the classification scheme appropriate for that question. **Use caution in filling out the rating form because the thresholds for scoring, as well as the way in which plants are classified, differ among the questions.**

Plant names used in the rating system: The rating system identifies some specific plants as indicators. For example, a list of species found in true bogs and acidic fens is provided in the key for identifying bogs in Chapter 6. The plant names listed in the rating system are those found in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) [PLANTS Database](#)¹⁵ and are current as of November 2022. Plant names change based on new information from genetics, morphology, and historical records. The reference databases we commonly use for plant names are sometimes in disagreement. For example, at the time of this publication, USDA PLANTS Database, [Integrated Taxonomic Information System \(ITIS\)](#),¹⁶ and US Army Corps of Engineers [National Wetland Plant List \(NWPL\)](#)¹⁷ disagree on the names of some common wetland species. We used the USDA PLANTS Database because it is familiar to many users of the rating system, provides a map of where each species is located, lists wetland indicator status where available, includes moss species, and acknowledges subspecies and variety names. Though we consider NWPL an authority on wetland indicator status, it does not distinguish among different subspecies and variety names, and it does not include mosses. Likewise, ITIS is an authority on the current taxonomic standing of plant names, but it does not provide a map. When distinguishing among plants with similar names, a map of the plants' distributions is sometimes helpful. Therefore, we have chosen the PLANTS database as the most useful for the rating system. Where plant names in the PLANTS database differ from NWPL, the synonym is provided in parentheses. **Annotation:** Note that planned updates to the NWPL website include synchronization with the USDA PLANTS database.

The Cowardin Classification

Cowardin plant classes are distinguished by the uppermost layer of plants (forest, shrub, etc.) that provides more than 30% surface cover within part or all of a wetland. This area is often called a Cowardin polygon when mapping the distribution of plants. If the total cover of plants is less than 30%, the area does not have a Cowardin plant class. Areas with less than 30% plant cover should

¹⁵ <http://plants.usda.gov>

¹⁶ <http://www.itis.gov/>

¹⁷ <http://rsgisias.crrel.usace.army.mil/NWPL/>

be categorized as open water or sand/mud flats. If the plants are deciduous and you are rating the wetland during periods when leaves have fallen, try to reconstruct what the cover would be when the plants are fully leafed out. A deciduous forest of alder would still be considered a forest using the Cowardin classification even in winter when there are no leaves present, and the cover may be less than 30%.

This method uses only four of the major Cowardin plant classes to map the plant communities in a wetland. These are:

- **Forested class:** An area (polygon) in the wetland unit where the canopy of woody plants over 20 ft (6 m) tall (such as cottonwood, aspen, cedar, etc.) covers at least 30% of the ground. Trees need to be at least partially rooted in the wetland in order to be counted toward the estimates of cover (unless the unit is a mosaic of small wetlands as described in Section 4.3 and the trees are on hummocks between the wetlands). Some small wetlands may have a canopy over the unit, but the trees are not rooted within the wetland. In this case the wetland does not have a Forested class.
- **Scrub-shrub class:** An area (polygon) in the wetland unit where woody plants less than 20 ft (6 m) tall are the top layer of plants. To count, the shrub plants must provide at least 30% cover and be the uppermost layer. Examples of common shrubs in western Washington wetlands include the native roses, young alder, young cottonwoods, hardhack (*Spiraea douglasii*), willows, and red-osier dogwood.
- **Emergent class:** An area (polygon) in the wetland unit covered by erect, rooted herbaceous plants excluding mosses and lichens, and where total cover of shrubs and trees is less than 30%. These plants have stalks that will support the plant vertically in the absence of surface water during the growing season. These plants are present for most of the growing season in most years. To count, the emergent plants must provide at least 30% cover of the ground and be the uppermost layer. Cattails and bulrushes are good examples of plants in the Emergent class.

Herbaceous plants are defined as seed-producing species that do not develop persistent woody tissue (stems and branches). Many herbaceous species die back at the end of the growing season.

NOTE: The definition of emergent plants used by Cowardin is different from the one used in delineation for determining the boundaries between “vegetated wetlands” and “vegetated shallows.”

- **Aquatic Bed class:** An area (polygon) in the wetland unit where rooted aquatic plants, such as lily pads, pondweed, etc., cover more than 30% of the surface of the standing water. These plants grow principally on or below the surface of the water for most of the growing season in most years. This is in contrast to the emergent plants described above that have stems and leaves that extend above the water most of the time. Aquatic bed plants are found only in areas where there is seasonal or permanent ponding or inundation. *Lemna*

spp. (duckweed) is not considered an aquatic bed species because it is not rooted. Aquatic bed plants do not always reach the surface and care must be taken to look into the water.

NOTE: Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a plant found in the water is an aquatic bed species or an emergent species. A simple criterion to separate emergent and aquatic bed plants most of the time is to observe whether the stalk will support the plant vertically in the absence of water. If so, it is emergent. If, however, the stalk is not strong enough to support the plant when water is removed, it is considered an aquatic bed species.

Examples of how different areas might be classified are given below.

- An area of trees (mapped as a polygon on your aerial photograph) within the wetland unit having a 50% cover of trees and with an understory of shrubs that have a 60% cover would be classified as a Forest. The trees are the highest layer of plants and meet the minimum requirement of 30% cover.
- An area with 20% cover of trees overlying a shrub layer with 60% cover would be classified as a Scrub-shrub. The trees do not meet the requirement for minimum cover.
- An area where trees or shrubs each cover less than 30%, but together have a cover greater than 30% is classified as Scrub-shrub.
- When trees and shrubs together cover less than 30% of an area, the polygon is classified based on the next highest plant class that has 30% cover. This would be either Emergent or Aquatic Bed.

Each polygon within a wetland unit can only have one Cowardin class. For this reason, it is useful to map the Cowardin classes on an aerial photo. This will avoid the common mistake of counting emergent plants under a canopy of trees or shrubs as a separate class.

5.3 Water quality and hydrologic functions in Depressional and Flats wetlands (questions starting with 'D')

D 1.0 Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?

D 1.1 Characteristics of surface water outflows from the wetland (This indicator is used for both the water quality and the hydrologic functions):

Rationale for indicator: Pollutants that are in the form of particulates (e.g., sediment, or phosphorus that is bound to sediment) will be retained in a wetland with no outlet. Wetlands with no outlet are scored the highest for this indicator. An outlet that flows only seasonally is usually better at trapping particulates than one that is flowing all the time because there is no chance for a downstream release of particulates for most of the year (a review of the scientific literature on the trapping potential of wetlands is found in Adamus et al., 1991).

As you walk around the edge of the Depressional unit, note carefully whether there are any indications that surface water leaves the wetland and flows farther downgradient. The question is relatively easy to answer if you find a channel.



Figure 18. A small Depressional wetland with no outlet.

You are asked to characterize the surface outlet in one of four ways, and these are:

- **Wetland has no surface water outlet.** Unit is a depression or flat depression (QUESTION 7 on HGM classification key) with no surface water leaving it. You find no evidence that water leaves the wetland on the surface. The wetland lies in a depression where the water never goes above the edge (Figure 18).
- **Wetland has an intermittently flowing, or highly constricted, outlet.** This means the unit has water leaving it through a stream or ditch that dries out sometimes, OR a highly constricted permanently flowing outlet. Intermittently flowing means that there is no outflow from the unit at some times during the year. The water levels in the unit fall below the elevation of the outlet. Highly constricted outlets, on the other hand **are permanently flowing** but are small relative to the flow. Marks of flooding or inundation have to be 3 ft or more above the bottom of the outlet (live storage is ≥ 3 ft) for the outlet to be considered constricted. **NOTE:** A Depressional wetland with occasional outflow resulting from stormwater runoff from an adjacent developed area is considered to have intermittent flow.
- **Wetland has an unconstricted, or slightly constricted, surface outlet that is permanently flowing.** The outlet does not provide much hindrance to flood waters flowing through the wetland. The distance between the low point of the outlet and average height of inundation will be less than 3 ft. Beaver dams are considered to be unconstricted unless there are indicators that water is backed up at least 3 ft above the top of the dam.
- **Wetland is a flat depression (QUESTION 7 on HGM classification key), whose outlet is a permanently flowing ditch.** The bottom of the ditch usually has a lower elevation than the rest of the unit. Usually, these wetlands have no indicators that they pond. These types of wetlands are often drained by human-made ditches. However, if the ditch is not permanently flowing, score the unit as intermittently flowing.

Annotation: Text was removed from this criterion that was contradictory to instructions in other bullets.

NOTE: If you cannot find an outlet but know the wetland is not completely closed, score it as intermittently flowing.

Annotation

A wetland is considered to have an outlet only if the water from the wetland exits the depressional basin through surface flow and flows into other downstream streams, ditches, waterbodies, or wetlands. Natural fluctuation of the wetland water surface and expansion/contraction of the water surface edge within the same depressional basin does not meet the definition of an outlet.

D 1.2 The soil 2 in. below the surface is a true clay or true organic soil:

Rationale for indicator: Clay soils and organic soils are good indicators that a wetland can remove a wide range of pollutants from surface water. The uptake of dissolved phosphorus and toxic compounds through adsorption to soil particles is highest when soils are high in clay or organic content (Mitsch & Gosselink, 1993). We only consider the type of soil near the surface because this is where the soil actually has contact with the surface waters carrying the pollutants. This is where most of the chemical and biological reactions occur.

If the unit is found within an area that is mapped as an organic or clay soil by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on their county soil maps, consider the unit to have clay or organic soils. If it is not mapped as an organic or clay soil, you will need to take at least one sample at the site and determine its composition. County soil maps can be accessed on NRCS [Web Soil Survey](#).¹⁸

Annotation: You will also need to take at least one sample on site and determine its composition if the soil is mapped with organic or clay soil inclusions (also called [minor components](#)¹⁹).

To look at the soil: Dig a small hole within the wetland boundary and pick a sample from the area that is about 2-3 in. below the duff layer. Usually, it is best to sample the soil toward the middle of the wetland rather than at the edge. Do not sample the soil under areas of permanent ponding. Avoid picking up any of the duff or recent plant material that lies on the surface. Determine whether the soil is organic or clay. If you are unfamiliar with the methods for doing this, a key for clay soils is provided in Appendix C.

NOTE: The presence of organic or clay soils anywhere within the wetland unit counts. There is no scaling for this question based on the size of the patch of soil. This simplification is necessary because it is not possible to develop a reproducible map of different soils in a wetland unit within the time frame for doing a rating.

See the [NRCS web page on soil taxonomy](#)²⁰ for more descriptions on how to identify soils.

Annotation

Organic soils are histosols and include those identified as peat, mucky peat, or muck. The percent of organic carbon by weight in organic soils ranges from 12-18 percent, depending on the amount of clay.

If the soil is mapped as having clay or organic inclusions and it makes a difference in the wetland rating, you may need to send the soil in to a laboratory for analysis. Indicate on the rating form if you used a laboratory test or a soil sample textured in the field.

¹⁸ <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>

¹⁹ https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/ref/?cid=nrcs142p2_054254#minor_components

²⁰ <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/survey/class/taxonomy/>

D 1.3 Characteristics and distribution of persistent plants (Emergent, Scrub-shrub, and/or Forested classes):

Rationale for indicator: Plants enhance sedimentation by acting like a filter, and cause sediment particles to drop to the wetland surface (review in Adamus et al., 1991). Plants in wetlands can take on different forms and structures. The intent of this question is to characterize how much of the wetland is covered with plants that persist throughout the year and provide a vertical structure to trap or filter out pollutants. It is assumed, however, that the effectiveness at trapping sediments and pollutants is severely reduced if the plants are grazed or mowed.

Use the Cowardin classification of plants for this question. You are looking for the areas that would be classified as Emergent, Scrub-shrub, or Forested (see Section 5.2). These are all persistent types of plants; those species that normally remain standing at least until the beginning of the next growing season (Cowardin et al., 1979). Emergent plants do not have to be alive at the time of the site visit to qualify as persistent. The dead stalks of emergent species will provide a vertical structure to trap pollutants as well as live stalks.

You are asked to characterize the plants in terms of how much area within the wetland unit is covered by persistent, ungrazed or unmowed plants. There are three size thresholds used to score this characteristic: more than $\frac{1}{10}$ of the wetland unit is covered in persistent plants; more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the wetland unit is covered; or more than 95% of the wetland unit is covered. You will need to draw the area of persistent plants on a map or aerial photo before you can feel confident that your estimates are accurate. **NOTE: This question applies only to persistent plants that are not grazed or mowed** (or if grazed or mowed, the plants are taller than 6 in).

An easy way to estimate the amount of persistent plants is to map the areas that are open water, covered with aquatic bed plants, mudflats, or rock on an aerial photograph. Also include areas that are grazed because much of the vertical structure of wetland plants is removed when plants are grazed. The remaining area is then, by default, the area of persistent plants. Figure 19 shows a Depressional wetland in which persistent plants cover between 50% and 95% of the area of the wetland. The remainder is open water.

NOTE 1: To meet the requirement for a Cowardin plant class, a polygon within the wetland unit needs at least 30% cover of the specified plant type (forest, shrub, etc.). However, to count the Cowardin polygon as an indicator in the rating system, the polygon itself must meet a size threshold. The threshold is 10% of the area of the unit if the unit is smaller than 2.5 ac, or at least $\frac{1}{4}$ ac if the unit is larger.

Annotation: If a plant class is distributed in several patches, the patches can be added together to meet the size threshold. However, the patches have to be large enough so that no more than 10 are needed to meet the size threshold. For example, if 15 patches of shrubs are needed to meet the size threshold then the wetland does NOT have a scrub-shrub class.

NOTE 2: If the unit has just been mowed or grazed, but you suspect this occurs infrequently, you will need to determine whether the plants in the wetland are 6 in. or less at the time when the wetland is receiving surface waters that transport sediment and pollutants. If the grazing occurs in summer (because the area is too wet for cattle in the winter), but the plants have time to grow again before the flood season, then the unit is ungrazed because the plants will meet the height threshold at the time of inundation. If, however, the grazing pressure is intense enough that the grass does not have time to recover before the wet season, then it should be considered grazed. The same question can be asked of seasonal mowing or haying.



Figure 19. A depressional wetland in which the cover of persistent, ungrazed plants is between 50% and 95% of the area of the wetland.

D 1.4 Characteristics of seasonal ponding or inundation:

Rationale for indicator: The area of the wetland that is seasonally ponded is an important characteristic in understanding how well it will remove different forms of nitrogen that cause eutrophication. The highest levels of nitrogen transformation occur in areas of a wetland that undergo a cyclic change between oxic (oxygen present) and anoxic (oxygen absent) conditions. The oxic regime is needed so certain types of bacteria can change nitrogen that is in the form of ammonium ion (NH_4^+) to nitrate, and the anoxic regime is needed for denitrification (changing nitrate to nitrogen gas) (Mitsch and Gosselink 1993). The area that is seasonally ponded is used as an indicator of the area in the wetland that undergoes this seasonal cycling. The soils are oxygenated when dry but become anoxic during the time they are flooded.

To answer this question, you will need to estimate how much of the wetland is seasonally ponded with water. Areas that are seasonally ponded must be inundated for at least 2 consecutive months, but then dry out for part of the year. Because the seasonally ponded area will change from year to year, try to estimate what the average condition might be in 5 out of 10 years.

One way to estimate this area is to make a sketch of the boundary of the wetland unit, and on this diagram draw the outside edge of the area you believe has surface water during the wet season. If the wetland also has permanent surface water, you will have to draw this and subtract it when making your estimate (see Figure 20).

During the dry season, the boundary of seasonal ponding will have to be estimated by using indicators such as:

- Marks on trees and shrubs of water/sediment/debris (Figure 21). The boundary of seasonal ponding can be estimated by extrapolating a horizontal line from this mark to the edge of the wetland.
- Water-stained plants lying on wetland surface (grayish or blackish appearance of leaves on the surface).
- Dried algae left on the stems of emergent plants and shrubs and on the wetland surface (Figures 22 and 23).

NOTE: Avoid making visual estimates of area covered by seasonal ponding when standing at the wetland edge. These estimates can be very inaccurate. Drawing the boundary on an aerial photograph and then using a graphic tool such as a grid or GIS to calculate area is a more accurate way to estimate area. A Global Positioning System (GPS) that has been corrected for positional inaccuracies can also be used to locate the boundaries and estimate area.

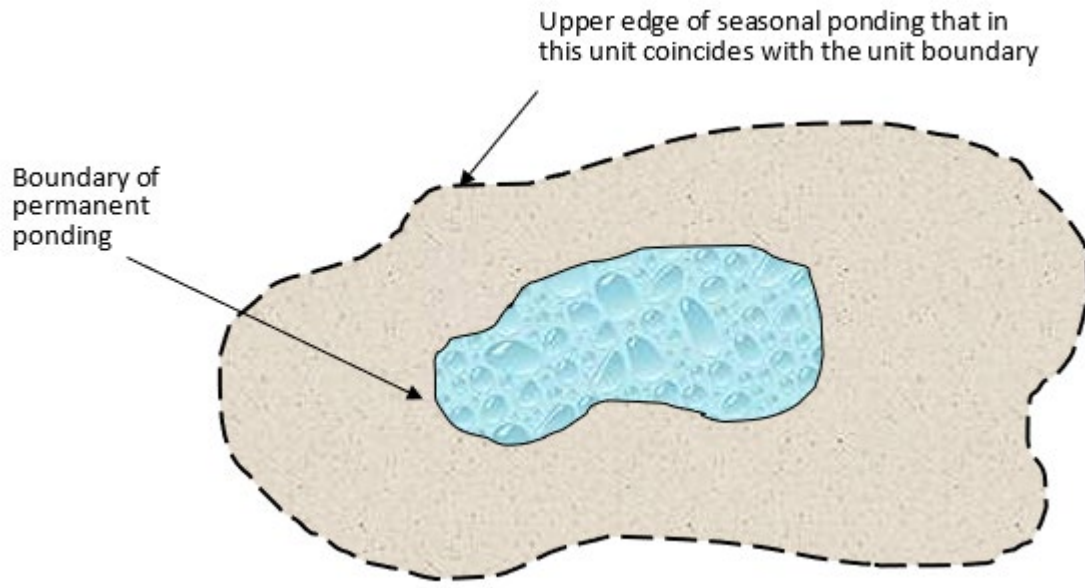


Figure 20. Sketch showing the boundaries of areas that are seasonally ponded and permanently ponded. The answer to question D 1.4 for this wetland is that the area seasonally ponded is more than ½ the total area of the wetland unit.



Figure 21. Water mark on tree showing vertical extent of seasonal ponding.



Figure 22. Small depressional wetland covered with algae. The edge of the algae marks the area that is seasonally ponded.



Figure 23. Algae left hanging on plants as the wetland dried out. The top of the algae marks the vertical extent of seasonal ponding. The boundary of seasonal ponding can be estimated by extrapolating a horizontal line from this mark to the edge of the wetland.

D 2.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?

Wetlands can remove many pollutants from waters coming into them. It is the removal of this excess pollution that is considered to be a valuable function for society. The landscape surrounding the wetland will determine, to some degree, how well a wetland improves water quality. If the wetland receives a heavy load of pollutants from the surrounding areas, it will function to its maximum capacity. However, if there are no pollutants coming in, the wetland cannot remove them, even if it has the necessary physical and chemical characteristics. Thus, the Landscape Potential for the function is related to the amount of pollutants that come into the wetland from the surrounding areas. Qualitatively, the level of pollutants can be correlated with the level of disturbance, development, and intensity of agriculture in the landscape. For example, relatively undisturbed watersheds will carry much lower sediment and nutrient loads than those that have been impacted by development, agriculture, or logging practices (Hartman et al., 1996; Reinelt & Horner, 1995).

D 2.1 Does the wetland receive stormwater discharges?

Rationale for indicator: Stormwater coming from residential or developed areas is often discharged into wetlands. Untreated stormwater is a source of many different pollutants (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). Furthermore, stormwater ponds do not remove all pollutants leaving them, even those constructed recently (Mallin et al., 2002). Thus, any stormwater discharge into a wetland increases the pollutants coming into it.

Answer YES to the question if you see any pipes coming into the wetland unit from the surrounding land. These are usually stormwater discharges. Also, look on the aerial photograph of the wetland and its surroundings for stormwater ponds. If you see any ponds, determine if their discharges can get into the wetland. Stormwater may come into the unit by way of a stream or ditch as well as a pipe. Stormwater can also come into a Depressional wetland in runoff from parking lots or roads even if no pipes are present. If you see evidence that such runoff comes into the wetland, answer YES to this question.

Annotation

Look for any evidence of stormwater input. That evidence may occur in the form of pipes, swales, ditches, streams, discharge from stormwater ponds, or others. Runoff from parking lots or roads is also counted, but if the runoff is captured and prevented from entering the wetland, it is not counted.

D 2.2 Is more than 10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland in land uses that generate pollutants in surface runoff (agricultural, pasture, residential, commercial, urban)?

Rationale for indicator: Farming, grazing, golf courses, residential areas, commercial areas, and urban areas, in general, are major sources of pollutants (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). The review also found that a well-vegetated buffer of 150 ft will only remove 60-80% of some pollutants from surface runoff into a wetland. Thus, pollutants from such land uses will probably reach the wetland unit if they are within 150 ft of the wetland.

Use your aerial photo and draw a line around the unit that is 150 ft from the edge of the unit you have mapped for rating. Answer YES to this question if you find the listed uses within 150 ft of the wetland and they cover more than 10% of the area within this 150 ft perimeter around the wetland. Use GIS or a graphic aid, such as an acetate overlay with a grid or dots, to estimate area. Visual estimates are not accurate enough and may result in significant errors.

Annotation

In this case “residential areas” is a more generic term for residences and not tied to a specific density. Any house or lawn or plot with a house on it within 150 ft is a source of pollution into the wetland. It could be just the edge of a lawn or driveway. However, if you can show that there is no way for pollutants from this source to get into the wetland, document it and answer the question NO. For example, if the residential land use is downslope of the site and all water and groundwater drain away from the site.

D 2.3 Are there septic systems within 250 ft of the wetland?

Rationale for indicator: Septic systems can pollute groundwater because nitrogen is not removed underground. Plumes of nitrogen from septic systems can be traced at least 250 ft in the groundwater (Aravena et al., 1993).

Use the aerial photograph of the unit to determine if there are any residences within 250 ft of the wetland. Septic systems are still in common use in many areas of western Washington that are outside city boundaries. If your wetland is within a city limit, you will need to check with the local planning office to determine if the area has sewers serving the houses or if they are still on septic systems. If you are outside city limits in areas with lots of ½ ac or larger, you can assume the houses are on septic systems.

Annotation

We do not consider slope of the land here because groundwater flows do not always follow patterns of surface terrain.

D 2.4 Are there other sources of pollutants coming into the wetland that are not listed in questions D 2.1–D 2.3?

Rationale for indicator: The sources of pollutants listed in questions D 2.1-D 2.3 may not be the only sources coming into the wetland unit from the surrounding landscape. In addition, sources of pollutants can be within the wetland unit itself. For example, pollutants are discharged within the wetland if it is used for grazing.

Answer YES to the question if you can identify any source of pollutants in the groundwater or surface water coming into the wetland caused by human activities. Identify the source of the pollution on the rating form. Wetlands can receive polluted waters even if they have large, well-vegetated buffers. For example, a stream that drains areas where pollutants are released far from the unit can pass through the wetland. Also, silt fences often do not prevent all the sediment from reaching the wetland during construction. Other sources of pollutants may be pesticide spraying on golf courses, particulates in exhausts from airplanes or motor vehicles, and pesticides used in mosquito control.

Activities that generate pollutants within the wetland itself, such as grazing, also count for a YES for this question. Cattle, sheep, or large native herbivores such as elk grazing within the wetland are a source of pollutants. Also, answer YES to this question if the wetland has a larger pond that is commonly used by migrating waterfowl. Waterfowl droppings are a source of both excess nutrients and bacteria.

Annotation

This question is trying to address more specific examples of pollutants that you might observe in the wetland or in the surrounding landscape that are not captured in the previous questions about land uses. It might be a pollutant you observe to be directly applied to the wetland, or a source of pollution that occurs outside of the 150 ft buffer that is assessed in the preceding questions.

Examples include:

- The wetland is treated for mosquitos.
- There are social encampments in or near the wetland.
- A road, such as a highway or gravel road, is near enough that you observe the dust and debris in the wetland.
- The wetland is directly adjacent to an airport—the airport footprint may be outside of the 150ft buffer, but planes may take off or land right over the wetland.

Note on waterfowl use: There is no threshold identified for size of open water for a larger pond commonly used by waterfowl in this question. This condition is common in urban and rural areas where open water and low grass or cut farm fields attract geese and ducks. One source of evidence for a concentration is a notable presence of waterfowl droppings on the ground. Evidence of waterfowl includes presence of flocks or droppings and complaints from residents. If you see an individual duck/goose or other waterfowl on a site with a pond, that is an indicator of

YES for this question. This assumption meets the needs for this to be a rapid method without requiring additional data collection.

D 3.0 Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?

Annotation

These questions ask if the wetland is in the watershed that contributes to impaired waterbodies. The wetland must be located upgradient of the listed water because a wetland can't affect the listing of a waterbody if the wetland is located downgradient of the listed water.

Wetlands that are located in the contributing basin of listed waters help to clean up water by intercepting and holding and/or cleaning up contaminated water that would otherwise move downgradient to the listed water. They also act to transform mobile contaminants like nitrogen that can move through groundwater. Even small wetlands within a basin act cumulatively to improve water quality.

Answer the following questions by accessing the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)²¹ and determining if the wetland you are rating is in a watershed that contributes to a listed water.

D 3.1 Does the wetland discharge directly to a stream, river, lake, or marine water that is on the 303(d) list?

Rationale for indicator: The phrase "303(d) list" is short for the list of impaired waters (stream segments, lakes) that the Clean Water Act requires all states to submit to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) every two years. In Washington, we identify all waters where pollution controls are not sufficient to attain or maintain applicable water quality standards. Wetlands that discharge directly to these polluted waters are judged to be more valuable than those that discharge to unpolluted bodies of water because their role in cleaning up the pollution is critical for reducing further degradation of water quality.

Annotation

This section is expanded to incorporate updated web resources and provide more detailed instructions on their use.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)²² that displays all the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards. Follow these steps to determine if the wetland unit you are rating is within at least 1 mi upgradient of any aquatic resource mapped as not meeting water quality standards:

²¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

²² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

1. Locate your wetland on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#).²³
2. Use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select Assessed Water/Sediment to display listed waters.
3. Under the Filter tab, go to the Water Quality Assessment section and unselect Category 1, 2, 4A, 4B, and 4C to show only the Category 5 (303(d)-listed) waters. Apply the filter.
4. Use the Add/Remove Data feature to add the National Hydrography Dataset for evidence of surface water connections between the wetland you are rating and the listed water.
5. Under the Tools tab, in the Other section, use the Measure Distance tool to determine if the wetland being rated is within a straight line distance of 1 mi upgradient of any aquatic resource mapped as Category 5 (red lines or polygons on the map). The wetland should have a surface water channel, ditch, or other discharge leading to the listed water.

Answer YES if the wetland discharges directly (within 1 mi) to an area mapped with a red line or polygon. Polygons usually represent larger waterbodies or discrete areas within those larger waterbodies where samples were collected.

Note: You may need to determine the direction of flow of surface water connections for the wetland you are rating to confirm that it is discharging directly to the listed water.

D 3.2 Is the wetland in a subwatershed where water quality is an issue in some aquatic resource (i.e., there is an aquatic resource in the basin that is on the 303(d) list)?

Rationale for indicator: Wetlands can mitigate the impacts of pollution even if they do not discharge directly to a polluted body of water. Wetlands can remove nitrogen from groundwater as well as surface water. They can also trap airborne pollutants. Thus, wetlands can provide an ecosystem service and value to our society in any basin and sub-basin that has pollution problems. The removal of pollutants by wetlands is judged to be more valuable in basins where other aquatic resources are already polluted or have problems with eutrophication.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)²⁴ that displays all the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards.

Locate your site on the map to determine if the wetland unit you are rating is in the contributing basin of any aquatic resource mapped as not meeting water quality standards. To find the boundaries of contributing basins in the area, consult with the planning department of the local jurisdiction. If this information is not available, use the guidance for mapping contributing basins described in question D 4.3.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

Annotation

The scale of the basin or sub-basin for this question is the approximate area (4-40 sq. mi) of a 12-digit hydrologic unit (HUC). 12-digit HUC boundaries (also called subwatersheds) can be accessed as a data layer on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#).²⁵ The question text has been revised to clarify this scale.

The sub-basin level addresses the potential for groundwater connection and the cumulative action of wetlands on the landscape to manage contaminated water.

To identify wetlands within a basin with listed waters, determine whether the wetland you are rating occurs upgradient (for a YES) or downgradient (for a NO) of the 303(d)-listed water.

D 3.3 Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality?

Rationale for indicator: Not all pollution and water quality problems are identified by Ecology's water quality monitoring program. Local and watershed planning efforts sometimes identify wetlands that are important in maintaining existing water quality. These wetlands provide a value to society at the local level that needs to be replaced if they are impacted.

To answer this question, you will need to seek information from the planning department of the local jurisdiction where the site is located. Information on regional or local plans can often be found on the website of the city or county in which the site is found. Useful search phrases include "watershed plan," "water quality," or "wetland protection."

If the basin in which the wetland is found has a Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) plan (also called a Water Cleanup Plan or Water Quality Improvement Project) developed for it, then you should answer YES for this question. It is assumed that all wetlands are valuable in a basin where water quality is poor enough to require a TMDL. The Department of Ecology's [Water Quality improvement projects](#)²⁶ website lists all the bodies of water that have TMDLs.

NOTE: Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) or Water Cleanup Plans describe the type, amount, and sources of water pollution in a particular water body. They analyze how much the pollution needs to be reduced or eliminated to meet water quality standards, and then provide targets and strategies to control the pollution. Wetlands that discharge directly to these polluted waters are judged to be more valuable because they function at a landscape scale to mitigate discharges of pollutants. TMDLs are based on models that estimate the natural decay and adsorption of pollutants under current conditions. Wetlands are an important part of that natural decay; their destruction would require a recalibration of the TMDL models and force reductions in current levels of discharge.

²⁵ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

²⁶ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-improvement/Total-Maximum-Daily-Load-process/Directory-of-improvement-projects>

Annotation

For wetlands in the contributing basin to areas with a TMDL “in development,” you would also answer YES (but see note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project below).

To answer YES for a TMDL in the basin, the wetland you are rating should be within the contributing basin to the TMDL study area. That means that the wetland occurs within or upgradient of the TMDL study area. To find the TMDL study area:

1. Go to the [Water Quality Atlas](#)²⁷ map and use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select WQ Improvement Projects for display.
2. If the wetland being rated is located in a basin highlighted as “Approved” or “In Development,” click on the highlighted polygon and go to the report link for the TMDL.
3. Look in the report for the TMDL study area to determine if the wetland being rated is within the contributing area to the TMDL study area. Note that multiple TMDLs may apply to a given area.

Data for TMDLs that have been approved can also be visualized by selecting Assessed Water/Sediment in the Add/Remove Map Data feature and filtering so that only Category 4A and 4B assessed waters are displayed:

- Category 4A waters have approved TMDLs.
- Category 4B waters have a pollution control program, similar to a TMDL plan, which is expected to solve the pollution problems (such as a local plan).

Category 4C waters are impaired by causes that cannot be addressed through a TMDL plan, such as the presence of invasive species, and may not qualify as a local plan or TMDL for this question. You should investigate the details of the 4C listing to determine if it meets the intent of this question.

Select the listed features downgradient of the wetland to access details and view the listings. TMDL projects in development are not displayed at this level on the WQ Atlas.

You can use a screenshot of the TMDL study area from the report or from the Water Quality Atlas map to meet the figure requirement for this question.

Note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project: A water quality improvement effort is currently in process for Puget Sound, and therefore Puget Sound is now mapped as having a TMDL in development for the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project (PSNRP). Because all wetlands in the Puget Sound basin would score High for this question, and we currently do not have a way to distinguish areas where wetlands may be more valuable than others related to the PSNRP, Ecology does not consider the Puget Sound TMDL in development for PSNRP as meeting the criteria for this question at this time. Wetlands in the contributing basins of bays and other areas in Puget Sound that have their own TMDL listings continue to meet the criteria for this question.

²⁷ <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterqualityatlas/map.aspx>

D 4.0 Does the site have the potential to reduce flooding and erosion?

D 4.1 Characteristics of surface water outflows from the wetland:

Rationale for indicator: Wetlands with no outflow are more likely to reduce flooding than those with outlets, and those with a constricted outlet will more likely reduce flooding than those with an unconstricted outlet (reviewed in Adamus et al., 1991). In wetlands with no outflow, all waters coming in are permanently stored and do not enter any streams or rivers. Constricted outlets will hold back flood waters and release them slowly to reduce flooding downstream. Wetlands with intermittent flow also provide a higher level of protection than those with unconstricted permanently flowing discharges because they can hold back flash floods that can occur during storms when there is no outflow.

See the description for question D 1.1. This question is answered the same way as question D 1.1. The difference between D 1.1 and D 4.1, however, is in the scores assigned to each type of outflow. Differences in scores are based on the difference in importance of the outflow characteristics to the two functions.

D 4.2 Depth of storage during wet periods (estimating live storage):

Rationale for indicator: The amount of water a Depressional wetland stores is an important indicator of how well it functions to reduce flooding and erosion. Retention time of flood waters is increased as the volume of storage is increased for any given inflow (Fennessy et al., 1994). It is too difficult to estimate the actual amount of water stored for a rapid method such as this one, and we use an estimate of the maximum depth of the “live storage” as a surrogate. This is only an approximation because depressional wetlands may have slightly different shapes and thus the volume of water they can store is not exactly correlated to the maximum depth of storage.

Live storage is a measure of the volume of storage available during major rainfall or snowmelt events that cause flooding in western Washington. This indicator recognizes that some wetlands, particularly those with groundwater connections, have water present all year around, or have some storage below the elevation of the outlet that does not contribute to reductions in peak flows (so called “dead storage”). In most depressional wetlands in western Washington, the depressions have filled to the edge of the outlet by the time the peak flooding occurs in late winter and early spring (Hruby et al., 1999).

Locate the outlet of the unit and identify the lowest point in the outlet (Figures 24, 25). In wetlands without outlets, identify: 1) the deepest point of the unit if the wetland is dry (Figure 26), or 2) the level of the areas that are permanently flooded. Next, estimate the difference in elevation between these low points and the marks of seasonal ponding (use information from D 1.4). This will provide an estimate of the depth of live storage during the seasonal high water.

Try to find water marks as close to the outlet as possible so you can estimate the height from the bottom of the outlet. Figures 24 and 25 show water marks directly on the culverts. Estimate the difference in elevation between the lowest point of the outlet and the level at which you noted marks of inundation. There are four thresholds of concern: 1) more than 3 ft of storage, 2) between 2-3 ft of storage, 3) between 6 in. and 2 ft of storage, and 4) less than 6 in. of storage. These thresholds can usually be estimated with a yard stick or tape measure without needing to use special equipment.

NOTE 1: If the outlet is a beaver dam or weir, treat the top of the dam or weir as the lowest point. If water is flowing over the dam, then the water surface anywhere in the wetland can be used to establish the low point. Beaver dams generally have less than 6 in. of live storage because they allow water to flow out over a wide area. Four inches of live storage was the highest measured in the 11 beaver dams that were visited during the calibration of the method.

NOTE 2: If the wetland has multiple outlets, try to find the one that has the lowest topographic elevation.

NOTE 3: Sometimes the lowest point of the outlet is flooded or flowing. In these cases, measure from the bottom of the outlet to the mark of the seasonal flooding. A common mistake is to measure from the current water level in the outlet to the marks of flooding.

NOTE 4: It can be difficult to extrapolate the height of flooding above the lowest point of the outlet in large wetlands where the flood marks are distant from the outlet.

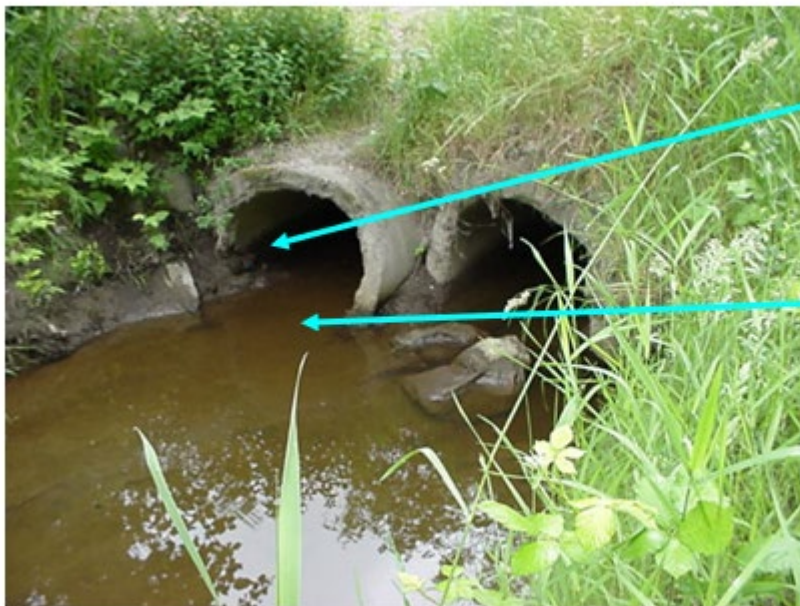
NOTE 5: If the wetland has no outlet, measure the storage as the difference between the level of permanent ponding and the seasonal ponding. If the wetland dries out in the summer, use the lowest point in the depression as your baseline (Figure 26).



Water marks of seasonal ponding (live storage)

Bottom of culvert

Figure 24. A box culvert that is the outlet of a Depressional wetland. The live storage is measured as the distance between the bottom of the culvert and the water marks on the side, shown by the arrows. The distance here is approximately 15 in.



Water mark of seasonal ponding

Bottom of culvert

Figure 25. A round culvert with water still present. Live storage is measured from the bottom of the culvert, where indicated by the arrow, not the present water level. The depth of storage is approximately 7 in., as indicated by the arrow showing the mark of seasonal ponding.

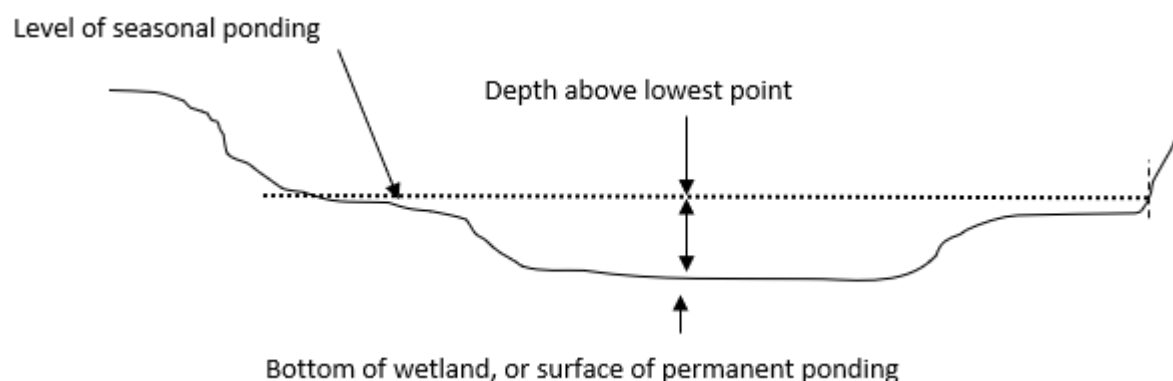


Figure 26. Measuring maximum depth of seasonal ponding in a wetland without an outlet.

Headwater wetlands: Question D 4.2 also asks if the wetland being rated is a headwater wetland. Depressional wetlands found in the headwaters of streams often do not store surface water to any great depth. However, they can be important in reducing peak flows because they slow down and desynchronize the initial peak flows from a storm (Brassard et al., 2000). A review of 169 scientific articles worldwide of the role of wetlands in the hydrologic cycle concluded that about ½ of the relevant studies showed that headwater wetlands have an important role in desynchronizing flood flows (Bullock & Acreman, 2003). The depth of seasonal storage in headwater wetlands was judged to be an inadequate representation of the importance of these wetlands in the hydrologic functions. For this reason, headwater wetlands are scored 3 points, out of 7 possible, even if their storage is less than 2 ft.

To identify if the wetland is a headwater wetland, use the information collected in question D 1.1. If the wetland has a permanent or seasonal outflow through a defined channel but **no** inflow from a permanent or seasonal channel, it is a headwater wetland for the purposes of this rating.

NOTE: One exception to this criterion is wetlands whose water regime is dominated by groundwater coming from water storage facilities. Depressional wetlands at the base of irrigation reservoirs, dams, or the edge of irrigation canals are not headwater wetlands, even if they have surface water that flows out of them without an inflow.

Annotation

The exception for water regimes dominated by water storage facilities was developed from observations of seep wetlands that formed below the reservoirs of large dams in eastern Washington where headwater wetlands would not historically or naturally have occurred in the watershed.

For rating headwaters with input from stormwater ponds you should consider several things:

1. Does the wetland store more than 2ft of water during wet periods (live storage)?
 - a. If yes, it is not a headwater for the purposes of rating depth of ponding
 - b. If no, go to #2
2. Are flows from the stormwater pond into the headwater wetland channelized?
 - a. If yes, then you would not score the wetland as a headwater.
 - b. If no, go to #3.
3. Is the stormwater pond located within the historic footprint of the wetland?
 - a. If yes, go to #4
 - b. If no, go to #5
4. Does the stormwater pond appear to be at the upstream limit of historic surface flow?
 - a. If yes, you may score the remaining wetland as a headwater
 - b. If no, go to #5
5. Is the stormwater pond collecting all of the water from the contributing basin to the headwater without any infiltration?
 - a. If yes, then you would not score the wetland as a headwater. The headwater has been decoupled from its historic potential to function and the stormwater pond is now filling that role.
 - b. If no, you may score the wetland as a headwater

D 4.3 Contribution of the wetland to storage in the watershed:

Rationale for indicator: The potential of a wetland to reduce peak flows from its contributing basin is a function of its retention time (volume coming into a unit for the duration of a storm event/the amount of storage present). The area of the contributing basin is used to estimate the relative amount of water entering it, while the area of the wetland is used to estimate the amount of storage present. Large contributing basins are expected to generate larger volumes for any given storm event than smaller basins. Thus, a small wetland with a large contributing basin is not expected to reduce peak flows as much as a large wetland with a small contributing basin.

This question asks you first to estimate the geographic area that contributes surface water to the wetland unit you are rating. This is called the “contributing basin” of the unit. You will then need to estimate the area of the unit and calculate the ratio of the two. You do not need to estimate these areas exactly because the scoring is based on thresholds for the ratio. If the contributing basin is less than 10 times the size of the wetland itself, the wetland will score the most points. On the other hand, if the area of the contributing basin is more than 100 times the area of the

wetland, the score is 0, and you will not need to make any further estimates. If the wetland is large relative to its contributing basin, you will need to add the area of the wetland to the total since rain also falls within the wetland unit.

NOTE: You can use whatever means available to estimate the area of the upstream basin contributing surface water to a wetland. A topographic map works well if the landscape is not too confusing. If you have GIS with basin boundaries, you will have to be careful to include only the areas upgradient of the wetland unit. If you are unfamiliar with the methods for mapping contributing basins, the procedure is described in a fact sheet by the NRCS, [How to Read a Topographic Map and Delineate a Watershed](#).²⁸ If this link is no longer valid, search for the title of the focus sheet using your web search engine.

Annotation

If a stream inlets to the wetland, include the entire upstream contributing basin of the stream above its inlet to the wetland.

If the wetland is surrounded by a dike, use the top of the dike as the edge of the contributing basin.

D 5.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?

Human changes in land use tend to de-stabilize the flows of water in a watershed. Generally, human activities reduce infiltration and increase the run-off during storm events and thus increase flooding problems (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). A wetland located in areas where run-off has increased can provide more flood protection than one located in an undeveloped area. Thus, the Landscape Potential for the function is related to the increased amounts of water coming into the wetland from human sources. Qualitatively, the increase is modeled as the number of different new sources of water coming into the wetland.

D 5.1 Does the wetland receive stormwater discharges?

Rationale for indicator: A depressional wetland that receives stormwater directly has a higher potential for providing hydrologic functions. It will receive more water during a rain event than under normal (no stormwater discharges) conditions.

This question is the same as D 2.1. Answer YES to the question if you see any pipes coming into the wetland from the surrounding land. These are usually stormwater discharges. Also, look on the aerial photograph of the wetland and its surroundings for stormwater ponds. If you see any ponds, determine if their discharges can get into the wetland. Stormwater may come into the wetland by way of a stream, road runoff, or ditch, as well as a pipe.

²⁸ https://www.soilandwater.nyc/uploads/7/7/6/5/7765286/watershed_delineation.pdf

Annotation

Look for any evidence of stormwater input. That evidence may occur in the form of pipes, swales, ditches, streams, discharge from stormwater ponds, or others. Runoff from parking lots or roads is also counted, but if the runoff is captured and prevented from entering the wetland, it is not counted.

D 5.2 Is more than 10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland in land uses that generate excess runoff (agricultural, pasture, residential, commercial, or urban)?

Rationale for indicator: Water can also flow into the depression directly from surrounding land uses that prevent some or all water from infiltrating. For example, a lawn can reduce infiltration by as much as 65% relative to a forest (Kelling & Peterson, 1975).

Use your aerial photo and draw a line that is 150 ft from the edge of the wetland you have mapped for rating. Answer YES to this question if you find the listed uses within 150 ft of the wetland and they cover more than 10% of the area within the 150 ft perimeter around the wetland. Use GIS or a graphic aid, such as an acetate overlay with a grid or dots, to estimate area. Visual estimates are not accurate enough and may result in significant errors.

Annotation

In this case “residential areas” is a more generic term for residences and not tied to a specific density. Any house or lawn or plot with a house on it within 150 ft is a source of excess runoff into the wetland. It could be just the edge of a lawn or driveway. However, if you can show that there is no way for excess runoff from this source to get into the wetland, document it and answer the question NO. For example, if the residential land use is downslope of the site and all water drains away from the site.

D 5.3 Is more than 25% of the contributing basin of the wetland covered with intensive human land uses (residential at >1 residence/ac, urban, commercial, agriculture, etc.)?

Rationale for indicator: Human changes in land use tend to de-stabilize the flows of water in a watershed. Generally, human activities reduce infiltration and increase the run-off during storm events and thus increase flooding problems (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). Research in the Puget Sound area by the University of Washington has found that there are significant increases in water flows when intensive land uses represent more than 25-35% of the contributing basin (Azous & Horner, 1997).

Use the map of the contributing basin you developed for question D 4.3 and estimate the area within the basin that has intensive land uses that are known to de-stabilize surface flows.

Annotation

Land uses can be determined from recent aerial imagery of the area or by accessing land use maps.

Land use/land cover resources include:

- County web maps
- [WSDA Agricultural Land Use](#)²⁹
- [Northwest Large Fire Interactive Map](#)³⁰ To find wildfires that occurred within the last 5 years, use the layer list feature to display NWCC Fire History
- [National Land Cover Database Land Cover map viewer](#)³¹

D 6.0 Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?

D 6.1 Is the wetland in a landscape that has flooding problems?

Rationale for indicator: The value of wetlands in reducing the impacts of flooding and erosion is based on the presence of human or natural resources that can be damaged by these disturbances. In general, the value of a wetland in reducing flood damage is judged to decrease with the distance downstream because the amount of water stored by the wetland relative to the overall flows decreases.

You will need to do some fact finding if you do not know whether floods have caused damage downstream of the wetland. Your best sources of information on flooding problems are the emergency planning office in your local government, the local Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), or the United States Geological Survey (USGS) for groundwater issues. You can search the web using the name of the location, town, or watershed and “flooding” or “flooding problems.”

Choose the descriptions that best match conditions for the wetland unit being rated; then choose the description that generates the highest score on the rating form.

The wetland captures surface water that would otherwise flow downgradient into areas where flooding has damaged human or natural resources (e.g., houses or salmon redds):

²⁹ <https://nras.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=3d61db30686d467ea6f5e0197be32b25>

³⁰ <https://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/information/firemap.aspx>

³¹ <https://www.mrlc.gov/viewer/>

- Flooding occurs in a sub-basin that is immediately downgradient of unit.

Annotation: The sub-basin immediately downgradient of the unit is the 12-digit HUC in which the wetland occurs.

- Surface flooding problems are in a sub-basin farther downgradient.

Annotation: The sub-basin farther downgradient is the next 12-digit HUC down from the wetland.

- Flooding from groundwater is an issue in the sub-basin where the unit is found. This is a known issue in certain areas of Pierce and Thurston counties that have problems with flooding and damage from groundwater. For more information see the USGS fact sheet [*Ground-Water Flooding in Glacial Terrain of Southern Puget Sound*](#).³²
- The existing or potential outflow from the wetland is so constrained by human or natural conditions that the water stored by the wetland cannot reach areas that flood.
- There are no problems with flooding downstream of the wetland.

Annotation: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration publishes a [searchable database](#)³³ of storms that caused damage. Any recorded evidence that damage from flooding has occurred can be used, regardless of time or source (e.g., local jurisdiction flood plan or data, news article, etc.).

NOTE 1: Many Depressional wetlands with no surface water outflow can protect natural or human resources from flooding. They are performing the hydrologic functions at the highest levels possible. No surface water leaves the wetland to cause flooding or erosion. The water either infiltrates to groundwater or it evaporates. To answer the Value question for a wetland with no outflow, try to picture the wetland as filled with a parking lot. Where would the surface water it normally stores flow? If it would flow into a swale, channel, or stream, there is a possibility that the flow would increase flooding or erosion.

NOTE 2 (a landscape constraint on function): When a Depressional wetland is situated upslope of a road where water movement through the road is limited by ineffective culverts, the roadway typically acts as a levee, de-coupling upslope wetlands from downstream flooding. The roadway, rather than the wetland, delays storm flows, and acts like a flood-control dam. This indicates that the hydrologic connection between the floodway and the upslope area is impaired. If, however, the water impounded on the upslope side of the road recedes at the same rate as the water on the downslope side, you can assume the connections through the road are not constrained. In this case, the storage provided by the wetland on the upslope side is important, and the wetland should be scored accordingly.

Annotation: When depressional wetlands are located landward of a dike, they are disconnected from the floodway and do not contribute to water storage functions. If, however, the dike is

³² <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2000/0111/report.pdf>

³³ <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/stormevents/>

breached or overtopped at least once every 10 years or a culvert or tide gate through the dike is present, you can assume the wetland is still connected to the floodway.

NOTE 3 (a landscape constraint on function): Depressional wetlands situated at the base of a hillside typically receive water inputs from groundwater. Generally, you can conclude that wetlands receiving less than 10% of their water from surface flows do not provide much protection from flooding because they are not connected to the major patterns of surface flows. If the dominant water inputs are from a spring or seep emerging from a hillslope, then the wetland likely does not provide much value in reducing surface flooding. If, however, there are indicators that the wetland receives surface runoff from farther up the slope (e.g., small gullies, washes, etc.) as well as groundwater, then the wetland may be valuable if there are flooding problems farther downstream. A wetland can be considered to have more than a 90% groundwater influence if there is no seasonal or permanent surface water inflow and a very small contributing basin. Depressional wetlands in western Washington, however, rarely, if ever get most of their water from groundwater. For example, assume an average rainfall of 48" in western Washington and an average rate of evapotranspiration of 18"/year for a forest. Thus, a minimum of 30"/year of water comes into the unit from rain alone within its boundary. To exceed the 90% threshold the unit would need to receive the equivalent of 300 in. of groundwater/unit area. A 1-ac wetland would need a minimum of 25 acre-feet of groundwater flowing through the system to meet the volume threshold for being dominated by groundwater, even if the only other source of surface water is rain within its boundaries.

NOTE 4 (a landscape constraint on function): A Depressional wetland that receives only return flow from irrigation is not in a landscape position to perform the hydrologic functions. Since the inflow is controlled, there is little chance that the water coming into the wetland will cause downstream flooding or erosion.

D 6.2 Has the site been identified as important for flood storage or flood conveyance in a regional flood control plan?

Rationale for indicator: The values of flood storage and flood conveyance provided by wetlands are often recognized in regional flood control plans, and specific sites are mentioned in these plans. If the value of a wetland for flood attenuation has already been recognized, it is assigned a High rating for value.

To answer this question, contact the jurisdiction in which the site is found to determine whether any regional flood control plans exist. A search of websites for flood prone areas will probably also list flood control plans for the watershed in question. If plans exist, determine if the site is listed as important or valuable for flood storage. To answer YES to this question, the flood control district needs to have developed a flood control or flood hazard mitigation plan that identifies the site as one that needs to be preserved or enhanced to improve flood protection.

5.4 Water quality and hydrologic functions in Riverine and Freshwater Tidal Fringe wetlands (questions starting with ‘R’)

R 1.0 Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?

R 1.1 Total area of surface depressions within the wetland that can trap sediments and associated pollutants during a flooding event:

Rationale for indicator: Depressions in Riverine wetlands will tend to accumulate sediment and the pollutants associated with sediment (phosphorus and some toxics) because they reduce water velocities (Fennessy et al., 1994) when the river floods. Wetlands where a larger part of the total area has depressions are relatively better at removing pollutants associated with sediments than those that have no such depressions.

For this question, you will need to estimate the fraction of the wetland that is covered by depressions. Using your map or photo of the site, sketch the areas where depressions are found. From this you can make a rough estimate of the total area that has depressions. Determine if this area is more than $\frac{3}{4}$ or more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total area of the wetland. Standing or open water present in the wetland when the river is not flooding are good indicators of depressions. Figure 27 shows a Riverine wetland that has a large depression filled with water.

NOTE: Generally, you should count only depressions that hold water for more than a week after a flood recedes. If a depression is not flooded at the time of your site visit, look for the deposition of fine or mucky sediments in the bottom of the depression. Sediments in the depression usually have a finer texture than those in the immediate area and indicate the water was present in the depression for longer periods of time.

Annotation

Other indicators in the field include algal mats or plant species that require or tolerate longer periods of inundation.

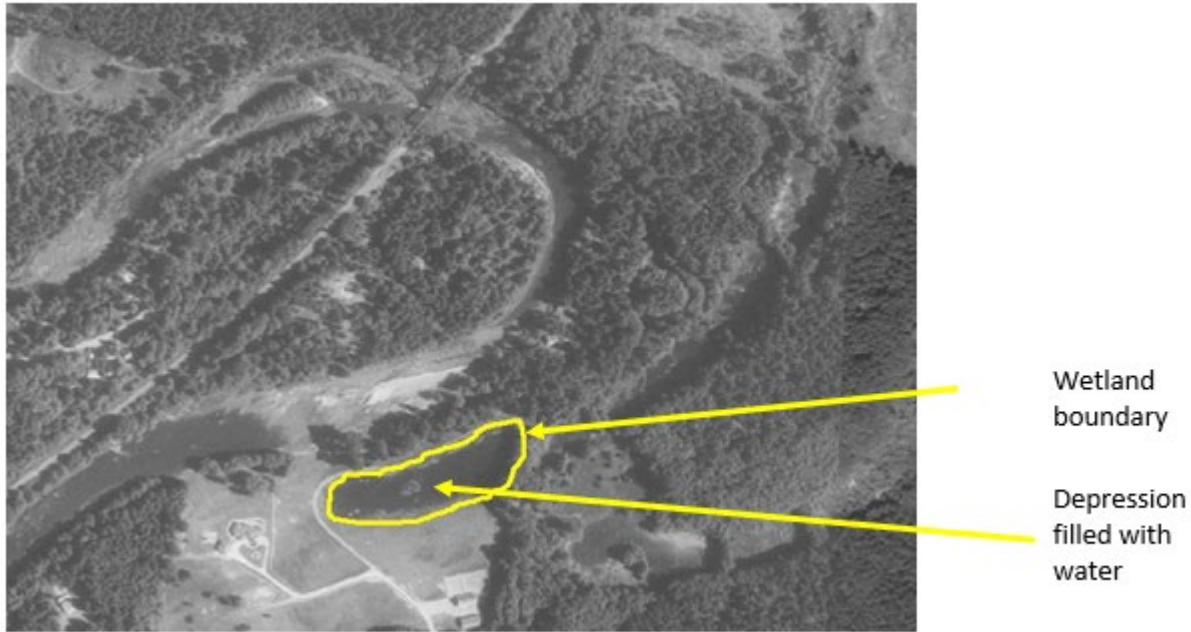


Figure 27. A Riverine wetland (outlined in yellow) in an old oxbow of the Nisqually River with one big depression that is filled with water and covers more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the wetland. Arrows show the wetland boundary and the depression filled with water.

R 1.2 Structure of the plants in the wetland:

Rationale for indicator: Plants in a Riverine wetland will improve water quality by acting as a filter to trap sediments and associated pollutants. The plants also slow the velocity of water, which results in the deposition of sediments. Persistent, multi-stemmed plants enhance sedimentation by offering frictional resistance to water flow (review in Adamus et al., 1991). Shrubs and trees are considered to be better at resisting water velocities in riverine systems than emergent plants during flooding and are scored higher. Aquatic bed species or grazed, herbaceous plants are not judged to provide much resistance to water flows and are not counted as filters.

For this question you will need to group the plants found within the wetland into three categories: 1) forest or shrub, 2) ungrazed or unmowed emergent plants (> 6 in. high), and 3) neither forest, shrub, nor ungrazed emergent plants.

NOTE: This question about plant cover is NOT based on the Cowardin classification. The polygons you draw for this question must have a 90% cover of the ground when you look down from a person’s height (~5 ft).

NOTE: You will need to judge if the plants in the wetland are 6 in. high or more at the time when the stream floods and is actually transporting sediment. If grazing or mowing occurs in summer but the plants have time to grow again before the time when the Riverine wetland gets flooded,

then the system is ungrazed. If, however, the grazing pressure is intense enough that the grass does not have time to recover during the flood season, then it should be considered grazed.

There are two size thresholds used to score this characteristic: 1) more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of the wetland area is covered (>66% cover) with either herbaceous, forest, or shrubby plants, and 2) more than $\frac{1}{3}$ is covered with these plants. These thresholds should be measured from aerial photographs of the site.

R 2.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?

Wetlands will remove many pollutants from water coming into them, and it is the removal of these pollutants that is considered to be a valuable function for society. The landscape surrounding the wetland will, to some degree, determine how well a wetland improves water quality. If the wetland receives a heavy load of pollutants from the surrounding areas, it will function to its maximum capacity. If, however, there are no pollutants coming in, the wetland cannot remove them, even if it has the necessary physical and chemical characteristics. Thus, the Landscape Potential for the function is related to the amount of pollutants that come into the wetland from the surrounding areas. Qualitatively, the level of pollutants can be correlated with the level of disturbance, development, and intensity of agriculture in the landscape. For example, relatively undisturbed watersheds will carry much lower sediment and nutrient loads than those that have been impacted by development, agriculture, or logging practices (Hartman et al., 1996; Reinelt & Horner, 1995).

R 2.1 Is the wetland within an incorporated city or within its Urban Growth Area (UGA)?

Annotation

Use Ecology's [Coastal Atlas Map](#)³⁴ or [Water Quality Atlas Map](#),³⁵ or a map from the local jurisdiction to determine if the wetland occurs in an incorporated city or within the boundary of an Urban Growth Area (UGA).

To display city and UGA boundaries on the Coastal Atlas:

1. Select the Contents tab.
2. Go to the Administrative/Regulated tab.
3. Select City and Urban growth area (UGA) under Jurisdictions.
4. Select Go.

To display city and UGA boundaries on the Water Quality Atlas:

1. Select the Add/Remove Data tab.
2. Select Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries under Administrative Boundaries.
3. Select Go.

³⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlasmap>

³⁵ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

R 2.2 Does the contributing basin to the wetland include a UGA or incorporated area?

Rationale for indicators: Urban and suburban areas are a major source of pollutants to streams (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). The presence of development adjacent and upstream of the wetland is a good indicator that there are pollutants in the water reaching the Riverine unit from the stream.

To begin, trace the stream or river to its source and determine if there are any urban or suburban areas adjacent to the stream that floods the wetland. Answer YES to R 2.1 if the site is in a city or Urban Growth Area (UGA) and YES to question R 2.2 if there are any incorporated cities and towns or their UGAs upstream of the wetland, but the wetland is not within the boundaries. Maps of UGAs and urban areas can be found on Ecology's [Coastal Atlas Map](#)³⁶ or [Water Quality Atlas Map](#),³⁷ or a map from the local jurisdiction.

For questions R 2.2 and R 2.3, you will need to identify the contributing basin to the stream that floods the wetland unit you are rating. This can be done using topographic maps or through websites such as the [USGS National Map](#).³⁸

NOTE: A wetland unit can have a YES answer for both questions if it is within a UGA and there are other cities or UGAs farther upstream.

Annotation

The USGS, as part of the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD), provides a reliable resource for identifying contributing basins of the streams associated with Riverine wetlands. They have mapped the contributing basins of rivers in the form of watershed boundary maps delineated at varying scales called Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC). You can access those watershed data through the USGS National Map listed above, or the following resources:

- Watershed boundary HUC maps are available on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)³⁹ map under Hydrography in the Map Layers. The HUC(s) that you use to map the contributing basin of the stream that floods the wetland will depend on the size of the stream upgradient of the location of the wetland. Look at the entire contributing basin of the stream or river upstream of the wetland. Note that the entire contributing basin to the stream above the wetland may contain multiple HUCs.
- [StreamStats](#)⁴⁰ is a USGS application that can also be helpful in mapping contributing basins of streams; however, you should confirm the results with additional topographic and hydrographic resources, such as NHD and Lidar or other elevation data.

³⁶ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlasmap>

³⁷ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

³⁸ <https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/>

³⁹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁴⁰ <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/streamstats-streamflow-statistics-and-spatial-analysis-tools>

R 2.3 Does at least 10% of the contributing basin contain tilled fields, pastures, or forests that have been clearcut within the last 5 years?

Rationale for indicator: Tilled fields are a source of nutrients, pesticides, and sediment. Pastures are a source of nutrients and pathogenic bacteria, and clearcut areas are a source of sediment (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). The presence of these conditions upstream of the wetland unit is a good indicator that there are pollutants in the river waters reaching the unit.

Define the boundaries of the contributing basin to the stream that floods the wetland unit as in question R 2.2. Answer YES to this question if at least 10% of the total area of the upstream contributing basin has at least one or a combination of pasture, tilled fields, or clearcut logging. Land uses can be determined from aerial photographs of the area or by accessing land use maps.

Annotation

Land use/land cover resources include:

- County web maps
- [WSDA Agricultural Land Use](#)⁴¹
- [Northwest Large Fire Interactive Map](#)⁴²
- [National Land Cover Database](#)⁴³

Include areas of forest fires that burned within the last 5 years.

R 2.4 Is more than 10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland in land uses that generate pollutants in surface runoff (agricultural, pasture, residential, commercial, urban)?

Rationale for indicator: Farming, grazing, golf courses, residential, commercial areas, and urban areas, in general, are major sources of pollutants (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). The review also found that a well-vegetated buffer of 150 ft will only remove 60-80% of some pollutants from surface runoff into a wetland. Thus, pollutants from such land uses will probably reach the wetland unit if they are within 150 ft of the wetland.

Use your aerial photo and draw a line around the wetland that is 150 ft from the edge of the wetland you have mapped for rating. Answer YES to this question if you find the listed uses within 150 ft of the wetland and they cover more than 10% of the area within the 150 ft perimeter around the wetland. Use GIS or a graphic aid, such as an acetate overlay with a grid or dots, to estimate area. Visual estimates are not accurate enough and may result in significant errors.

⁴¹ <https://nras.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=3d61db30686d467ea6f5e0197be32b25>

⁴² <https://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/information/firemap.aspx>

⁴³ <https://www.mrlc.gov/viewer/>

Annotation

In this case “residential areas” is a more generic term for residences and not tied to specific density. Any house or lawn or plot with a house on it within 150 ft is a source of pollution into the wetland. It could be just the edge of a lawn or driveway. However, if you can show that there is no way for pollutants from this source to get into the wetland, document it and answer the question NO. For example, if the residential land use is downslope of the site and all water and groundwater drain away from the site.

R 2.5 Are there other sources of pollutants coming into the wetland that are not listed in questions R 2.1-R 2.4?

Rationale for indicator: The sources of pollutants listed in questions R 2.1-R 2.4 may not be the only sources coming into the wetland unit from the surrounding landscape. In addition, sources of pollutants can be within the wetland unit itself. For example, pollutants are discharged within the wetland if it is used for grazing.

Answer YES to the question if you can identify any source of pollutants in the groundwater or surface water coming into the wetland caused by human activities. Identify the source of the pollution on the rating form. Wetlands can receive polluted waters even if they have large, well-vegetated buffers. For example, a stream that drains areas where pollutants are released far from the unit can pass through the wetland. Also, silt fences often do not prevent all the sediment from reaching the wetland during construction. Other sources of pollutants may be pesticide spraying on golf courses, particulates in exhausts from airplanes or motor vehicles, and pesticides used in mosquito control.

Activities that generate pollutants within the wetland itself, such as grazing, also count for a YES for this question. Cattle, sheep, or large native herbivores such as elk grazing within the wetland are a source of pollutants. Also answer YES to this question if the wetland has a pond that is commonly used by migrating waterfowl. Waterfowl droppings are a source of both excess nutrients and bacteria.

Annotation

This question is trying to address more specific examples of pollutants that you might observe in the wetland or in the surrounding landscape that are not captured in the previous questions about land uses. It might be a pollutant you observe to be directly applied to the wetland, or a source of pollution that occurs outside of the 150 ft buffer that is assessed in the preceding questions. Examples include:

- The wetland is treated for mosquitos.
- There are social encampments in or near the wetland.
- A road, such as highway or gravel road, is near enough that you observe the dust and debris in the wetland

- The wetland is directly adjacent to an airport—the airport footprint may be outside of the 150ft buffer, but planes may take off or land right over the wetland.

Note on waterfowl use: There is no threshold identified for size of open water for a larger pond commonly used by waterfowl in this question. This condition is common in urban and rural areas where open water and low grass or cut farm fields attract geese and ducks. One source of evidence for a concentration is a notable presence of waterfowl droppings on the ground. Evidence of waterfowl includes presence of flocks or droppings and complaints from residents. If you see an individual duck/goose or other waterfowl on a site with a pond, that is an indicator of YES for this question. This assumption meets the needs for this to be a rapid method without requiring additional data collection.

R 3.0 Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?

Annotation

These questions ask if the wetland is in a watershed with impaired waterbodies. The wetland must be located upgradient of the listed water because a wetland can't affect the listing of a waterbody if the wetland is located downgradient of the listed water.

Wetlands help to clean up water by intercepting and holding and/or cleaning up contaminated water. They also act to transform mobile contaminants like nitrogen that can move through the groundwater system. Even small wetlands within a basin act cumulatively to improve water quality.

Answer the following questions by accessing the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁴⁴ and determining if the wetland you are rating is in the contributing basin of a listed water.

R 3.1 Is the wetland along a stream or river that is on the 303(d) list or on a tributary that drains to a stream on the 303(d) list?

Rationale for indicator: The phrase, "303(d) list," is short for the list of impaired waters (stream segments, lakes) that the Clean Water Act requires all states to submit to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) every two years. In Washington, we identify all waters where required pollution controls are not sufficient to attain or maintain water quality standards. Wetlands that discharge directly to these polluted waters are judged to be more valuable than those that discharge to unpolluted bodies of water because their role at cleaning up the pollution is critical for reducing further degradation of water quality.

⁴⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

Annotation

This section is expanded to incorporate web resources and provide more detailed instructions on their use.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁴⁵ that displays the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards. Follow these steps to determine if the Riverine wetland lies on a stream or river mapped as a Category 5 water, or is on a tributary to one:

1. Locate your wetland on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#).⁴⁶
2. Use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select Assessed Water/Sediment to display listed waters.
3. Under the Filter tab, go to the Water Quality Assessment section and unselect Category 1, 2, 4A, 4B, and 4C to show only the Category 5 (303(d)-listed) waters. Apply the filter.
4. Under the Tools tab, in the Other section, use the Measure Distance tool to determine if the wetland being rated is on a tributary within a straight-line distance of 1 mi upgradient of any aquatic resource mapped as Category 5 (red lines or polygons on the map).

Answer YES to this question if the wetland is along a stream or river that is on the 303(d) list or on a tributary that drains to one within 1 mi.

R 3.2 Is the wetland along a stream or river that has TMDL limits for nutrients, toxics, or pathogens?

Rationale for indicator: Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL), also called Water Cleanup Plans or Water Quality Improvement Projects, describe the type, amount, and sources of water pollution in a particular water body. They analyze how much the pollution needs to be reduced or eliminated to meet water quality standards, and then provide targets and strategies to control the pollution. Wetlands that discharge directly to these polluted waters are judged to be more valuable because they function at a landscape scale to mitigate discharges of pollutants. TMDLs are based on models that estimate the natural decay and adsorption of pollutants under current conditions. Wetlands are an important part of that natural decay; their destruction would require a recalibration of the TMDL models and force reductions in current levels of discharge.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#) that displays all the bodies of water that have TMDLs. Determine if the wetland you are rating is flooded by a stream or river in a drainage for which TMDLs have been developed or are being developed.

⁴⁵ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁴⁶ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

Annotation

Basin size is not considered for this question because Riverine wetlands are directly connected to the listed waterbody.

To determine if the river or stream is in a drainage with a TMDL:

1. Go to the [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁴⁷ map and select Add/Remove Map Data and check WQ Improvement Projects.
2. If the wetland being rated is located in a basin highlighted as Approved or In Development, click on the highlighted polygon to determine if the listing is for the river or stream on which the wetland is located, or if the wetland and associated stream are in the drainage to the TMDL study area.
3. Answer YES for this question if the TMDL is for nutrients, toxics, or pathogens. Note that multiple TMDLs may apply to a given area.

Data for TMDLs that have been approved can also be visualized by selecting Assessed Waters/Sediment and filtering so that only Category 4A and 4B assessed waters are displayed:

- Category 4A waters have approved TMDLs.
- Category 4B waters have a pollution control program, similar to a TMDL plan, that is expected to solve the pollution problems (such as a local plan)

Category 4C waters are impaired by causes that cannot be addressed through a TMDL plan, such as the presence of invasive species, and may not qualify as a local plan or TMDL for this question. You should investigate the details of the 4C listing to determine if it meets the intent of this question.

Select the listed features on the stream or river associated with the wetland or in the listed drainage downgradient of the wetland to access details and view the listings. TMDL projects in development are not displayed at this level on the WQ Atlas.

You can use a screenshot of the TMDL study area from the report or from the Water Quality Atlas map to meet the figure requirement for this question.

Note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project: A water quality improvement effort is currently in process for Puget Sound and therefore Puget Sound is now mapped as having a TMDL in development for the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project (PSNRP). Because all wetlands in the Puget Sound basin would score High for this question, and we currently do not have a way to distinguish areas where wetlands may be more valuable than others related to the PSNRP, Ecology does not consider the Puget Sound TMDL in development for PSNRP as meeting the criteria for this question at this time. Wetlands in the contributing basins of bays and other areas in Puget Sound that have their own TMDL listings continue to meet the criteria for this question.

⁴⁷ <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterqualityatlas/map.aspx>

R 3.3 Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality?

Rationale for indicator: Not all pollution and water quality problems are identified by Ecology’s water quality monitoring program. Local and watershed planning efforts sometimes identify wetlands that are important in maintaining existing water quality. These wetlands provide a value to society that needs to be replaced if they are impacted.

To answer this question, you will need to seek information from the planning department of the local jurisdiction where the site is located. Information on regional or local plans can often be found on the website of the city or county in which the wetland is found. Useful search phrases include: “watershed plan,” “water quality,” or “wetland protection.”

If the river or stream along which the wetland is found has a TMDL plan developed for it, then answer YES on this question. It is assumed that all wetlands are valuable in a basin where water quality is poor enough to require a TMDL. The Department of Ecology’s [Water Quality Improvement Projects](#)⁴⁸ website lists all the bodies of water that have TMDLs (see R 3.2 above for instructions).

Annotation: For wetlands in the contributing basin to areas with a TMDL “in development,” you would also answer YES (but see note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project in R 3.2 above).

NOTE: The fact that a TMDL has been developed for the river or basin in which the wetland is found is scored twice for Riverine wetlands: once in question R 3.2 and also in R 3.3.

⁴⁸ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-improvement/Total-Maximum-Daily-Load-process/Directory-of-improvement-projects>

R 4.0 Does the site have the potential to reduce flooding and erosion?

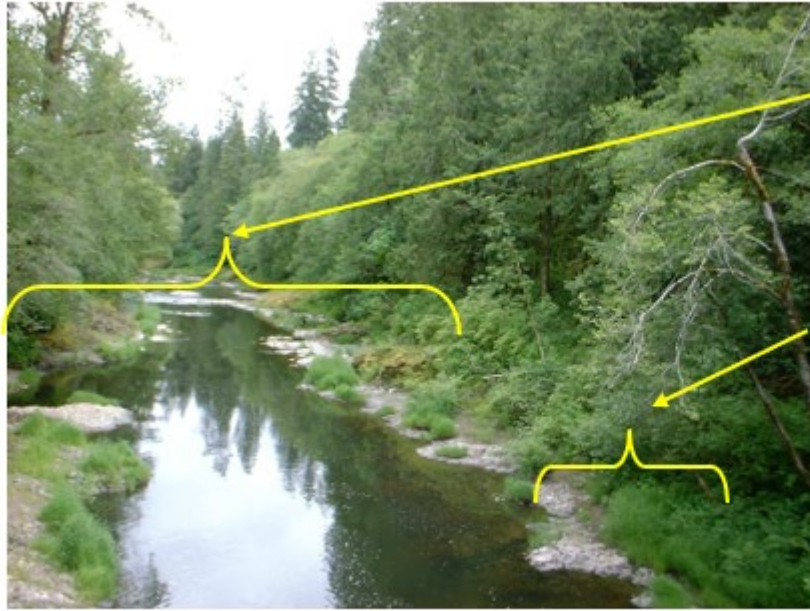
R 4.1 Characteristics of the overbank flood storage the wetland provides, based on the ratio between the channel width and the width of the wetland perpendicular to the flow:

Rationale for indicator: The ratio of the width of the channel to the width of the wetland perpendicular to the flow is an indicator of the relative volume of storage available within the wetland. The width of the stream between banks is an indicator of the relative flows at that point in the watershed. Wider streams will usually have higher volumes of water than narrower streams. More storage is therefore needed in larger systems to lessen the impact of peak flows. The width of the wetland perpendicular to the stream is used as an indicator of the amount of short-term storage available during a flood event. A wetland that is wide relative to the width of the stream is assumed to provide more storage during a flood event than a narrow one. The ratio of the two values provides an estimate that makes it possible to rank wetlands relative to each other in terms of their overall potential for storage.

You will need to estimate the average distance of the wetland perpendicular to the direction of the flow, and the width of the stream or river channel (distance between the top of the banks of the stream). Calculate this ratio by taking the width of the wetland and dividing by the width of the stream. There are five thresholds for scoring: a ratio more than 20, a ratio between 10-20, a ratio between 5-<10, a ratio between 1-<5, and a ratio <1.

Riverine wetlands are found in different positions in the floodplain, and it may sometimes be difficult to estimate this indicator. The following bullets describe some common types of Riverine wetlands and how to estimate this indicator.

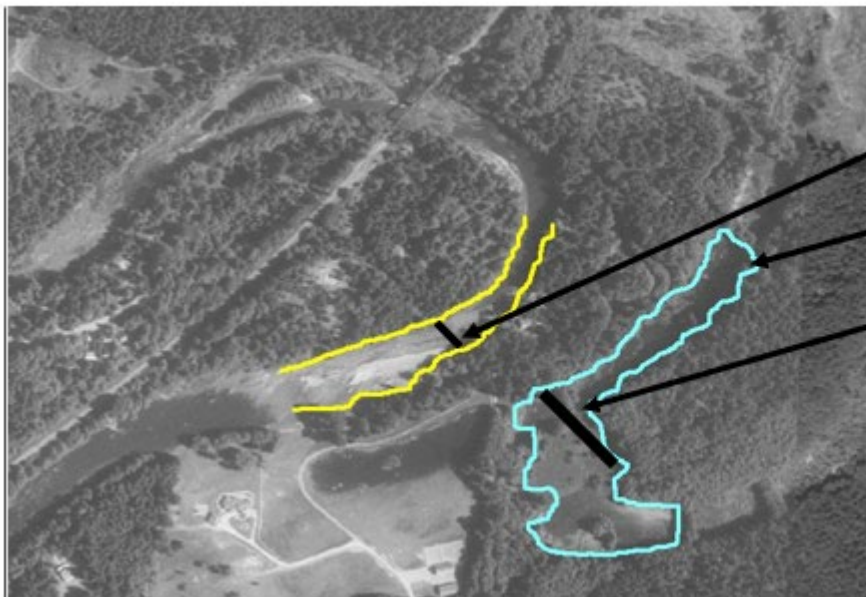
- If the wetland lies within the banks of the stream or river, the ratio is estimated as: the average width of the wetland ÷ average distance between banks. Figure 28 shows a wetland where plants fill only a small part of the distance between the banks. In this case the ratio is <1.
- If the wetland lies outside the existing banks of the river, you may need to estimate the distances using a map or aerial photograph. Riverine wetlands in old oxbows may be some distance away from the riverbanks. Instead of trying to estimate a width for the wetland and the distance between banks in feet or yards, it may be easier to estimate the ratio directly from an aerial photo using a ruler. Ask yourself whether the average width of the wetland is more or less than the distance between banks. If it is more, is it more than five times as wide? If not, the ratio is between 1 and <5. If it is more than five times greater, is it more than 10 times, etc. Figure 29 shows a Riverine wetland in an old oxbow where the ratio was measured to be between 1-<5.
- If you are including the river or stream as part of the wetland, then the width of the stream is also included in the estimate of the width of the wetland.
- Braided channels: If the wetland is associated with only some of the braids, you should use the cumulative width of all channels to calculate the average width of the channel.



Distance between banks is approximately 100 ft

Average width of wetland perpendicular to river flow is approximately 10 ft

Figure 28. A Riverine wetland where the width of the wetland is less than the distance between the banks (ratio <1). Yellow brackets show the distance between the banks of the river (approximately 100 ft) and the average width of the wetland perpendicular to the river flow (approximately 10 ft).



Average width of river between banks

Boundary of wetland

Average width of wetland perpendicular to the direction of flow

Figure 29. A Riverine wetland in an old oxbow of the Nisqually River outlined in blue, where the average width of the wetland perpendicular to the river flow, shown by the black line, is between 1 and 5 times the width of the river channel. The yellow lines delineate the river channel adjacent to the wetland, with the black line between them showing the average width of the river.

R 4.2 Characteristics of plants that slow down water velocities during floods:

Rationale for indicator: Riverine wetlands play an important role during floods because the plants act to slow water velocities and thereby erosive flows. This reduction in velocity also spreads out the time of peak flows, thereby reducing the maximum flows. The potential for reducing flows will be greatest where the density of wetland plants and other obstructions is greatest and where the obstructions are rigid enough to resist water velocities during floods (Adamus et al., 1991). The indicator combines both characteristics for the scoring. Shrubs and trees are considered to be better at resisting water velocities than emergent plants. Aquatic bed species are judged not to provide much resistance and are not counted. Wetlands with a dense cover of trees and shrubs are scored higher than those with a cover of only emergent species.

For this question, you will need to group the plants found within the wetland into two categories: 1) emergent, and 2) forest and shrub-shrub.

There are four size thresholds used to score this characteristic: 1) forest or shrub $> \frac{1}{3}$ the area of the wetland, 2) emergent plants $> \frac{2}{3}$ area, 3) forest or shrub $> \frac{1}{10}$ area, and 4) emergent plants $> \frac{1}{3}$ area. Figure 30 shows an aerial photograph of a Riverine wetland that has dense shrub plants over most of its area.



Figure 30. A Riverine wetland in Bothell that has shrub plants over more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of its area in many patches. Other important characteristics are: 1) the stream is part of the wetland because it is narrower than 50 ft and there are wetland plants on both sides, 2) the average ratio of width of wetland to width of stream is greater than 20. The unit boundary is outlined in white, and the stream channel is the dark meander within the unit.

NOTE: This plant cover is NOT based on the Cowardin classification. The polygons you draw of emergent and shrub plants must have a 90% cover of the ground when you look down from a person's height (5ft).

NOTE: If the wetland is covered with downed trees, you can treat large woody debris as forest or shrub.

R 5.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?

R 5.1 Is the stream or river adjacent to the wetland downcut?

Rationale for indicator: Streams in developed areas are often downcut because of the increased flows from impermeable surfaces (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). As a result, the streams can become disconnected from the surrounding floodplain and floodwaters go overbank less frequently. A Riverine wetland that is directly adjacent to a downcut stream will not provide the same level of flood attenuation as one that is adjacent to a stream with no downcutting.

To answer this question, you will need to view the section of the stream that provides the overbank flows to the wetland unit. Generally, downcutting becomes visible when its watershed contains more than 10% impervious surface (Donaldson & Hefner, 2005). Figures 31, 32, 33 and 34 show a progression of different levels of downcutting that result from development. For the purposes of this rating, Figures 33 and 34 show streams for which the answer to R 5.1 would be YES. Figures 31 and 32 are streams for which the answer would be NO because the floodplain is still somewhat connected to the stream. Figures 31-34 are from Donaldson & Hefner (2005).

Annotation

If the wetland is within the banks of the stream, answer NO. The wetland's ability to receive floodwater is not reduced or limited by downcutting of the banks.



Figure 31. Stream in a watershed with less than 5% impervious surface cover, showing no downcutting.



Figure 32. A stream in a watershed with 8-10% impervious surface cover. Streambed is still relatively stable, but signs of stream erosion are more apparent. Not much downcutting is evident.



Figure 33. A stream in a watershed with approximately 20% impervious surface cover showing downcutting. You would answer YES to question R 5.1 for this stream.



Figure 34. This stream has a surrounding area of approximately 30% impervious surface cover. The manhole in the middle of the picture was originally in the floodplain and is an indicator of the degree to which the channel has been downcut.

R 5.2 Does the upgradient watershed include a UGA or incorporated area? (This question is the same as R 2.2.)

Rationale for indicator: Urban and suburban areas are a major source of impervious surface. These areas increase both intensity of peak flows and the amount of water flowing during a storm event (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). The presence of development upstream of the wetland is a good indicator that the landscape is increasing the flood flows to the wetland unit, thereby increasing the wetland's level of functioning in attenuating floods.

To begin, trace the stream or river to its source and determine whether there are any urban or suburban areas adjacent to the stream. Answer YES to this question if there are any incorporated cities and towns or their Urban Growth Areas (UGA) upstream of the wetland. The wetland may be within the UGA as long as some of the UGA is upstream. Maps of UGAs and urban areas can be found on Ecology's [Coastal Atlas Map](#)⁴⁹ or [Water Quality Atlas Map](#), or a map from the local jurisdiction.⁵⁰

If there are no developed areas adjacent to the stream, you will need to identify the contributing basin to the stream that floods the wetland you are rating. This can be done using topographic maps or through websites such as the [USGS National Map](#).⁵¹ Answer YES to this question if there are any incorporated cities and towns or UGAs within the contributing basin.

Annotation

To display city and UGA boundaries on the [Coastal Atlas Map](#):⁵²

1. Select the Contents tab.
2. Go to the Administrative/Regulated tab.
3. Select City and Urban growth area (UGA) under Jurisdictions.
4. Select Go.

To display city and UGA boundaries on the [Water Quality Atlas Map](#):⁵³

1. Select the Add/Remove Data tab.
2. Select Cities and Urban Growth Boundaries under Administrative Boundaries.
3. Select Go.

⁴⁹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlasmap>

⁵⁰ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁵¹ <https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/>

⁵² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlasmap>

⁵³ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

The USGS, as part of the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD), provides a reliable resource for identifying contributing basins of the streams associated with Riverine wetlands. They have mapped the contributing basins of rivers in the form of watershed boundary maps delineated at varying scales called Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC). You can access those watershed data through the following resources:

- Watershed boundary HUC maps are available on Ecology’s [Water Quality Atlas Map](#)⁵⁴ under Hydrography in the Map Layers. The HUC(s) that you use to map the contributing basin of the stream that floods the wetland will depend on the size of the stream upgradient of the location of the wetland. Look at the entire contributing basin of the stream or river upstream of the wetland. Note that the entire contributing basin to the stream above the wetland may contain multiple HUCs.
- [StreamStats](#)⁵⁵ is a USGS application that can also be helpful in mapping contributing basins of streams; however, you should confirm the results with additional topographic and hydrographic resources, such as NHD and Lidar or other elevation data.

R 5.3 Is the upgradient stream or river controlled by dams?

Rationale for indicator: Dams will buffer the flood waters that a wetland receives by holding much of the waters back upstream of the unit. This can reduce the flood storage and attenuation that the wetland itself performs. The landscape potential for a wetland performing hydrologic functions is therefore reduced when dams are present upstream.

To answer this question, you will have to trace on a map or aerial photo the stream or river adjacent to the wetland you are rating. Answer YES to this question if there is a dam within 10 miles upstream of the wetland. **Look only for dams on the main channel of the stream adjacent to the wetland.** Dams on tributaries to the main stream do not count.

Annotation

Small farm weirs and beaver dams do not count for this question.

⁵⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁵⁵ <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/streamstats-streamflow-statistics-and-spatial-analysis-tools>

R 6.0 Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?

R 6.1 Distance to the nearest areas downstream that have flooding problems:

Rationale for indicator: The value of wetlands in reducing the impacts of flooding and erosion is based on the presence of human or natural resources that can be damaged by these processes. The indicator characterizes whether the wetland's position in the landscape protects downgradient resources from flooding. In general, the value of a wetland in reducing flood damage is judged to decrease with increasing distance from downstream flood-prone areas because the amount of water stored by the wetland relative to the overall flows decreases. Distance is characterized qualitatively in terms of hydrologic basins.

If you do not know whether floods have caused damage downstream of the wetland unit, you will need to do some research. Your best sources of information on flooding problems are the emergency planning office in your local government and the local Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). You may also find useful information using search engines on the web. Search using the name of a downstream city or the watershed name + "flooding" (or "flood problems," "flood history").

Determine whether flooding occurs that damages resources in:

- The sub-basin that is immediately downgradient of the unit.

Annotation: The sub-basin immediately downgradient of the unit is the 12-digit HUC in which the wetland occurs.

- A sub-basin farther downgradient.

Annotation: The sub-basin farther downgradient is the next 12-digit HUC down from the wetland.

Annotation

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration publishes a [searchable database](#)⁵⁶ of storms that caused damage. Any recorded evidence that damage from flooding has occurred can be used, regardless of time or source (e.g., local jurisdiction flood plan or data, news article, etc.).

⁵⁶ <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/stormevents/>

R 6.2 Has the site been identified as important for flood storage or flood conveyance in a regional flood control plan?

Rationale for indicator: The values of flood storage and flood conveyance provided by wetlands are often recognized in regional flood control plans, and specific sites are mentioned in these plans. If the value of a wetland for flood attenuation has already been recognized, it is assigned a High rating for value.

To answer this question, contact the jurisdiction in which the site is found to determine whether any regional flood control plans exist. A search of websites for flood prone areas will probably also list flood control plans for the watershed in question. If plans exist, determine if the site is listed as important or valuable for flood storage. To answer YES to this question, the flood control district needs to have developed a flood control or flood hazard mitigation plan that identifies the site as one that needs to be preserved or enhanced to improve flood protection.

5.5 Water quality and hydrologic functions in Lake Fringe wetlands (questions starting with ‘L’)

L 1.0 Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?

NOTE: Lake Fringe wetlands have a maximum score for site potential of 12 points instead of 16 for the site potential. The technical review team developing the 2004 Wetland Rating System (Hruby, 2004a; b) concluded that Lake Fringe wetlands do not improve water quality to the same extent as Riverine or Depressional wetlands because any pollutants taken up in plant material will be more easily released into the water column and dispersed when the plants die off.

L 1.1 Average width of plants along the lakeshore:

Rationale for indicator: The intent of this question is to characterize the width of the zone of plants that provides a vertical structure to filter out pollutants or absorb them. Wetlands in which the average width of plants is large are more likely to retain sediment and toxic compounds than wetlands where plants are in a narrow band (Adamus et al., 1991). Even aquatic bed species that die back every year are considered to play a role in improving water quality. These plants take up nutrients in the spring and summer that would otherwise be available to stimulate algal blooms in the lake. In addition, aquatic bed species change the chemistry of the lake bottom to facilitate the binding of phosphorus (Moore et al., 1994).

It is often difficult to map the outside edge of a wetland when it is along the shores of a lake where open water can extend out for large distances. For this reason, the question is phrased in terms of width of the zone of plants perpendicular to the shore rather than the area of plants. There are three thresholds for scoring the average width of the zone of plants:

- 33 ft or more (10 m)
- 16 ft-< 33 ft (5-10 m)
- 6 ft-<16 ft (2-5 m)

Sketch the zone of plants on a map or aerial photo and average the width by segment. Then, calculate an overall average width for the wetland. Figure 35 gives an example of such a sketch. Figure 36 shows an actual Lake Fringe wetland where the average width of plants is greater than 33 ft.

Annotation: The zone of plants is based on the area of plants identified using polygons of Cowardin classes and includes aquatic bed.

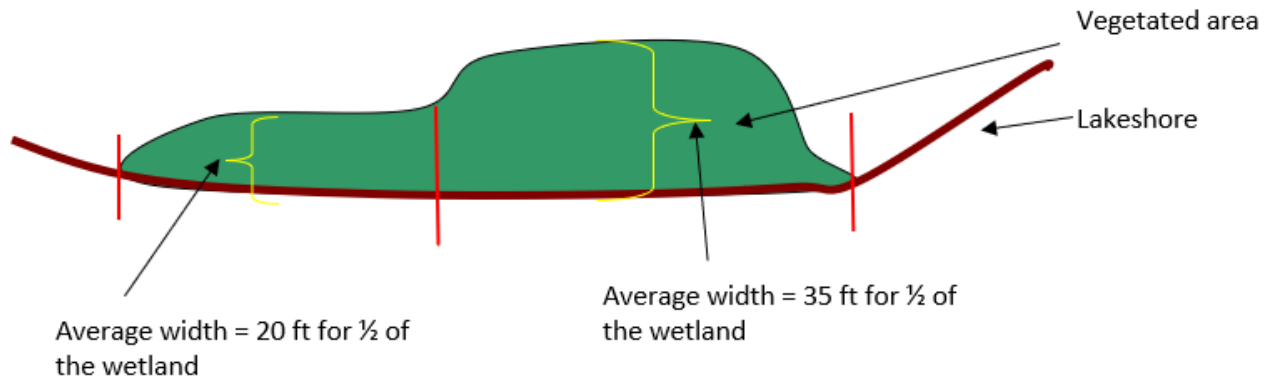


Figure 35. Estimating width of the plant zone along the shores of a lake. The average width for the entire area is: $(20 \text{ ft} \times 0.5) + (35 \text{ ft} \times 0.5) = 27.5 \text{ ft}$.



Figure 36. A Lake Fringe wetland where the zone of plants is wider than 33 ft. The plants along the shores of this lake consist of a zone of shrubs and a zone of aquatic bed and emergent species.

L 1.2 Characteristics of the plants in the wetland:

Rationale for indicator: The intent of this question is to characterize how much of the wetland is covered with plants that are more effective at improving water quality in a lake environment. Herbaceous emergent species have, in general, been found to sequester metals and remove oils and other organics better than other plant species (Hammer, 1989; Horner, 1992).

For this question, you will need to group the plants found within the wetland into three categories: 1) herbaceous, 2) aquatic bed, and 3) any other plants. The herbaceous plants can be either the dominant plant form (in this case it would be called emergent class) or as an understory in a shrub or forest community. **These groupings are not the Cowardin classes for plants.**

There are several size thresholds used to score this characteristic: More than 90%, more than $\frac{2}{3}$, or more than $\frac{1}{3}$, of the vegetated area is covered in herbaceous plants or other types. You will need to draw the areas of plant types on a map or aerial photo before you can be confident that your estimates are accurate.

NOTE: In Lake Fringe wetlands, the area of the wetland used as the basis for determining thresholds is only the area that is vegetated. Do not include open water beyond the outer edge of the wetland in determining the area of the wetland covered by a specific type of plants. Small patches of open water within the vegetated zone, however, are included in the estimate for total area.

L 2.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?

L 2.1 Is the lake used by power boats?

Rationale for indicator: The presence of power boats on a lake will increase the pollutants entering a Lake Fringe wetland. Toxic chemicals, oils, cleaners, and paint scrapings from boat maintenance can make their way into the water (reviewed in Asplund, 2000). In addition, older two stroke engines still found on many recreational boats and jet skis were purposely designed to discharge their exhaust, which often contains gasoline and oil, into the water. The landscape potential of a wetland along the shores of a lake to improve water quality is higher if the lake itself is directly receiving pollutants from power boats.

To answer this question, you will need to know if the lake has any restrictions on use by power boats. The local planning department or parks department should have this information. The answer to this question is NO if there is a complete ban on gasoline or diesel motors on the lake. Many lakes are limited to small outboards of less than 5 or 10 hp, but these are still sources of pollutants, and the answer would be YES. Other lakes are limited to electric motors only. In this latter case, the answer would also be NO.

The answer to this question should be YES unless you can provide evidence that a ban on power boats exists.

L 2.2 Is more than 10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland on the upland side in land uses that generate pollutants in surface runoff (agricultural, pasture, residential, commercial, or urban)?

Rationale for indicator: Farming, grazing, golf courses, residential areas, commercial areas, and urban areas, in general, are major sources of pollutants (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). The review also found that a well-vegetated buffer of 150 ft will remove only 60-80% of some pollutants from surface runoff into a wetland. Thus, pollutants from such land uses will probably reach the wetland unit along the lake if they are within 150 ft of it.

Use your aerial photo and draw a line around the wetland that is 150 ft from the upland edge of the wetland. The line should be 150 ft on the landward side of the wetland boundary. Answer YES to this question if you find the listed uses within 150 ft of the wetland and they cover more than 10% of the area within this 150 ft perimeter upslope of the wetland. Use GIS or a graphic aid, such as an acetate overlay with a grid or dots, to estimate area. Visual estimates are not accurate enough and may result in significant errors.

Annotation

In this case “residential areas” is a more generic term for residences and not tied to specific density. Any house or lawn or plot with a house on it within 150 ft is a source of pollution into the wetland. It could be just the edge of a lawn or driveway.

L 2.3 Does the lake have problems with algal blooms or excessive plant growth such as milfoil?

Rationale for indicator: Algal blooms and blooms of larger plants such as milfoil are an indication of excessive nutrients in the lake water (Schindler & Fee, 1974; Smith et al., 1999). The increased levels of nutrients in the lake increase the amount of nutrients that the wetland plants absorb (Venterink et al., 2002) and thus also increase the level of function within the wetland unit.

To answer this question, you will need to visit the lake in the summer, or examine aerial photographs taken in the summer, to determine whether there is excessive plant growth (Figures 37, 38). If you are rating the wetland in the winter, you will need to inquire locally (residents, board of health officials, or parks departments) to determine whether blooms occur in the summer.

Annotation

The following resources can help to make a positive determination of algal blooms or excessive plant growth:

- Locations of current toxic algae blooms are available through the [freshwater algae bloom monitoring program](https://www.nwtoxicalgae.org/FindLakes.aspx).⁵⁷
- Historic data are available through Ecology’s [Lakes data map](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/tools/LakeDetail.aspx).⁵⁸

These resources, however, should not be used as a confirmation that those conditions do not occur on the lake. Further inquiry with the local jurisdiction, lake manager, residents, etc. is required to determine that the lake does not have problems with algal blooms or excessive plant growth.

⁵⁷ <https://www.nwtoxicalgae.org/FindLakes.aspx>

⁵⁸ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/coastalatlas/tools/LakeDetail.aspx>



Figure 37. Algal blooms in a lake in the Puget Sound area.



Figure 38. A lake infested with milfoil indicating the presence of excess nutrients (photo courtesy of New Hampshire Department of Environmental Protection).

L 3.0 Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?

Annotation

These questions ask if the wetland is on a lake with poor water quality or if the wetland is on a lake in the contributing basin of listed water bodies.

Wetlands that are located in the contributing basin of listed waters help to clean up water by intercepting and holding and/or cleaning up contaminated water that would otherwise move downgradient to the listed water. They also act to transform mobile contaminants like nitrogen that can move through the groundwater system. Even small wetlands within a basin act cumulatively to improve water quality.

Answer the following questions by accessing the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁵⁹ and determining if the wetland you are rating is on a listed lake or if the wetland is on a lake that is in the contributing basin of a listed water.

L 3.1 Is the lake on the 303(d) list of degraded aquatic resources?

Rationale for indicator: The phrase "303(d) list" is short for the list of impaired waters (stream segments, lakes) that the Clean Water Act requires all states to submit to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) every two years. In Washington, we identify all waters where pollution controls are not sufficient to attain or maintain applicable water quality standards. Wetlands along the shores of lakes on the 303(d) list are judged to be more valuable because their role in cleaning up the pollution is critical for reducing further degradation of water quality.

Annotation

This section is expanded to incorporate web resources and provide more detailed instructions on their use.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁶⁰ that displays the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards.

Determine if the wetland is along the shores of a lake on the 303(d) list.

Using the Water Quality Atlas map to determine if the wetland is on a 303(d)-listed lake:

1. Locate your wetland on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#).⁶¹
2. Use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select Assessed Water/Sediment to display listed waters.

⁵⁹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁶⁰ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁶¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

3. Under the Filter tab, go to the Water Quality Assessment section and unselect Category 1, 2, 4A, 4B, and 4C to show only the Category 5 (303(d)-listed) waters. Apply the filter.
4. Determine if the wetland you are rating is on a lake mapped with solid red polygons in the Water Quality Atlas.

Answer YES to this question if the wetland you are rating is on a lake with a 303(d) listing.

L 3.2 Is the lake in a subwatershed where another aquatic resource is on the 303(d) list?

Rationale for indicator: Lake Fringe wetlands can mitigate the impacts of pollution even if they are not located directly on a polluted body of water. At a watershed scale, Lake Fringe wetlands can remove pollutants that might otherwise cause problems farther downstream. They can also trap airborne pollutants. Thus, wetlands can provide an ecosystem service and value to our society in any basin and sub-basin that has pollution problems. The removal of pollutants by wetlands is judged to be more valuable in basins where other aquatic resources are already polluted. The 303(d) list is used as an indicator of pollution problems in a basin.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁶² that displays all the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards (see L 3.1 above for instructions). Determine if the wetland is in a basin or sub-basin where any body of water is on the 303(d) list.

Annotation

The scale of the basin or sub-basin for this question is the approximate area (4-40 sq. mi) of a 12-digit hydrologic unit (HUC). 12-digit HUC boundaries can be accessed as a data layer on Ecology's Water Quality Atlas. The question text has been revised to reflect this scale.

The sub-basin level addresses the potential for groundwater connection and the cumulative action of wetlands on the landscape to manage contaminated water.

To identify wetlands on a lake within a basin with listed waters, determine whether the lake occurs upgradient (for a YES) or downgradient (for a NO) of the 303(d)-listed water.

L 3.3 Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality?

Rationale for indicator: Not all pollution and water quality problems are identified by Ecology's water quality monitoring program. Local and watershed planning efforts sometimes identify wetlands that are important in maintaining existing water quality. These wetlands provide a value to society that needs to be replaced if they are impacted.

⁶² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

To answer this question, you will need to seek information from the planning department of the local jurisdiction where the site is located. Information on regional or local plans can often be found on the website of the city or county in which the site is found. Useful search phrases include: “watershed plan,” “water quality,” or “wetland protection.”

If the basin in which the wetland is found has a Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) plan (also called a Water Cleanup Plan or Water Quality Improvement Project) developed for it, then answer YES for this question. It is assumed that all wetlands are valuable in a basin where water quality is poor enough to require a TMDL. The Department of Ecology’s [Water Quality improvement projects](#)⁶³ website lists all the bodies of water that have TMDLs.

NOTE: Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) or Water Cleanup Plans describe the type, amount, and sources of water pollution in a particular water body. They analyze how much the pollution needs to be reduced or eliminated to meet water quality standards, and then provide targets and strategies to control the pollution. Wetlands in these basins are judged to be more valuable because they function at a landscape scale to mitigate discharges of pollutants. TMDLs are based on models that estimate the natural decay and adsorption of pollutants under current conditions. Wetlands are an important part of that natural decay; their destruction would require a recalibration of the TMDL models and force reductions in current levels of discharge.

Annotation

For wetlands on lakes in the contributing basin to areas with a TMDL “in development,” you would also answer YES (but see note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project below).

To answer YES for a TMDL in the basin, the wetland you are rating should be on a lake within the contributing basin to the TMDL study area. That means that the lake occurs within or upgradient of the TMDL study area. To find the TMDL study area:

1. Go to the [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁶⁴ and use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select WQ Improvement Projects for display.
2. If the lake is located in a basin highlighted as “Approved” or “In Development,” click on the highlighted polygon and go to the report link for the TMDL.
3. Look in the report for the TMDL study area to determine if the lake is within the contributing area to the TMDL study area. Note that multiple TMDLs may apply to a given area.

Data for TMDLs that have been approved can also be visualized by selecting Assessed Waters/Sediment and filtering so that only Category 4A and 4B assessed waters are displayed.

- Category 4A waters have approved TMDLs.
- Category 4B waters have a pollution control program, similar to a TMDL plan, that is expected to solve the pollution problems (such as a local plan).

⁶³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-improvement/Total-Maximum-Daily-Load-process/Directory-of-improvement-projects>

⁶⁴ <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterqualityatlas/map.aspx>

Category 4C waters are impaired by causes that cannot be addressed through a TMDL plan, such as the presence of invasive species, and may not qualify as a local plan or TMDL for this question. You should investigate the details of the 4C listing to determine if it meets the intent of this question.

Select listed features downgradient of the lake to access details and view the listings. TMDL projects in development are not displayed at this level on the WQ Atlas.

You can use a screenshot of the TMDL study area from the report or from the Water Quality Atlas map to meet the figure requirement for this question.

Note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project: A water quality improvement effort is currently in process for Puget Sound and therefore Puget Sound is now mapped as having a TMDL in development for the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project (PSNRP). Because all wetlands in the Puget Sound basin would score High for this question, and we currently do not have a way to distinguish areas where wetlands may be more valuable than others related to the PSNRP, Ecology does not consider the Puget Sound TMDL in development for PSNRP as meeting the criteria for this question at this time. Wetlands in the contributing basins of bays and other areas in Puget Sound that have their own TMDL listings continue to meet the criteria for this question.

L 4.0 Does the site have the potential to reduce shoreline erosion?

The site potential for Lake Fringe wetlands has a maximum score of 6 points for the hydrologic functions instead of 16. The technical review team developing the 2004 Wetland Rating System concluded that Lake Fringe wetlands do not provide hydrologic functions to the same extent as Riverine or Depressional wetlands. The function of reducing shoreline erosion at the local scale was not judged to be as important as reducing peak flows and reducing erosion at the watershed scale and should not be scored as highly. Lake Fringe wetlands do, however, provide a hydrologic function by dissipating wave energy before it reaches the shore. Waves can erode shorelines and cause damage to resources along the shore.

L. 4.1 Average width and characteristics of plants along the lakeshore (do not include aquatic bed species):

Rationale for indicator: The intent of this question is to characterize how much of the wetland is covered with plants that provide a physical barrier to waves and protect the shore from erosion. This protection consists of both shoreline anchoring and the dissipation of erosive forces (Adamus et al., 1991). Wetlands that have extensive, persistent (especially woody) plants provide protection from waves and currents associated with large storms that would otherwise penetrate deep into the shoreline (Adamus et al., 1991). Emergent plants provide some protection but not as much as the stiffer shrubs and trees.

This characteristic is similar to that used in L 1.1 and L 1.2, but the grouping of plant types and thresholds for scoring are different. You are looking for the areas that would be classified as Forested, Scrub-shrub, or Emergent. **This indicator is based on the Cowardin plant classes.**

It is difficult to map the outside edge of a wetland when it is along the shores of a lake where open water can extend out for large distances. For this reason, the question is phrased in terms of the width and type of plants found only within the area of trees, shrubs, and emergents. There are two thresholds for measuring the average width of plant zones [33 ft (10m) and 6 ft (2m)], and two thresholds based on length of the wetland along the shore ($\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the length along the shore). Figure 39 gives an example of such a sketch.

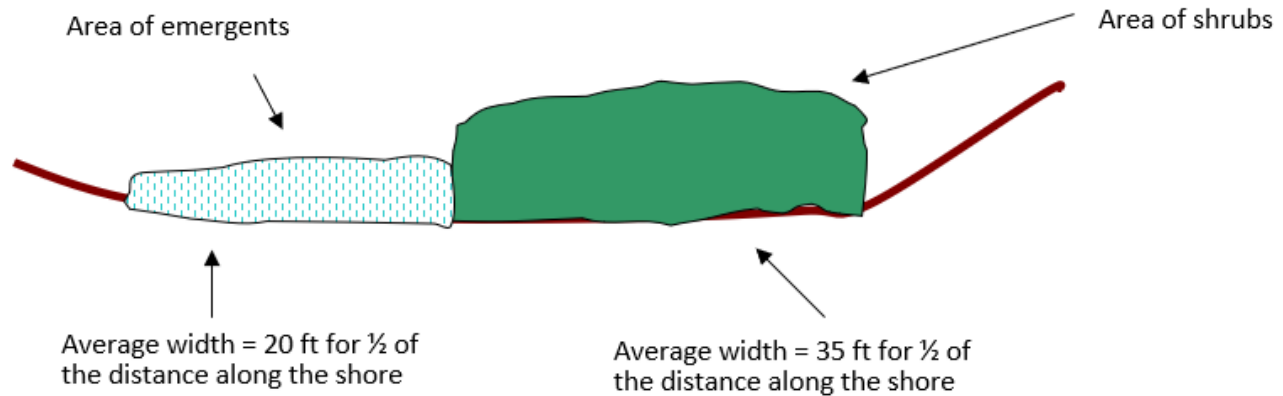


Figure 39. Estimating width of plant types along the shores of a lake. The average width of shrubs is 35 ft for $\frac{1}{2}$ the length along the shore and the width of emergents is 20 ft for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the length. This wetland would score 4 points because more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the length consists of a zone of shrubs wider than 33 ft.

Annotation

Do not include Aquatic Bed because those species die back in the winter, when storms that generate shoreline erosion are most likely to occur.

L 5.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?

L 5.1 Is the lake used by power boats with more than 10 hp?

Rationale for indicator: Boat wakes can be a major source of shoreline erosion (Maynard et al., 2008, review in Asplund, 2000). Lakes with boat traffic will have larger waves than lakes without. Wetlands along the shores of the former will provide a higher level of function by reducing the impact of the larger waves.

To answer this question, you will need to know whether the lake has any restrictions on power boats. The local planning department or parks department should have this information. The answer to this question is NO if there is a complete ban on gasoline or diesel motors on the lake. Many lakes are limited to small outboards of less than 5 or 10 hp. Other lakes are limited to

electric motors only. In both cases the answer would also be NO because the speed of these smaller boats is limited, and correspondingly, their wakes will be smaller.

The answer to this question should be YES unless you can provide evidence that the bans on power boats are present.

L 5.2 Is the fetch on the lake side of the wetland at least 1 mile in distance?

Rationale for indicator: The size of wind-generated waves on lakes depends on the fetch. The fetch is the uninterrupted distance over which the wind blows without a significant change in direction. Lakes with larger fetches will have larger waves. Wetlands along the shores of lakes with longer fetches will provide a higher level of function by reducing the impact of the larger waves. The threshold of 1 mi was chosen because in many lakes such a fetch will generate a wave of approximately 1 ft in a 20-mph wind. This calculation was based on results from a [Fetch- and Depth Limited Waves tool](#)⁶⁵ developed by USGS to calculate the wave height given wind speed, fetch, and water depth.

Use a topographic map or scaled aerial photograph to measure the farthest distance to another shore or obstruction. This is the maximum fetch over which a wind can blow. Answer YES to this question if the length is 1 mi or more.

Annotation

Prevailing wind direction is not considered here because winds can blow from all directions during storms.

L 6.0 Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?

L 6.1 Are there resources, both human and natural, along the shore that can be impacted by erosion?

Rationale for indicator: Lake Fringe wetlands provide value by protecting a shoreline from erosion if there is some resource that could be damaged by this erosion. For example, houses are often built along a shoreline, and these can be damaged by shoreline erosion, especially if the house is on a bluff. Buildings, however, are not the only resource that can be impacted. A mature forest along the shores of a lake is a valuable natural resource that provides important habitat. Shoreline erosion, especially erosion from boat wakes, may topple trees into the lake and reduce the overall area of this valuable resource.

⁶⁵ <http://csherwood-usgs.github.io/jsed/Fetch%20and%20Depth%20Limited%20Waves,%20USGS.html>

Users of this method must make a qualitative judgment on the value of the Lake Fringe wetland in protecting resources from shoreline erosion. Generally, a Lake Fringe wetland does have value if:

- There are human structures or old growth/mature forests within 25 ft of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) of the shore in the wetland.
- There are nature trails or other paths and recreational activities within 25 ft of the OHWM.

The rating form has space to note observations of resources along the shore that do not meet the criteria above. If you observe or know of other resources, note this on the form and score it.

Annotation

Human structures generally include permanent or temporary works artificially built or composed of parts joined together, whether installed on, above, or below the surface of the ground or water, except for vessels. Roads and improved boat launches count as human structures if there is a risk of the lake eroding them.

Recreational activities include unimproved boat launches, beaches and swimming or fishing areas.

5.6 Water quality and hydrologic functions in Slope wetlands (questions starting with ‘S’)

S 1.0 Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?

The site potential for Slope wetlands has a maximum score of 12 points for the water quality functions instead of 16. The technical review team that developed the 2004 Wetland Rating System (Hruby, 2004a; b) concluded that Slope wetlands do not improve water quality to the same extent as Riverine or Depressional wetlands because Slope wetlands tend to release surface water fairly quickly. They are usually less effective at trapping sediment and all the pollutants associated with sediment because of their topography and the way water moves through them.

S 1.1 Characteristics of the average slope of the wetland:

Rationale for indicator: Water velocity decreases with decreasing slope. This increases the retention time of surface water in the wetland and the potential for retaining sediments and associated toxic pollutants. The potential for sediment deposition and the retention of toxics by burial increases as the slope decreases (reviewed in Adamus et al., 1991).

For this question, you will need to estimate the average slope of the wetland. Slope is measured either in degrees (°) or as a percent (%). In this method, we use the latter measurement, percent, which is calculated as the ratio of the vertical change between two points and the horizontal distance between the same two points [vertical drop in feet (or meters) ÷ horizontal distance in feet (or meters)]. For example, a 1-ft drop in elevation between two points that are 100 ft apart is a 1% slope, and a 2-ft drop across the same distance is a 2% slope.

For large wetlands, the slope can be estimated from topographic maps of the area. The change in contour lines can be used to calculate the vertical drop between the top and bottom edges of the wetland. The horizontal distance can be estimated using the appropriate scale (which should be at the bottom of the map). Local jurisdictions sometimes have assessor's maps that are contoured at 2-ft intervals. These can be very useful in estimating the slope.

For small wetlands, it will be necessary to estimate the vertical drop visually and the horizontal distance by pacing or using a tape measure. Visual estimates of the vertical drop are more accurate if you can find a point of reference near the bottom edge of the wetland. Stand at the upper edge of the wetland and visualize a horizontal line to a tree, telephone pole, or another person at the lower edge of the Slope wetland. The point at which the horizontal line intersects the object at the lower edge can be used to estimate the vertical drop between the upper and lower edges of the wetland (see Figure 40).

NOTE: If you are standing at the upper edge of the wetland looking for a visual marker at the lower edge using a level, do not forget to subtract your height from the total. If you are at the bottom edge, you will need to add your height.

NOTE: If the slope of a wetland changes, the best way to estimate the average is to calculate the slope between the uppermost wetland boundary and the lowest point on the boundary. This will average out all the variations unless the wetland has a much higher slope for a short distance on the borders of the wetland.

NOTE: If the Slope wetland has a ditch along its bottom side DO NOT use the bottom of the ditch for calculating the slope. Use the elevation of the top of the ditch for calculating the slope.

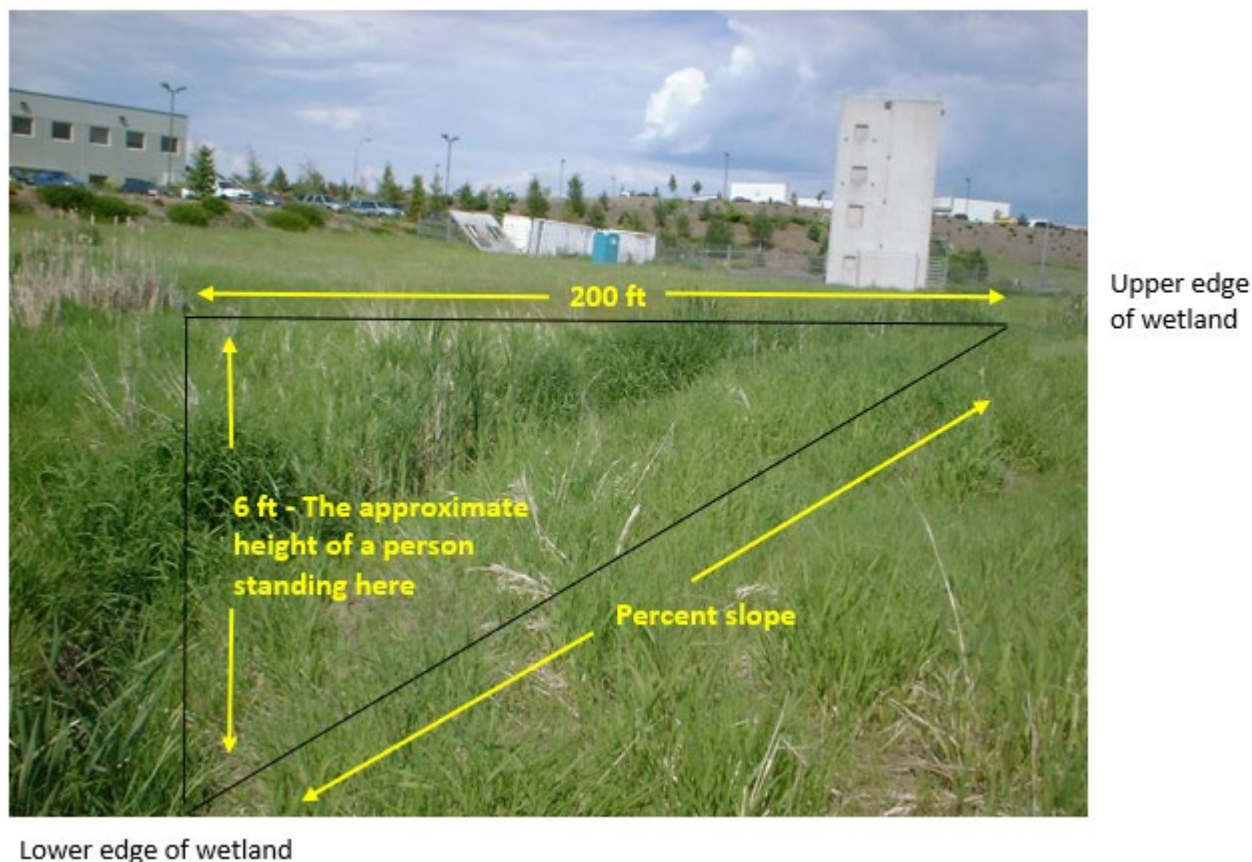


Figure 40. Estimating the slope of a small Slope wetland. The top of a 6-ft tall person is about level with the upper edge of the wetland. The average slope is approximately $6/200 = 0.03$ or 3%. Figure edited.

S 1.2 The soil 2 in. below the surface is a true clay or true organic soil.

Rationale for indicator: Clay soils and organic soils are both good indicators that a wetland can remove a wide range of pollutants from surface water. The uptake of dissolved phosphorus and toxic compounds through adsorption to soil particles is highest when soils are high in clay or organic content (Mitsch & Gosselink, 1993).

If the wetland lies within an area that is mapped as an organic or clay soil by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in their county soil maps, you do not need to investigate further. Consider the wetland to have clay or organic soils. If it is not mapped as an organic or clay soil, County soil maps can be accessed on NRCS [Web Soil Survey](https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>

Annotation: You will also need to take at least one sample on site and determine its composition if the soil is mapped with organic or clay soil inclusions (also called [minor components](#)⁶⁷). **To look at the soil:** Dig a small hole within the wetland boundary and pick a sample from the area that is about 2 in. below the duff layer. Usually, it is best to sample the soil toward the middle of the wetland rather than at the edge. Avoid picking up any of the duff or recent plant material that lies on the surface. Determine if the soil is organic or clay. If you are not familiar with procedures for identifying clay soils, a key is provided in Appendix C.

NOTE: The presence of organic or clay soils anywhere within the wetland unit counts. There is no scaling for this question based on the size of the patch of soil. This simplification is necessary because it is not possible to develop a reproducible map of different soils in a wetland within the time frame for doing the field work.

See the [NRCS web page on soil taxonomy](#)⁶⁸ for more descriptions on how to identify soils.

Annotation

Organic soils are histosols and include those identified as peat, mucky peat, or muck. The percent of organic carbon by weight in organic soils ranges from 12-18 percent, depending on the amount of clay.

If the soil is mapped as having clay or organic inclusions and it makes a difference in the wetland rating, you may need to send the soil in to a laboratory for analysis. Indicate on the rating form if you used a laboratory test or a soil sample textured in the field.

S 1.3 Characteristics of the plants in the wetland that trap sediments and pollutants:

Rationale for indicator: The intent of this question is to characterize how much of the wetland is covered with plants that are more effective at improving water quality in a slope environment. Herbaceous species have, in general, been found to sequester metals and remove oils and other organics better than other plant species (Hammer 1989, Horner 1992). Furthermore, dense herbaceous plants present the greatest resistance to the surface flow often found on slope wetlands. Water in this environment tends to flow very close to the surface and be shallow (not more than a few inches). Trees and shrubs tend to be widely spaced relative to herbaceous plants and don't provide as much resistance to this type of surface flow.

For this question, you will need to group the plants found within the wetland into two groups: 1) dense, ungrazed or unmowed, herbaceous plants, and 2) all other types (Figure 41). **NOTE: The Cowardin plant classes are NOT used for this question.** For this question the area of herbaceous plants can include the areas of emergent plants as classified by Cowardin as well as the herbaceous understory in a shrub or forest. To qualify as "dense," the herbaceous plants must

⁶⁷ https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/ref/?cid=nrcs142p2_054254#minor_components

⁶⁸ <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/survey/class/taxonomy/>

cover at least $\frac{3}{4}$ (75%) of the ground (as opposed to the 30% requirement in the Cowardin plant classes).

NOTE: The best information on reducing surface flows in a slope is provided by the basal cross-section of the plants. However, this is not easy to measure. The best indicator we were able to find is an estimate of the cover when viewed from a person's height. Generally, if less than 25% of the ground is visible through the vegetation when viewed from 5-6 ft high on site, then there will be a fairly high stem density and basal cross section to trap sediments and reduce flows.

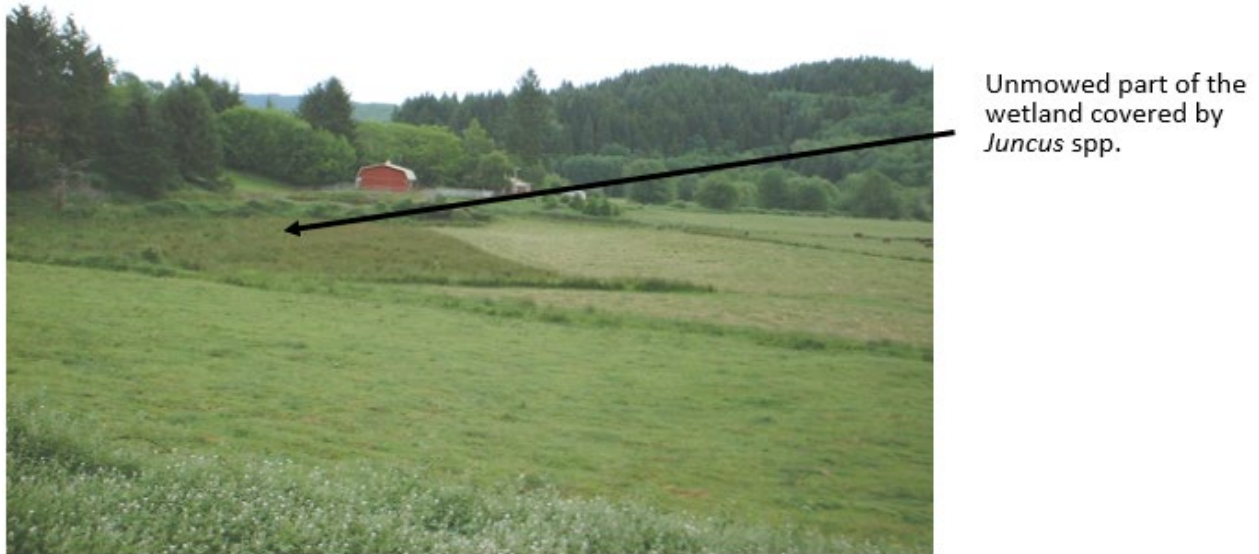


Figure 41. A slope wetland where dense, un-mowed plants are between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ the area of the wetland.

S 2.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?

S 2.1 Is more than 10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland on the uphill side in land uses that generate pollutants in surface runoff (agricultural, pasture, residential, commercial, urban)?

Rationale for indicator: Farming, grazing, golf courses, residential areas, commercial areas, and urban areas, in general, are major sources of pollutants (review in Sheldon et al., 2005). The review also found that a well-vegetated buffer of 150 ft will remove only 60-80% of some pollutants from surface runoff into a wetland. Thus, pollutants from such land uses will probably reach the wetland unit if they are within 150 ft of the unit and upslope of it.

Use your aerial photo and draw a line around the wetland that is 150 ft from the edge of the wetland. The line should be 150 ft upslope of the wetland boundary. Answer YES to this question if

you find the listed uses within 150 ft of the wetland and they cover more than 10% within this perimeter upslope of the wetland. Use GIS or a graphic aid, such as an acetate overlay with a grid or dots, to estimate area. Visual estimates are not accurate enough and may result in significant errors.

Annotation

In this case “residential areas” is a more generic term for residences and not tied to specific density. Any house or lawn or plot with a house on it within 150 ft is a source of pollution into the wetland. It could be just the edge of a lawn or driveway.

S 2.2 Are there other sources of pollutants coming into the wetland that are not listed in questions S 2.1?

Rationale for indicator: The sources of pollutants listed in question S 2.1 may not be the only sources coming into the wetland unit from the surrounding landscape. In addition, sources of pollutants can be within the wetland unit itself. For example, pollutants are discharged within the wetland if it is used for grazing.

Answer YES to the question if you can identify any source of pollutants in the groundwater or surface water coming into the wetland caused by human activities. Identify the source of the pollution on the rating form. Other sources of pollutants may be spraying of pesticides on golf courses, particulates in exhausts from airplanes or motor vehicles, and pesticides used in mosquito control.

Activities that generate pollutants within the wetland itself, such as grazing, also count for a YES for this question. Cattle, sheep, or large native herbivores such as elk grazing within the wetland are a source of pollutants. Also, answer YES to this question if the wetland has a pond that is commonly used by migrating waterfowl. Waterfowl droppings are a source of both excess nutrients and bacteria.

Annotation

This question is trying to address more specific examples of pollutants that you might observe in the wetland or in the surrounding landscape that are not captured in the previous questions about land uses. It might be a pollutant you observe to be directly applied to the wetland, or a source of pollution that occurs outside of the 150 ft buffer that is assessed in the preceding questions.

Examples include:

- The wetland is treated for mosquitos.
- There are social encampments in or near the wetland.
- A road, such as a highway or gravel road, is near enough that you observe the dust and debris in the wetland.
- The wetland is directly adjacent to an airport—the airport footprint may be outside of the 150ft buffer, but planes may take off or land right over the wetland.

Note on waterfowl use: There is no threshold identified for size of open water for a larger pond commonly used by waterfowl in this question. Slope wetlands by definition do not have impounded water, but many agricultural slope wetlands are used by large flocks of migrating waterfowl. This condition is common in urban and rural areas where open water and low grass or cut farm fields attract geese and ducks. One source of evidence for a concentration is a notable presence of waterfowl droppings on the ground. Evidence of waterfowl includes presence of flocks or droppings and complaints from residents. If you see an individual duck/goose or other waterfowl on a site with a pond, that is an indicator of YES for this question. This assumption meets the needs for this to be a rapid method without requiring additional data collection.

S 3.0 Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?

Annotation

These questions ask if the wetland is in the contributing basin of listed water bodies. The wetland must be located upgradient of the listed water because a wetland can't affect the listing of a water body if the wetland is located downgradient of the listed water.

Wetlands that are located in the contributing basin of listed waters help to clean up water by intercepting and holding and/or cleaning up contaminated water that would otherwise move downgradient to the listed water. They also act to transform mobile contaminants like nitrogen that can move through the groundwater system. Even small wetlands within a basin act cumulatively to improve water quality.

Answer the following questions by accessing the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁶⁹ and determining if the wetland you are rating is in the contributing basin of a listed water.

S 3.1 Does the wetland discharge directly to a stream, river, lake, or marine water that is on the 303(d) list?

Rationale for indicator: The phrase "303(d) list" is short for the list of impaired waters (stream segments, lakes) that the Clean Water Act requires all states to submit to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) every 2 years. In Washington, we identify all waters where pollution controls are not sufficient to attain or maintain applicable water quality standards. Wetlands that discharge directly to these polluted waters are judged to be more valuable than those that discharge to unpolluted bodies of water because their role in cleaning up the pollution is critical for reducing further degradation of water quality.

Annotation

This section is expanded to incorporate web resources and provide more detailed instructions on their use.

⁶⁹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁷⁰ that displays the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards. Follow these steps to determine if the wetland unit you are rating is within at least 1 mi upgradient of any aquatic resource mapped as not meeting water quality standards:

1. Locate your wetland on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁷¹ map.
2. Use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select Assessed Water/Sediment to display listed waters.
3. Under the Filter tab, go to the Water Quality Assessment section and unselect Category 1, 2, 4A, 4B, and 4C to show the Category 5 (303(d)-listed) waters. Apply the filter.
4. Use the Add/Remove Data feature to add the National Hydrography Dataset for evidence of surface water connections between the wetland you are rating and the listed water.
5. Under the Tools tab, in the Other section, use the Measure Distance tool to determine if the wetland being rated is within a straight line distance of 1 mi upgradient of any aquatic resource mapped as Category 5 (red lines or polygons on the map). The wetland should have a surface water channel, ditch, or other discharge leading to the listed water.

Answer YES if the wetland discharges directly (within 1 mi) to an area mapped with a red line or polygon. Polygons usually represent larger waterbodies or discrete areas within those larger waterbodies where samples were collected.

S 3.2 Is the wetland in a subwatershed where another aquatic resource is on the 303(d) list?

Rationale for indicator: Wetlands can mitigate the impacts of pollution even if they do not discharge directly to a polluted body of water. Wetlands can remove nitrogen from groundwater as well as surface water. They can also trap airborne pollutants. Thus, wetlands can provide an ecosystem service and value to our society in any basin and sub-basin that has pollution problems. The removal of pollutants by wetlands is judged to be more valuable in basins where other aquatic resources are already polluted.

To answer this question you will need to access the Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁷² that lists the bodies of water that do not meet water quality standards.

Locate your site on the map to determine if the wetland unit you are rating is in the contributing basin of any aquatic resource mapped as not meeting water quality standards. To find the boundaries of basins and sub-basins (called hydrologic units) in the area, consult with the planning department of the local jurisdiction or use the [map of hydrologic units](#)⁷³ developed by the USGS.

⁷⁰ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁷¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁷² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁷³ <http://water.usgs.gov/GIS/huc.html>

Annotation

The scale of the basin or sub-basin for this question is the approximate area (4-40 sq. mi) of a 12-digit hydrologic unit (HUC). 12-digit HUC boundaries (also called subwatersheds) can be accessed as a data layer on Ecology's [Water Quality Atlas](#).⁷⁴ The question text has been revised to reflect this scale.

The sub-basin level addresses the potential for groundwater connection and the cumulative action of wetlands on the landscape to manage contaminated water.

To identify wetlands within a basin with listed waters, determine whether the wetland you are rating occurs upgradient (for a YES) or downgradient (for a NO) of the 303(d)-listed water.

S 3.3 Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality?

Rationale for indicator: Not all pollution and water quality problems are identified by Ecology's water quality monitoring program. Local and watershed planning efforts sometimes identify wetlands that are important in maintaining existing water quality. These wetlands provide a value to society that needs to be replaced if they are impacted.

To answer this question, you will need to seek information from the planning department of the local jurisdiction where the site is located. Information on regional or local plans can often be found on the website of the city or county in which the site is found. Useful search phrases include: "watershed plan," "water quality," or "wetland protection."

If the basin in which the wetland is found has a Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) plan (also called a Water Cleanup Plan or Water Quality Improvement Project) developed for it, then answer YES for this question. It is assumed that all wetlands are valuable in a basin where water quality is poor enough to require a TMDL. The Department of Ecology's [Water Quality Improvement Projects](#)⁷⁵ website lists all the bodies of water that have TMDLs.

NOTE: Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) or Water Cleanup Plans describe the type, amount, and sources of water pollution in a particular water body. They analyze how much the pollution needs to be reduced or eliminated to meet water quality standards, and then provide targets and strategies to control the pollution. Wetlands that discharge directly to these polluted waters are judged to be more valuable because they function at a landscape scale to mitigate discharges of pollutants. TMDLs are based on models that estimate the natural decay and adsorption of pollutants under current conditions. Wetlands are an important part of that natural decay; their destruction would require a recalibration of the TMDL models and force reductions in current levels of discharge.

⁷⁴ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

⁷⁵ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-improvement/Total-Maximum-Daily-Load-process/Directory-of-improvement-projects>

Annotation

For wetlands in the contributing basin to areas with a TMDL “in development,” you would also answer YES (but see note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project below).

To answer YES for a TMDL in the basin, the wetland you are rating should be within the contributing basin to the TMDL study area. That means that the wetland occurs within or upgradient of the TMDL study area. To find the TMDL study area:

1. Go to the [Water Quality Atlas](#)⁷⁶ map and use the Add/Remove Map Data feature to select WQ Improvement Projects for display.
2. If the wetland being rated is located in a basin highlighted as “Approved” or “In Development,” click on the highlighted polygon and go to the report link for the TMDL.
3. Look in the report for the TMDL study area to determine if the wetland being rated is within the contributing area to the TMDL study area. Note that multiple TMDLs may apply to a given area.

Data for TMDLs that have been approved can also be visualized by selecting Assessed Water/Sediment in the Add/Remove Map Data feature and filtering so that only Category 4A and 4B assessed waters are displayed.

- Category 4A waters have approved TMDLs.
- Category 4B waters have a pollution control program, similar to a TMDL plan, that is expected to solve the pollution problems (such as a local plan).

Category 4C waters are impaired by causes that cannot be addressed through a TMDL plan, such as the presence of invasive species, and may not qualify as a local plan or TMDL for this question. You should investigate the details of the 4C listing to determine if it meets the intent of this question.

Select the listed features downgradient of the wetland to access details and view the listings. TMDL projects in development are not displayed at this level on the WQ Atlas.

You can use a screenshot of the TMDL study area from the report or from the Water Quality Atlas map to meet the figure requirement for this question.

Note about the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project: A water quality improvement effort is currently in process for Puget Sound, and therefore Puget Sound is now mapped as having a TMDL in development for the Puget Sound Nutrient Reduction Project (PSNRP). Because all wetlands in the Puget Sound basin would score High for this question, and we currently do not have a way to distinguish areas where wetlands may be more valuable than others related to the PSNRP, Ecology does not consider the Puget Sound TMDL in development for PSNRP as meeting the criteria for this question at this time. Wetlands in the contributing basins of bays and other areas in Puget Sound that have their own TMDL listings continue to meet the criteria for this question.

⁷⁶ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/waterqualityatlas/wqa/map>

S 4.0 Does the site have the potential to reduce flooding and stream erosion?

The site potential for Slope wetlands can only rate Low or Moderate for the hydrologic functions. The technical review teams that developed the 2004 Wetland Rating Systems concluded that Slope wetlands may provide some velocity reduction but do not provide flood storage. Thus, they should be rated lower than wetlands that can perform both aspects of the function.

S 4.1 Characteristics of plants that reduce the velocity of surface flows:

Rationale for indicator: The intent of this question is to characterize how much of the wetland is covered with plants that provide a physical barrier to sheetflow coming down the slope. Plants on slopes will reduce peak flows and the velocity of water during a storm event (U.S. Geological Service, [Urbanization and Water Quality](https://www.usgs.gov/special-topics/water-science-school/science/urbanization-and-water-quality),⁷⁷ accessed November, 2022). The importance of plants on slopes in reducing flows has been well documented in studies of logging (Lewis et al., 2001) though not specifically for Slope wetlands. The assumption is that plants in Slope wetlands play the same role as plants in forested areas in reducing peak flows.

For this question, you will need to estimate the area of two categories of plants found within the wetland: 1) dense, uncut, rigid plants, and 2) all other plants. This indicator for plants is **not** related to any of the Cowardin classes. **Dense** means that individual plants are spaced closely enough that the soil is barely, if at all, visible (> 75% cover of plants) when looking at it from the height of an average person. **Uncut** means that the height of the plants has not been significantly reduced by grazing or mowing. "Significantly reduced" means that the height is less than 6 in. **Rigid** is defined as having stems thick enough (usually > 1/8 in) to remain erect during surface flows.

There is only one threshold used to score this characteristic: dense, ungrazed, rigid plants for more than 90% of the area of the wetland (Figure 42). The wetland in Figure 41 was mowed over much of its area, except where the *Juncus spp.* was growing. The mowed plants were less than 6 in. high, so the only plants that were included for this indicator were the *Juncus*.

NOTE: This is a simpler version of the questions in the 2004 Wetland Rating System (Hruby 2004b). Only one answer resulted in a Moderate rating of 6 or more points. As a result, the other questions were dropped since their scores did not change the rating.

NOTE: This description is not species specific because a species may be rigid in one environment and not rigid in another. For example, reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) can grow very thick and rigid stems in areas with high nutrients. In other situations, however, it can be very thin (e.g., shady environment) and would easily be bent to the ground by runoff.

⁷⁷ <https://www.usgs.gov/special-topics/water-science-school/science/urbanization-and-water-quality>



Figure 42. A Slope wetland with dense, rigid, ungrazed plants (reed canarygrass and *Juncus* spp., shrubs, and trees) over more than 90% of its area. The direction of the slope is from the left of the photograph to the right.

S 5.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?

S 5.1 Is more than 25% of the area within 150 ft upslope of the wetland in land uses that generate excess surface runoff (agricultural, pasture, residential, commercial, or urban land uses)?

Rationale for indicator: Human land uses tend to de-stabilize the flows of water in a watershed. Generally, human activities reduce infiltration and increase run-off during storm events (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). For example, a lawn can reduce infiltration by as much as 65% (Kelling & Peterson, 1975). Thus, a slope unit located in areas where run-off has increased can provide more velocity reduction of surface flows than one located in an undeveloped area.

Use your aerial photo and draw a line around the wetland that is 150 ft from the edge of the wetland. Estimate the land uses in the area 150 ft upslope of the wetland boundary. Answer YES to this question if you find the listed land uses within 150 ft of the wetland and they cover more than 25% of the area upslope within this perimeter.

Annotation

In this case “residential areas” is a more generic term for residences and not tied to specific density. Any house or lawn or plot with a house on it within 150 ft is a source of excess runoff into the wetland. It could be just the edge of a lawn or driveway.

S 6.0 Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?

S 6.1 Distance to the nearest areas downstream that have flooding problems.

Rationale for indicator: The value of wetlands in reducing the impacts of flooding and erosion is based on the presence of human or natural resources that can be damaged by these processes. The indicator used characterizes whether the wetland’s position in the landscape protects downgradient resources from flooding. In general, the value of a wetland in reducing flood damage is judged to decrease with increased distance to downstream areas with flooding problems because the amount of water flowing through the unit relative to the overall flows decreases.

If you do not know whether floods have caused damage in the sub-basin farther downstream, you will need to do some research. Your best sources of information on flooding problems are the emergency planning office in your local government and the local Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). You can search the web using the name of the location, town, or watershed and “flooding” or “flooding problems.”

Choose the description that best matches conditions around the wetland unit being rated.

The wetland reduces velocities that would otherwise impact downgradient areas where flooding has damaged human or natural resources (e.g., houses or salmon redds):

- In the sub-basin that is immediately downgradient of the wetland.

Annotation: The sub-basin immediately downgradient of the unit is the 12-digit HUC in which the wetland occurs.

- In a sub-basin farther downgradient.

Annotation: The sub-basin farther downgradient is the next 12-digit HUC down from the wetland.

Annotation: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration publishes a [searchable database](#)⁷⁸ of storms that caused damage. Any recorded evidence that damage from flooding has occurred can be used, regardless of time or source (e.g., local jurisdiction flood plan or data, news article, etc.).

NOTE 1 (a landscape constraint on function): A Slope wetland that receives only return flow from irrigation is not in a landscape position to perform the hydrologic functions. Since the inflow is

⁷⁸ <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/stormevents/>

controlled, there is little chance that the water coming into the wetland will cause downstream flooding or erosion. Answer NO to the question if you can document that more than 90% of the flow through the wetland is a result of irrigation.

NOTE 2 (a landscape constraint on function): When a Slope wetland is situated upslope of a road where water movement through the road is limited by ineffective culverts, the roadway typically acts as a levee, de-coupling upslope wetlands from downstream flooding. The roadway, rather than the wetland, delays storm flows, and acts like a flood-control dam. This indicates that the hydrologic connection between the floodway and the upslope area is impaired. If, however, the water impounded on the upslope side of the road recedes at the same rate as the water on the downslope side, you can assume the connections through the road are not constrained. In this case, the velocity reduction provided by the wetland on the upslope side is important, and the wetland should be scored accordingly.

Annotation: If the road is overtopped at least once every 10 years, you can assume the wetland is still connected to the floodway.

S 6.2 Has the site been identified as important for flood storage or flood conveyance in a regional flood control plan?

Rationale for indicator: The values of flood storage and flood conveyance provided by wetlands are often recognized in regional flood control plans, and specific sites are mentioned in these plans. If the value of a wetland for flood attenuation has already been recognized, it is assigned a High rating for value.

To answer this question, contact the jurisdiction in which the site is found to determine whether any regional flood control plans exist. A search of websites for flood prone areas will probably also list flood control plans for the watershed in question. If plans exist, determine if the site is listed as important or valuable for flood storage. To answer YES to this question, the flood control district needs to have developed a flood control or flood hazard mitigation plan that identifies the site as one that needs to be preserved or enhanced to improve flood protection.

5.7 Habitat functions for all HGM classes (questions starting with 'H')

A rapid method such as this one relies on indicators of function that are fixed and present throughout most of the year (see Appendix D). As a result, it is not possible to actually monitor the species that use a wetland or determine their abundance. The one aspect of habitat that we can determine is the number of habitat niches present. The questions below describe indicators that represent different habitat niches. The basic assumption is that wetlands with more niches can provide a higher level of habitat functions than one with fewer. The rating of the site potential for this function is based on the number of species for which a site can potentially provide habitat.

H 1.0 Does the site have the potential to provide habitat?

H 1.1 Structure of the plant community:

Rationale for indicator: More habitat niches are provided within a wetland as the number of plant communities increases. The increased structural complexity provided by different plants optimizes potential for breeding areas, escape, cover, and food production for the greatest number of species (Hruby et al., 1999). This increased species richness arising from the increased structural diversity also supports a greater number of terrestrial species in the overall wetland food web (Hruby et al., 1999). The Cowardin plant classes are used as indicators of different types of structure in the plant community. In addition, the presence of vertical strata in forested communities is considered a characteristic that increases habitat complexity and niches.

For this question, you will need to map the Cowardin classes of plants in the wetland and whether the forested class has different strata present under the canopy. The plant community is divided into the following habitat types:

- Aquatic bed
- Emergent
- Scrub-shrub
- Forested
- Multiple strata within the Forested class. Do the areas mapped as a Cowardin Forested class have at least three out of the five strata (canopy, sub-canopy, shrubs, herbaceous, moss/groundcover)?

NOTE 1: Each plant class has to cover more than $\frac{1}{4}$ ac if the wetland unit is 2.5 ac or larger, or if the wetland unit is smaller than 2.5 ac, the threshold is 10% of the area of the unit. Cowardin plant classes are distinguished on the basis of the uppermost layer of plants (forest, shrub, etc.) that provides more than 30% surface cover within the area of its distribution (see Section 5.2).

NOTE 2: Aquatic bed plants do not always reach the surface and care must be taken to look beneath the water's surface. Because waterfowl can graze certain species of aquatic bed early in the growing season, you may incorrectly conclude that aquatic bed plants are not present if the field visit is made during this time period. **Therefore, examine the pond bottom in areas of open water for evidence of aquatic bed species that have senesced.** If a wetland is being rated very late in the growing season, when either the standing water is gone or very limited in extent, examine mudflats and adjacent vegetated areas for the presence of dried aquatic bed species.

NOTE 3: If a plant class is distributed in several patches, the patches can be added together to meet the size threshold. However, the patches have to be large enough so that no more than 10 are needed to meet the size threshold. For example, if 15 patches of shrubs are needed to meet the size threshold then the wetland does NOT have a Scrub-shrub class.

NOTE 4: Count how many strata (i.e., canopy, sub-canopy, shrubs, herbaceous, moss/groundcover) are present in forested areas of the wetland, but only within the polygon you have mapped as forested. If three or more of the five strata are present, record this on the rating form.

NOTE 5: Each stratum (canopy, sub-canopy, shrub, herbaceous, or moss/groundcover) has to cover at least 20% of the ground within the polygon identified as Forest when looking at it from above. If the field visit is during the winter, you will have to estimate cover based on your expectation of what the plants would cover when in full leaf.

H 1.2 Hydroperiods

Rationale for indicator: Many aquatic species have their life cycles keyed to different water regimes (e.g., permanent, seasonal, or saturated conditions). A wetland with many different water regimes will potentially support more species than a wetland with fewer water regimes. For example, some species are tolerant of permanent pools, while others can live in pools that are temporary (Wiggins et al., 1980).

For this question you will need to identify areas in the wetland with different water regimes. You are looking for areas with different patterns of flooding or saturation. For example, does part of the wetland have surface ponding only for a very short time (we call this occasionally flooded or inundated) or are there areas that have surface water all year (permanently flooded)? The purpose is to identify the wettest water regime within different areas of the wetland unit. Thus, an area that is seasonally flooded, but only saturated during the field visit in the summer, would still be categorized as seasonally flooded. **To count, each hydroperiod has to cover more than ¼ ac if the wetland unit is 2.5 ac or larger, or if the wetland unit is smaller than 2.5 ac, the threshold is 10% of the area of the unit.** This includes the area of streams and rivers. Often there is a small stream in a Depressional wetland or along the side of a Riverine one, but it **cannot** be counted because the total area between the banks of the stream that is in the unit or in contact along one side does not meet the size threshold.

The water regimes that you need to identify and draw on the site map are:

Permanently Flooded or Inundated: A polygon in the unit where surface water is present the entire year, in 9 out of 10 years.

NOTE: During high water in the winter and spring, it may be difficult to determine the area that would be permanently flooded during the summer dry period. One indicator of permanent water is an area of open water without plants inside the zone of seasonal inundation. Aerial photos taken during the summer may also show areas of permanent water.

Seasonally Flooded or Inundated: A polygon in the unit where surface water is present for extended periods (for more than 2 consecutive months during a year), especially early in the growing season, but is absent by the end of the season in most years. During the summer dry season, it may be difficult to determine the area that is seasonally inundated. Use the indicators described in D 1.4 to help you determine areas that are seasonally flooded or inundated.

Occasionally Flooded or Inundated: A polygon where surface water is present for periods of less than 2 months during the growing season, but the water table usually lies below the soil surface for most of the season. Plants that grow in both uplands and wetlands (facultative) are characteristic of this water regime.

Annotation: This can occur as a result of sheetflow or small puddles that fill during storms, or as flooding from adjacent streams when the flood waters recede faster than the 2 consecutive months required for seasonal flooding.

Saturated: A polygon where the soil is saturated at or near the surface for long enough to create a wetland, but surface water is never present. The latter criterion separates saturated areas from inundated areas. In this case, there will be no signs of inundation on plant stems or in surface depressions.

Permanently Flowing Stream: The wetland unit contains a river, stream, channel, or ditch with water flowing in it throughout the year within its boundaries or along one edge (most often in a Riverine situation). The distance between the banks should be used to draw the polygon on the map and estimate if the size thresholds are met. Do not use the area of water in the stream you find during the site visit.

Intermittently Flowing Stream: The wetland unit contains a river, stream, channel, or ditch in which water flow is intermittent or seasonal within its boundaries or along one edge. The distance between the banks should be used to draw the polygon for this hydroperiod and estimate if the size thresholds are met. Do not use the area of water found during the site visit.

Annotation: For streams, only measure the area between the top of the banks that is located within the area contiguous with the wetland.

Figure 20 shows a hypothetical wetland with two water regimes – permanently flooded and seasonally flooded. Figure 43 shows a photograph of a Slope wetland, also with two water regimes. Some areas are **occasionally flooded** from sheet flow during storms and the rest are **saturated** from subsurface flows. Figure 44 shows a Depressional wetland with three water regimes.

NOTE 1: Wetlands that are classified as **Lake Fringe or Freshwater Tidal Fringe are scored 2 points for this question.** The water regimes in these two types of wetlands do not fit the descriptions above or are too difficult to determine in the field.

NOTE 2: You should map the hydroperiods as they would appear at the wettest time of the year.

NOTE 3: A polygon you map within a wetland unit can only have one hydroperiod. Different areas within a unit, however, may have different hydroperiods.

NOTE 4: A drawing such as Figure 20 should be made on a copy of the aerial photograph or map outlining the different hydroperiods. Such a drawing will reduce common errors (e.g., failure to confirm the size threshold or counting the same area as having two hydroperiods).

NOTE 5: Depressional wetlands often have their water regimes in concentric rings. In addition to permanently ponded and seasonally ponded, a wetland could have additional rings that are occasionally ponded and saturated. To count, however, each of these hydroperiods needs to meet the size threshold.

NOTE 6: Slope wetlands often have only a saturated hydroperiod. If they get surface runoff, then they may have occasional surface inundation as well. Thus, for Depressional, Riverine, or Lake Fringe wetlands that are joined to Slope wetlands, you need to record the hydroperiods of the area classified as Slope, as well as those with another classification.

NOTE 7: Many streams in or adjacent to a wetland unit cannot be counted because the area between banks that would be a separate hydroperiod does not meet the size threshold.



Areas that have no surface water present but are saturated during most of the year.

Small depressions that fill with surface water after storms. These areas are occasionally flooded, and cover at least 10% of the unit.

Figure 43. Slope wetland with two water regimes. The blue arrows point to areas that are saturated or have small depressions that are occasionally filled with water during storms.



Figure 44. A large depressional wetland with three water regimes: permanently flooded, seasonally flooded, and occasionally flooded. The areas that are seasonally and occasionally flooded are found around the outer edge of the wetland.

H 1.3 Richness of plant species:

Rationale for indicator: The number of plant species present in a wetland reflects the potential number of niches available for animal and invertebrate species. The total number of animal and invertebrate species in a wetland is expected to increase as the number of plant species increases (Hruby et al., 1999). For example, the number of invertebrate species is directly linked to the number of plant species (Knops et al., 1999). This indicator includes both native and non-native plant species (with the exceptions noted below) because both provide habitat for animal and invertebrate species. The four aggressive species not counted tend to form large monocultures that exclude other species and reduce the structural richness of the habitat.

As you walk through the wetland unit, keep a list of the patches of different plant species you find. You should count both wetland and upland plants. However, you should include only species that form patches that cover at least 10 ft² within the unit. Different patches of the same species can be combined to meet the size threshold. This threshold was established to reduce the variability among users with different levels of expertise in identifying plants.

You should try to identify plants but keying them out is not necessary. All you need to track is the total number, so you can identify species as Species 1, Species 2, etc. In order to capture the full range of plant species present during the year, record any species that are dead and recognizably different from other species present. There are three thresholds to keep in mind for this indicator:

20 or more species, 5-19, and less than 5 species. If you count more than 19 species, you do not need to continue identifying plants.

For this question, the following species are **NOT TO BE INCLUDED** in the total: Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). These species were judged to reduce the number of niches present in a wetland by the team of wetland scientists who developed this indicator.

Annotation

Only count plants that are at least half rooted within the wetland.

H 1.4 Interspersion of habitats:

Rationale for indicator: In general, interspersion among different physical structures (e.g., open water) and classes of plants (e.g., aquatic bed, emergent plants, shrubs) increases the suitability for different guilds of wildlife by increasing the number of ecological niches (Hruby et al., 1999). For example, a higher diversity of plant forms is likely to support a higher diversity of macroinvertebrates (Chapman, 1966; Dvořak & Best, 1982; Lodge, 1985).

In question H 1.1 you determined how many different Cowardin plant classes are present in the wetland being rated. This question uses that information and also asks you to identify any areas of open water in the wetland (open means without plants on or above the water surface during the spring, summer, or fall). You are asked to rate the interspersion among these structural characteristics of the wetland. The diagrams on the rating form show what is meant by ratings of HIGH, MODERATE, LOW, or NONE. Each polygon with a different shading represents a different plant class or open water.

NOTE: The plant structures under a forest canopy, however, should not be included in this indicator because they are within one Cowardin class.

Annotation: The plant structures under a forest canopy are those that compose the forest strata scored in H 1.1.

To answer this question first consider if the interspersion falls into the two default ratings. If the wetland has only one class of plants present (question H 1.1) and no open water, the answer to this question will be NONE (see Figure 45). If the wetland has four plant classes (from question H 1.1), or three plant classes and open water the answer will always be HIGH. Figure 44 is a Depressional wetland with open water, emergent, aquatic bed, shrub, and forest classes. Thus, it automatically rates a HIGH. The only time you will have to make a decision is when the wetland has two or three types of structure that provide habitat.

Additional notes for determining the interspersion are:

- Lake Fringe wetlands will always have **at least** two categories of structure (open water and one class of plants).

- A wetland with a meandering, unvegetated stream (seasonal or permanent) that does not meet the size threshold (<10% of the unit or <¼ ac) should be rated LOW if it has only one plant class. If, however, the area of the unvegetated stream is greater than the threshold size, the interspersions is MODERATE.
- Several isolated patches of one structural category (e.g., patches of open water) should be considered the same as one patch with many lobes.

In scoring wetlands with two types of structure, the difference between LOW and MODERATE interspersions is the amount of edge habitat between the structures. Wetlands with convoluted edges are scored MODERATE. Those with relatively straight edges are scored LOW. For wetlands with three types of structure, the same criterion is used to differentiate between a MODERATE and HIGH rating.



Figure 45. A Depressional wetland with only one class of plants and no open water. The interspersions is rated as NONE.

H 1.5 Special habitat features:

Rationale for indicator: There are certain habitat features in a wetland that provide refuge and resources for many different species. The presence of these features increases the potential that the wetland will provide a wide range of habitats (Hruby et al., 1999). These special features include:

- Large downed woody debris in the wetland that provides major niches for decomposers (e.g., bacteria and fungi) and invertebrates.
- Snags that provide perches and cavities for birds and other animals.
- Undercut banks that provide protection for fish and amphibians.
- Stable, steep banks of fine material that might be used by aquatic mammals for denning.
- Thin-stemmed plants that provide structure on which amphibians can lay their eggs.
- A plant community that does not have aggressive (invasive) species. This indicates that the wetland unit is relatively undisturbed.

Record the presence of any the following special habitat features within the wetland on the rating form:

- Large woody debris within the wetland that is more than 4 in. diameter at the base and more than 6 ft long (Figure 46).

Annotation: Large woody debris can be measured at the base or the widest part.

- Snags in the wetland that are more than 4 in. diameter at breast height (Figure 46). **The snag has to have been “rooted” in the wetland to count.** Fence posts or other vertical posts that meet the size threshold can be counted. Also, dead branches of more than 4 in. diameter on large trees count as snags.

Annotation: The woody debris and snag criteria are different from those for Priority Habitat snags and logs as defined by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. These criteria describe snags and logs that occur within the wetland and provide habitat for a wider variety of biota.

- Steep banks of fine material for denning, or evidence of use of the wetland by beaver or muskrat. Banks need to be at least 33 ft long, 2 ft high within or immediately adjacent to the wetland and have the following characteristics: at least a 30 degrees slope, with at least a 3 ft depth of fine soil such as sand, silt, or clay. OR evidence that the area has been recently used by beaver, such as downed trees and shrubs with teeth marks, and where the wood has not turned gray yet (Figure 47). Evidence of grazing or activity by muskrat does not count because it may be the result of Nutria, an invasive aquatic mammal. It is very difficult to differentiate between these two species in the field.

- At least ¼ ac of thin-stemmed persistent plants or woody branches that are in areas that are permanently or seasonally inundated. These plants provide egg-laying structures for amphibians. A ¼ ac of such plants provide optimal conditions for egg-laying (K. Richter, personal communications), and a unit will score a point only if this criterion is met. This does not mean that a wetland does not provide amphibian habitat in the absence of this; just that a wetland provides better habitat if these conditions are present.
- The cover of aggressive, opportunistic plant species is less than 25% within EACH stratum present in the wetland. The five possible strata are canopy, sub-canopy, shrub, herbaceous/emergent, and groundcover. For example, a forested wetland with a 100% canopy of alder or cottonwood but with an understory of reed canarygrass that covered 70% of the ground would not qualify for this characteristic.

Annotation: If the cover of aggressive, opportunistic plant species is more than 25% within any stratum, do not count this as a special habitat feature.

The species that are considered aggressive for answering this question are as follows:

Cirsium arvense (Canada thistle)
Lysimachia vulgaris (garden loosestrife)
Lythrum salicaria (purple loosestrife)
Myriophyllum spicatum (Eurasian milfoil)
Phalaris arundinacea (reed canarygrass)
Phragmites australis (common reed)
Polygonum cuspidatum (=Reynoutria japonica [Japanese knotweed])
Polygonum sachalinense (=Reynoutria sachalinensis [giant knotweed])
Polygonum xbohemicum (=Reynoutria xbohemica [Bohemian knotweed])
Rubus bifrons (=Rubus armeniacus [Himalayan blackberry])
Rubus laciniatus (cutleaf blackberry)
Tamarix spp. (either *Tamarix ramosissima* and/or *T. parviflora* [saltcedar])

Only the species on this list count as aggressive. This is the list on which the experts developing and reviewing the rating system could agree. Other species may be considered aggressive by one or more botanists, but we could not achieve consensus to include any others on the list.

- **Annotation:** Undercut banks are present for at least 6.6 ft (2 m) and/or overhanging plants extend at least 3.3 ft (1 m) over open water or a stream (or ditch) in, or contiguous with the wetland, for at least 33 ft (10 m). This habitat feature is present in Lake Fringe wetlands with a fringe of vegetation that overhangs an area of open water or aquatic bed for at least 33 ft along the shore. Overhanging vegetation and undercut banks provide protection from predators for fish and amphibians. Overhanging vegetation shades the water and undercut banks can also be thermal refuges.

Check off each habitat feature present in the wetland on the rating form. Add the total number of checks and record that as the score in the right-hand column.



Figure 46. Large woody debris and snags in wetland



Figure 47. Evidence of beaver activity. Note the conical shape of the cuts.

H 2.0 Does the landscape have the potential to support the habitat functions of the site?

Habitat loss and fragmentation are a major source of losses in biodiversity (Fahrig, 2003). Thus, wetlands in areas that have not been subject to fragmentation and habitat loss are in a better landscape position to provide habitat for a wide range of species that require both uplands and wetlands to survive. Questions H 2.1 and H 2.2 describe two indicators for characterizing the availability of good habitat around a wetland.

Land uses that are often called “high intensity,” such as dense residential areas, manufacturing areas, and commercial, all have negative impacts on habitat because of noise, light, toxic runoff, and other disturbances (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). Wetlands that are located in such areas are therefore less suited as habitat for many species. Question H 2.3 attempts to characterize these impacts by reducing the overall landscape potential of a site if these high-intensity land uses are present.

You will need to map three types of land uses in a polygon that extends 1 km in all directions from the edge of the wetland being rated. These are “high intensity” land uses, “moderate and low intensity” land uses, and “relatively undisturbed.” Do this by:

1. Drawing a polygon around the wetland that extends 1 km **from the edge of the entire unit** (not the center). Use an aerial photograph or a map of land uses if available. This is called the “1 km Polygon” that surrounds the wetland being rated.
2. Drawing smaller polygons within this 1 km Polygon around the areas that are relatively undisturbed, have low or moderate intensity land uses, and have high intensity land uses.
3. To answer the following questions, you will need to estimate the relative area of these polygons. **However, you do not need to measure actual acreages, just the percent of the total area within the larger polygon (Figure 48).** If you do not have access to GIS capabilities, relative area can be easily determined by copying a piece of gridded graph paper onto an acetate sheet, overlaying it on the aerial photograph, and counting squares.

Terms are defined in the following box and in Table 3. If you find a land use that is not listed, you will have to decide how to categorize it (high intensity, moderate/low intensity, relatively undisturbed). In this case, you should document your rationale on the rating form or attached to the figures you submit.

Relatively undisturbed is a general term used to describe areas that are almost completely free of human impacts and activities. Relatively undisturbed areas can include uplands, other wetlands, lakes, or other bodies of water. It means that the area is free of regular disturbances such as:

- Tilling and cropping
- Residential and urban development
- Grazing
- Paved roads or frequently used gravel roads
- Mowing
- Pets
- Boating and fishing

NOTE 1: Areas dominated by aggressive species are not considered disturbed unless you also have other evidence that disturbances are still present. The aggressive species could be a result of some past disturbance that is no longer present.

NOTE 2: Logged areas that have been undisturbed for at least 5 years can qualify as relatively undisturbed. This includes hybrid poplar plantations that are more than 5 years old.

NOTE 3: Areas that are accessed daily by dogs, either from residential areas or from people walking them, should be treated as disturbed. Dogs and other pets cause stress among the animals using a wetland.

NOTE 4: A rarely used path or gravel road can be considered relatively undisturbed if it is used less than once or twice a week. Daily usage of a road or area is considered disturbed.

NOTE 5: Lakes, ponds, and other bodies of open water can be considered relatively undisturbed if they are not regularly used for boating or for other water-related activities. Daily usage of the lake by boats would be considered disturbed. A lake can be considered undisturbed if it is used only once or twice a week by non-motorized craft.

Table 3. Land uses that can be classified as high and moderate/low intensity based on their impacts to wetland habitat.

Level of Impact	Types of Land Use Based on Common Zoning Designations
High Intensity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial • Urban • Industrial • Institutional • Retail sales • Residential (more than 1 unit/ac) • High-intensity agriculture (dairies, nurseries, greenhouses, growing and harvesting crops requiring annual tilling, and raising and maintaining animals, etc.) • High-intensity recreation (golf courses, ball fields, etc.)
Moderate and Low Intensity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential (1 unit/ac or less) • Parks • Moderate-intensity agriculture (orchards, hay fields, pastures) • Trails • Forestry • Utility corridors

Annotation

Most of the literature on habitat in the surrounding landscape is based on looking at land cover data that are generally mapped at a resolution of 30 m². For these questions we do not recommend trying to map features that are smaller than 30 m².

Land use/land cover resources include:

- County web maps
- [WSDA Agricultural Land Use](#)⁷⁹
- [Northwest Large Fire Interactive Map](#)⁸⁰
- [National Land Cover Database Land Cover](#)⁸¹

In these questions for assessing the landscape potential of habitat, habitat is defined as areas that are relatively undisturbed plus areas of low/moderate land uses within 1 km of the wetland. The areas of low/moderate land uses are considered to have some disturbances that can detract from their value as habitat, therefore they are only counted at half their cover of area:

$$\text{Habitat} = \% \text{ cover relatively undisturbed areas} + [\% \text{ cover moderate and low intensity land uses} / 2]$$

⁷⁹ <https://nras.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=3d61db30686d467ea6f5e0197be32b25>

⁸⁰ <https://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/information/firemap.aspx>

⁸¹ <https://www.mrlc.gov/viewer/>

You will consider habitat at two levels, the accessible habitat, and the total habitat within the 1 km polygon. Accessible habitat and total habitat are described in more detail for each question below.

Notes on land use characterization:

NOTE 1: Puget Sound and other large bodies of water have a mosaic of disturbance levels much like a terrestrial area with different land uses. Open water is relatively undisturbed or of low/moderate intensity use in some locations, in others it may be high intensity (for example, a marina, ferry lane, commercial shellfish operation, or developed boat launch).

You should identify areas where boat use is high intensity, like around a marina, areas where use is low/moderate intensity, like around shorelines with residential docks or small public boat launches, and areas where the water may be relatively undisturbed, like in very large lakes where boat traffic is minimal to none in some parts of the lake or where boat use is not allowed. Most lakes with a public boat launch would generally be low/moderate- they tend to be heavily used, especially on weekends when the weather is nice, but are generally unused or only lightly used during the week and when the weather is unpleasant.

NOTE 2: The description of **relatively undisturbed** in the box above lists disturbances that are not necessarily synonymous with the category of high intensity land use. Some of those disturbances can and do occur in the low/moderate land use intensity that is counted at half the habitat area within the 1 km polygon for these questions.

NOTE 3: High intensity land uses include solar farms because they involve large areas where the ground is shaded by impervious structures that require frequent maintenance and cleaning.

NOTE 4: High intensity agriculture lists areas where animals are raised and maintained; those include barns, paddocks, concentrated feeding areas, and other areas where animals are concentrated. As indicated in the list of moderate and low intensity land uses, these do not include pastures and rangelands. The literature on the habitat value of agriculture generally shows that agricultural areas can be important habitat refugia in altered landscapes. It also shows that habitat value decreases as agricultural intensification increases (e.g., hayfields and pastures versus fields of intensive row-cropping that requires annual ground preparation and seeding, and concentrated feeding operations).

NOTE 5: Low/moderate intensity land uses include social encampments and wind farms.

NOTE 6: Green spaces in high intensity urban areas that are ≥ 1 ac should also be considered as low/moderate intensity land uses, unless the area is known to be relatively undisturbed by humans (e.g., steep slopes, wetlands with deep water and no boat access, or dense scrub/shrub vegetation). Green spaces in high intensity urban areas < 1 ac in size should be considered as part of the high intensity urban land use.

NOTE 7: Characterize the land use based on the footprint of the land use, not based on parcel or zoning boundaries. Parcel boundaries can be helpful in determining residential density levels to distinguish between high intensity residential areas that have >1 residential unit per acre and moderate/low intensity with <1 unit per acre.

H 2.1 What is the area of accessible habitat?

Rationale for indicator: This box has been edited to improve clarity. It is difficult to separate the effects of habitat loss from the fragmentation of habitat (Fahrig, 2003). Thus, Eigenbrod et al. (2008) have developed an indicator, called “accessible habitat” that integrates these two concepts into one measurable indicator. Accessible habitat is defined as the amount of habitat that can be reached from the wetland without crossing a human land use (specifically, roads). However, some lower intensity human land uses such as parks do not completely isolate a habitat. As a result, for the purposes of rating wetlands, low and moderate intensity land uses are not completely discounted as accessible habitat. The total area of low and moderate intensity land uses accessible from the unit is divided by two and then added to the area of relatively undisturbed habitat accessible from the unit. This addresses the issue that some lower intensity land uses do still provide habitat, but not the same level of habitat as undisturbed areas.

Annotation

The definition of accessible habitat for rating wetlands has resulted in some confusion. This question is not intended to discount as accessible those relatively undisturbed areas that are contiguous with low/moderate land uses identified as accessible, and vice versa. The rationale and instructions have been revised to provide clarification, with the intent to reduce variation among users while representing the best available science.

Accessible habitat is defined by Eigenbrod et al., (2008) as “the amount of habitat that can be reached from a focal patch of habitat without crossing a road” or other linear barrier. Terrestrial species are particularly affected by these barriers, due to effects primarily related to behavioral avoidance or mortality when attempting to cross. Some roads only have a small negative or no effect on a species (Eigenbrod et al., 2008), therefore it is important to account for the low/moderate intensity land uses in addition to the relatively undisturbed habitat when estimating accessible habitat because low/moderate intensity land uses are not necessarily barriers themselves.

For rating wetlands, accessible habitat is delineated by human-made barriers to connectivity between the wetland and other relatively undisturbed and low/moderate land use patches. Barriers bisect habitat patches and include paved roads with daily use, and high intensity land uses. Residential roads in low/moderate land uses that dead-end within the 1 km polygon, including cul-de-sacs and driveways, do not count as barriers. Species are able to use more favorable habitats to move through such landscapes (Graves et al., 2014).

Gravel and dirt roads are also less likely to be barriers to animal movement (Brehme et al., 2013). They are included as part of the low/moderate land use category and their level of disturbance is accounted for when you divide the area of low/moderate land uses in half to calculate that proportion of habitat.

Consider streams associated with the wetland as representing corridors that connect accessible patches unless there is a mapped fish culvert blockage, or you have site data to indicate a lack of connectivity.

Include bodies of water such as ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers as accessible habitat when they abut the wetland or other polygons of accessible habitat unless a high intensity use acts as a barrier on the water body.

To calculate the accessible habitat around the wetland unit you are rating, follow these steps:

1. Highlight all polygons of relatively undisturbed land uses on your map that are contiguous with the wetland boundary and not separated from the wetland by some human disturbance (e.g., roads or high intensity land uses).
2. Highlight all polygons of moderate or low intensity land uses that are contiguous with the wetland boundary or to the relatively undisturbed areas mapped in #1 above.
3. Highlight any additional polygons of relatively undisturbed land uses and moderate or low intensity land uses that are contiguous with the polygons highlighted in #s 1 and 2 above.
4. Estimate the relative area of all relatively undisturbed polygons highlighted in #s 1 and 3 above as a percent of the total area within the larger 1 km Polygon. You do not need to measure actual acreages, just the percent of the total areas within the larger polygon (Figure 48). Include this number on the rating form.
5. Estimate the relative area of the polygons categorized as moderate or low intensity highlighted in steps # 2 and 3 above as a percent of the total area within the larger 1 km Polygon. Divide this result by 2 and add it to the percent of accessible, relatively undisturbed habitat calculated in step #4 above.

Use the sum of relatively undisturbed areas and low/moderate land uses from step #5 as the area of accessible habitat to answer question H 2.1.

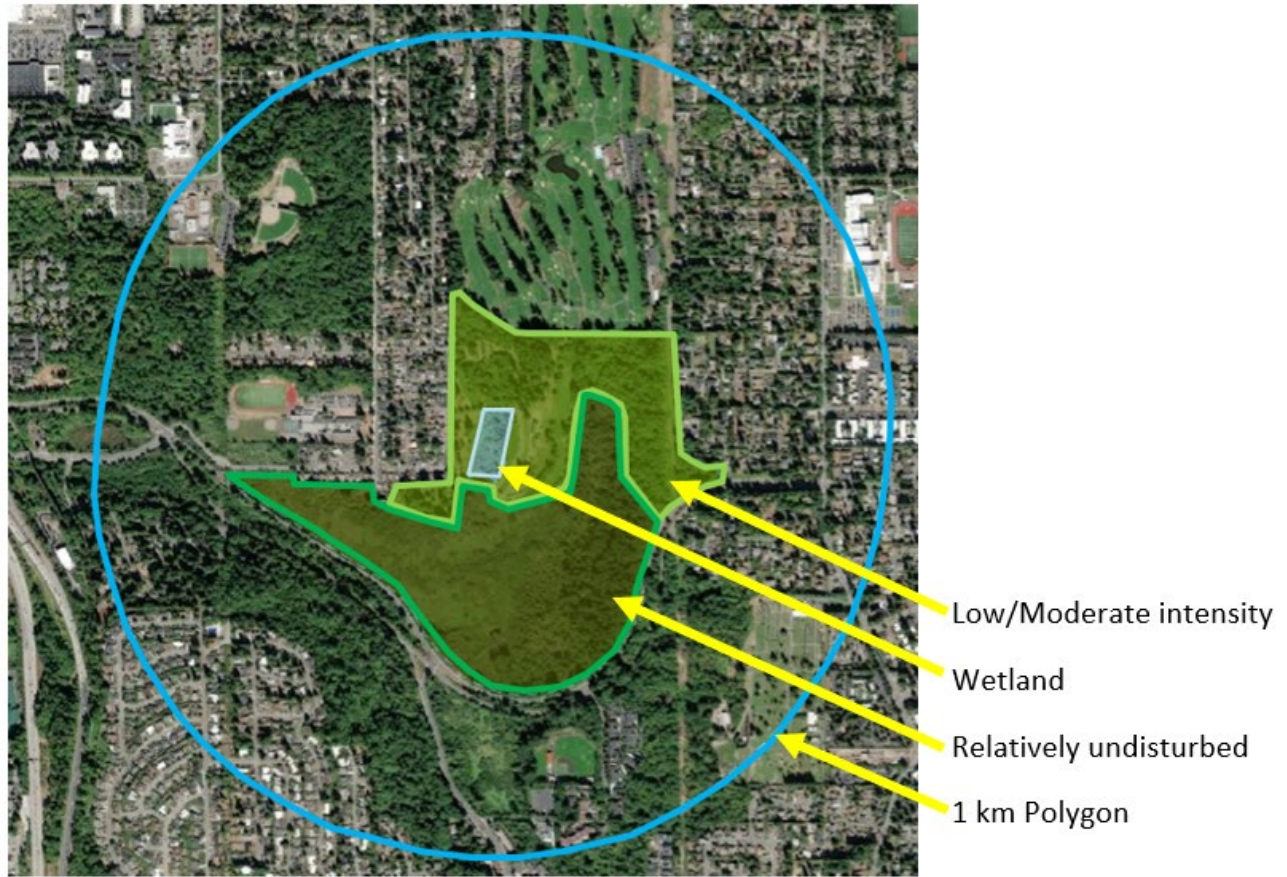


Figure 48. Updated figure. A 1 km Polygon from edge of wetland unit showing the accessible habitat. The accessible habitat includes a park around the wetland, counted as an area of low/moderate intensity land use, and an adjacent area of relatively undisturbed habitat that is accessible from the park. Accessible habitat is 10-19% of the total area of the 1 km Polygon.

H 2.2 Total habitat in 1 km Polygon around wetland:

Annotation

The term “undisturbed” was struck from the title and the rationale to meet the intent of this question to quantify all of the available habitat in the 1 km Polygon (relatively undisturbed + [low/moderate land uses/2]). Text was added to the instruction criteria to improve clarity.

Rationale for indicator: The focus of this indicator is more on the fragmentation of the surrounding landscape. Flying species such as birds are not dependent on undisturbed corridors to move from habitat patch to habitat patch, but more on the total area of habitat available (Rodewald & Bakermans, 2006). This indicator characterizes the overall (total) habitat available surrounding the wetland.

Use the diagram of land uses within 1 km of the edge of the wetland to answer this question as well, but use the following criteria:

1. Select all of the polygons identified as relatively undisturbed within the 1 km Polygon around the wetland, even if they are separated from the unit. Estimate the percent of the 1 km Polygon that they cover.
2. Select the polygons of low or moderate intensity land uses within the 1 km Polygon around the wetland, even if they are separated from the unit. Estimate the percent of the 1 km Polygon these represent and divide this percentage by 2.
3. Add the percents from #1 and #2 (Figure 49). If the total is more than 50%, record that on the rating form.
4. If the total of relatively undisturbed patches and those with low or moderate land use intensity is between 10% and 50%, count the number of distinct patches in the 1 km Polygon and score this using the criteria on the rating form.

Annotation

Patch size is not considered as part of this equation because small patches of habitat are at least equally as important as large patches (Fahrig, 2020; Riva & Fahrig, 2022). Total habitat within the local landscape is more important than patch size (Fahrig, 2013).

When habitat in the surrounding landscape is >50%, the area is sufficiently filled with habitat that the number of patches is not an important indicator (Fahrig, 2003; Crouzeilles et al., 2014). The number of patches is related to a reduction in habitat potential at 10-30% cover of habitat for species with a wide range of dispersal distances (Crouzeilles et al., 2014).

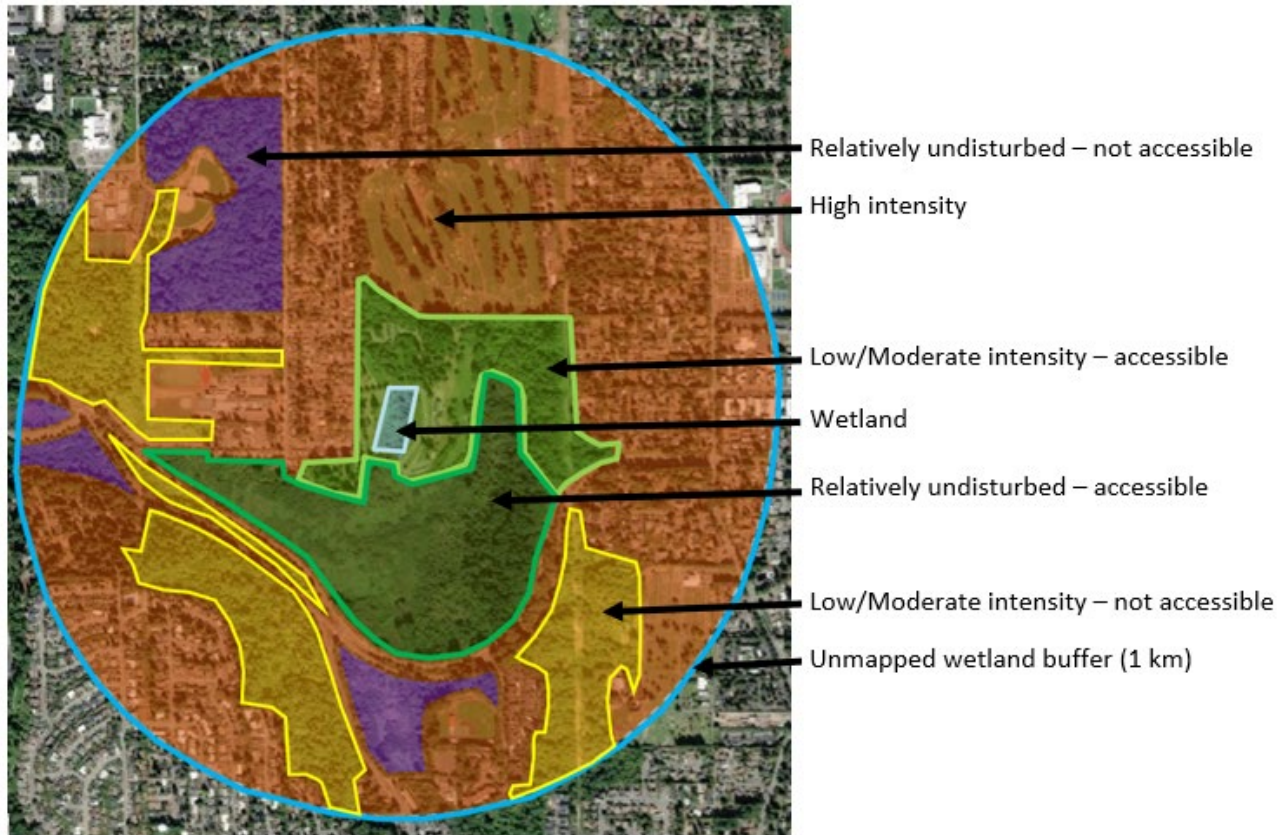


Figure 49. New figure. A 1 km Polygon from edge of a wetland unit (light blue polygon) showing the total habitat. The total habitat includes the areas of accessible habitat calculated in H 2.1 (light and dark green polygons) plus the relatively undisturbed areas (purple polygons) and the areas of low and moderate land uses (yellow polygons) that are not accessible from the wetland unit. The areas of high intensity land uses (orange polygons) are also shown.

H 2.3 Land use intensity in the 1 km Polygon

Rationale for indicator: Land uses that are often called high intensity, such as dense residential, manufacturing, and commercial areas, all have negative impacts on habitat because of noise, light, and other disturbances (reviewed in Sheldon et al., 2005). Wetlands that are located in such areas are therefore less suited as habitat for many species.

Use the diagram of land uses within 1 km of the wetland boundary to answer this question as well but analyze using the following steps.

1. Identify all polygons of high intensity land uses.
2. Calculate the relative area of these land uses in the 1 km Polygon. If the total is more than 50% of the area of the entire polygon, record that on the rating form and subtract two points from the total.

H 3.0 Is the habitat provided by the site valuable to society?

People do not value all species equally. Some are valued for their “charismatic” characteristics, some because they are in danger of extinction, and some for their commercial, aesthetic, or moral values (Perry, 2010). The value of the habitat a wetland provides for society is therefore linked to the presence of these more-valued species. Furthermore, as individuals we often place different values on individual species of wildlife. For example, some may value a beaver more than frogs, while others disagree.

Question H 3.1 attempts to characterize the values of different species of wildlife at a broad level by highlighting wetlands that provide habitat for species that are recognized by jurisdictions, the state, and federal agencies as having some importance and that are protected by laws and regulations. In this case, we are relying on the agencies and jurisdictions (as representatives of society as a whole) to identify the valuable species and habitats. The Department of Ecology does not have the resources, or the mandate, to develop a different list of valuable species.

H 3.1 Does the site provide habitat for species valued in laws, regulations, or policies?

Annotation: The rationale and text in this section have been edited for flow and clarity, and to provide updated information related to web resources.

Rationale for indicator: Some species are identified as Threatened or Endangered by federal and state laws or are the focus of management and conservation by state environmental agencies.

Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains a database of rare plants, rare plant communities, and examples of high quality plant communities.

The [Priority Habitats and Species \(PHS\) List](#) of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) [PHS program](#)⁸² identifies species that are valuable to society. A species may be on the PHS List because it is at-risk (e.g., federally or state listed as Threatened or Endangered), it tends to collect in groups that make the species susceptible to harm, or it is culturally or economically important.

These species are judged to have a higher value to society than others. Wetland units that provide habitat for these species are considered to have a higher habitat value than wetlands that do not.

⁸² <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/phs>

Wetlands are assigned a High value for habitat if the unit:

- Contains a rare plant, rare plant community, or high quality example of a plant community as determined by WDNR. These are called Wetlands of High Conservation Value (see SC 2.0 under Wetlands with Special Characteristics; Chapter 6).

See WDNR's [Data Explorer](#)⁸³ to determine if a polygon for a known rare plant or ecosystem overlaps any part of the wetland unit you are rating.

- Provides habitat for Threatened or Endangered (T/E) species on either a state or federal list. This includes both plants and animals. For the latest information on T/E species you will have to access the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) links below, or contact the [regional WDFW biologist](#).⁸⁴ These links were active as of May 2023.

[USFWS Endangered Species web page](#)⁸⁵

[USFWS Critical Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species map USFWS](#)⁸⁶

[NOAA Fisheries Threatened and Endangered species directory](#)⁸⁷

[WDFW Threatened and endangered species web page](#)⁸⁸

[WDFW Priority Habitats and Species: Maps web page](#)⁸⁹

For information on T/E plants, see the Natural Heritage Program at Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) [Species Lists](#).⁹⁰

NOTE: Be aware that wetlands with streams running through them in the Puget Sound area and on the Columbia River will probably be providing habitat for one or more species of threatened or endangered fish.

- Is mapped as a location for an individual WDFW Priority Species. WDFW maintains maps of important habitat areas and locations for species on their Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) list, which includes species with certain risk criteria or cultural importance that may not be state or federally listed T/E species.

NOTE 1: See WDFW's [PHS on the Web](#)⁹¹ for a map of the Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) data for the entire state. Zoom to the location of your wetland unit and determine if

⁸³ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPdata>

⁸⁴ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=48699252565749d1b7e16b3e34422271>

⁸⁵ <https://www.fws.gov/program/endangered-species>

⁸⁶ <https://fws.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=9d8de5e265ad4fe09893cf75b8dbfb77>

⁸⁷ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species-directory/threatened-endangered>

⁸⁸ <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/listed>

⁸⁹ <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/phs/maps>

⁹⁰ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPlists>

⁹¹ <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/hp/phs/>

data for a Priority Species (not a Priority Habitat polygon) falls within the boundary of the wetland unit.

NOTE 2: Individual Priority Species locations may occur on the [PHS on the Web](#)⁹² map as points, polygons, or lines. Priority Habitats are also mapped as polygons, which should not be counted as locations for an individual Priority Species. Confirm that the species data is located in the wetland and the mapped species is listed as a Priority Species.

NOTE 3: Beware that for some Priority Species only masked data polygons (e.g., township) may be displayed. Masked data hide the exact location of sensitive species and may not represent data for species occurring in the wetland. Contact the [regional WDFW biologist](#)⁹³ if you have questions.

NOTE 4: If you observe a Priority Species in the wetland during your site visit you should count the wetland as a location for an individual Priority Species, even if it is not mapped. The PHS maps typically show surveyed locations and many wetlands have not been surveyed. Note your observation in your rating.

- Has at least three different WDFW Priority Habitats within 100 m of the unit that are not wetlands. The list on the rating form summarizes the Priority Habitats as of March 2022. However, these may change, and you need to use the latest definitions for Priority Habitats. The list of Priority Habitats can be accessed from the [WDFW PHS web page](#).⁹⁴

NOTE 1: Wetlands are specifically excluded from the list of WDFW Priority Habitats used for this question.

NOTE 2: The intent is to identify Priority Habitats outside of the wetland. The types of Priority Habitats that occur within the wetland are generally addressed in the site potential questions (e.g., snags/logs in the wetland are counted as special habitat features in H 1.5). Most wildlife species in Washington use wetlands at some life stage. Priority Habitats outside of wetlands are considered value added to the wetland habitat.

NOTE 3: This question is independent of the land use between the wetland unit and the Priority Habitat.

NOTE 4: The presence of Priority Habitats within 100m of the wetland should be confirmed during the site visit. The [PHS on the Web](#)⁹⁵ can indicate Priority Habitats to look for while you are on site, but do not rely entirely on the PHS on the Web map for all Priority Habitats. Features of Biodiversity Areas and Corridors that occur on the PHS on the Web map within 100m of the wetland unit are the only feature that automatically count as a Priority Habitat for rating wetlands. For **all** Priority Habitats, a lack of a mapped feature does not indicate lack of presence. See the definitions of Priority Habitats in WDFW's [PHS List](#)⁹⁶ to help you identify features during your site visit.

⁹² <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/hp/phs/>

⁹³ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=48699252565749d1b7e16b3e34422271>

⁹⁴ <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/list/>

⁹⁵ <https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/hp/phs/>

⁹⁶ <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00165>

NOTE 5: If a stream or ditch that meets the definition of an Instream Priority Habitat and a riparian area that meets the definition of a Riparian Priority Habitat occur within 100m of the wetland unit, count each as an individual Priority Habitat. These are described as separate aquatic and terrestrial Priority Habitats in the PHS list.

NOTE 6: If a stream or ditch that meets the definition of an Instream Priority Habitat and open water that meets the definition of a Fresh Deepwater Priority Habitat occur within 100m of the wetland unit, only count one towards the list of Priority Habitats.

NOTE 7: If the entire Fresh Deepwater feature is included in the wetland unit being rated (such as a Depressional wetland with a pond with a vegetated fringe), do not count it as a Priority Habitat.

Contact the [regional WDFW biologist](#)⁹⁷ if you have questions.

- Has been categorized as an important habitat site in a local or regional comprehensive plan, Shoreline Master Plan, or a watershed plan. The Department of Ecology does not maintain a database of important habitat areas identified in local plans. You will need to contact the planning department of the jurisdiction in which your wetland unit is found to determine if it has been identified as an area that provides valuable habitat.

Wetlands are assigned a Moderate value for habitat if the unit has one or two different WDFW Priority Habitats within 100 m.

Wetlands are assigned a Low value for habitat if they do not meet any of the criteria above.

⁹⁷ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=48699252565749d1b7e16b3e34422271>

6. Detailed Guidance for the Rating Form: Wetlands with Special Characteristics

This rating system was designed to differentiate among wetlands based on their sensitivity to disturbance, their significance, their rarity, our ability to replace them, and the functions they provide. The first four criteria can be considered as values that are somewhat independent of the functions provided by a wetland. Questions SC 1 to SC 6 provide the information needed to identify and rate the wetlands with these special characteristics. These types of wetlands have an importance or value that may supersede their functions. **You should determine whether the wetland being rated meets any of the conditions described below as well as answering the questions about functions.**

Questions to identify wetlands with special characteristics

SC 1.0 Estuarine wetlands

SC 1.1 Estuarine wetlands are vegetated, Tidal Fringe, wetlands where the concentration of salt in the water is greater than 0.5 parts per thousand. Estuarine wetlands of any size within National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, National Estuary Reserves, Natural Area Preserves, State Parks, or Educational, Environmental or Scientific Reserves designated under WAC 332-30-151 are rated a Category I.

SC 1.2 Estuarine wetlands in which the salt marsh vegetation extends over more than 1 ac, and that meet at least two of the following three criteria are rated a Category I.

- The wetland is relatively undisturbed. This means it has no ditching, filling, cultivation, or grazing, and the vegetation has less than 10% cover of non-native plant species. **NOTE:** If non-native *Spartina* species cover more than 10% of the wetland, then the wetland can be given a dual rating (I/II). The area of *Spartina* would be rated a Category II, while the relatively undisturbed upper marsh with native species would be a Category I. Do not, however, exclude the area of *Spartina* in determining the size threshold of 1 ac.
- At least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the landward edge of the wetland has a 100-ft buffer of ungrazed pasture, shrub, forest, or relatively undisturbed freshwater wetland. A relatively undisturbed dike with vegetation that is not cut or grazed annually can count as an undisturbed buffer.
- The vegetated areas of the wetland have at least two of the following structural features: tidal channels, depressions with open water, or contiguous freshwater wetlands.

Any estuarine wetland that does not meet the criteria above for a Category I is a Category II wetland.

NOTE: Eelgrass beds do not fall within the definition of vegetated wetlands used in the rating system. They are an important aquatic resource, but they do not fall within the purview of this rating system.

SC 2.0 Wetlands of High Conservation Value (formerly Natural Heritage Wetlands)

We changed the name from Natural Heritage Wetlands to Wetlands of High Conservation Value (WHCV) because the former name has caused some confusion. Some users of the rating system believed that the Natural Heritage Wetlands are Natural Heritage Sites maintained by WDNR. This is not the case. Wetlands of High Conservation Value are Category I wetlands because WDNR has found that they hold rare or threatened plant communities or populations of rare or threatened plant species. These wetlands are not necessarily Natural Heritage Sites.

Wetlands that are Wetlands of High Conservation Value (formerly called Natural Heritage Wetlands) are those identified by the Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP) at the Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) as either wetlands with high quality undisturbed plant communities or wetlands that support rare or sensitive plant populations.

Annotation

Outdated information about how to find WHCV data was deleted in the section above. The [WNHP Data Explorer](#)⁹⁸ is now available. It displays known and historical rare plant and plant community data that the WNHP has identified as Element Occurrences (EO) in their database. Historical data are records where species have not been observed in >40 years, but that may be due to a lack of survey at that location during that time. Because seeds can persist in soil for long periods of time and plants can persist in remnant habitats, historic data indicate the potential for rare plants to occur in the area and they are considered when applying a wetland rating.

The WNHP maps rare plant and ecosystem polygons based on the level of detail, or precision, for the geographic location in the WNHP database. If a known or historical rare plants and rare & high-quality ecosystems polygon overlaps the wetland you are rating, you will need to look at the Element Occurrence Precision field in the pop-up box for the polygon to determine if its precision level is General, Minute, or Second. See [WNHP's GIS Metadata](#)⁹⁹ for more information on levels of precision.

If the data are for a polygon of a lichen or other non-vascular species at the General or Minute-level of EO precision, we do not currently have the resources or availability of skilled lichenologists to support determinations of the species presence, and do not expect these to be considered when scoring wetland ratings at this time.

Follow these instructions to determine if the wetland you are rating is a WHCV:

1. Go to the [WNHP Data Products](#)¹⁰⁰ webpage. Under Web Viewers, access the Data Explorer and zoom to the wetland you are rating.

⁹⁸ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPdata>

⁹⁹ https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/amp_nh_eo_metadata.pdf

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPdata>

2. Determine if data for known or historical rare plants and rare & high-quality ecosystems occur anywhere within the boundaries of the wetland being rated (SC 2.1 in the rating form).
3. Look at the Element Occurrence Precision level in the pop-up box of data for the polygon. If a known or historical rare plant and ecosystem polygon with Second-level precision overlaps the wetland unit being rated, it is considered a WHCV.
4. If a known or historical rare plant and ecosystem polygon with Minute-level precision overlaps the wetland unit being rated, it will require some additional information (see below).
5. Treat known and historical rare plant and ecosystem polygons with a General level of precision like mapped Priority Habitats, where the mapped location is an indicator to look for presence in the field. If a wetland occurs in a location covered by a generalized EO data polygon, use the WNHP's Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington¹⁰¹ to help identify the species. See the WNHP website for information on identifying rare or high-quality plant communities.¹⁰²
6. If the wetland being rated does not overlap any known or historical rare plant species or ecosystem data, but you observe in the wetland a rare plant species, rare ecosystem (e.g., plant community), or high-quality common ecosystem that may qualify the site as a WHCV, submit the site to WA Natural Heritage Program¹⁰³ (SC 2.2 in the rating form). See section 2.1 for instructions.

If any part of a wetland overlaps data from any known or historical polygon with Second-level precision, regardless of the plants' wetland indicator status rating,¹⁰⁴ the wetland meets the criteria for WHCV in the Washington Wetland Rating System, and that wetland is a Category I.

Known and historical data with Minute-level precision should be considered when assessing for the presence of rare plants or plant communities. These larger polygons do confer some uncertainty in location and will require some follow-up to make a determination for the presence of these elements. Follow these steps:

1. Contact the WNHP to find out if they have specific location information for the data.
2. Look at the plant species or community and determine whether it is likely to occur in the wetland habitat or the surrounding upland. This can be done by looking for the species on the National Wetland Plant List¹⁰⁵ to determine if it is ranked as a species more likely to occur in wetlands, and at species and plant community descriptions to determine its preferred habitats.
3. If it is possible that the species occurs in the wetland or buffer area and it is necessary to determine presence, have a qualified consultant, who has botanical expertise and

¹⁰¹ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPfieldguide>

¹⁰² <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPecosystems>

¹⁰³ https://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/amp_nh_sighting_form.pdf

¹⁰⁴ https://wetland-plants.usace.army.mil/nwpl_static/v34/home/home.html

¹⁰⁵ https://wetland-plants.usace.army.mil/nwpl_static/v34/home/home.html

experience conducting rare plant surveys, survey for the species during the appropriate season when it is most detectable. This can confirm species presence if it is observed but does not “prove” that the species is not present.

4. To sufficiently demonstrate lack of presence, you will need to show that conditions of substantial disturbance and land use change have eliminated suitable habitat in the known historic location of the rare plant or ecosystem.
5. Presence of a rare plant or ecosystem, or a historical mapped location and presence of habitat that can support the rare plants, indicates that the contiguous wetland extent is a WHCV. Determine if the project is likely to impact the species and contact the regulators permitting the activity to determine how to proceed.

SC 3.0 Bogs

If more than a ¼ ac of the wetland you are rating meets the criteria for bogs described below, it is a Category I wetland. Bogs cannot be replicated through compensatory mitigation and are very sensitive to disturbance.

The terms associated with bogs are complex and often confusing (e.g., bogs, fens, mires, peat bogs, Sphagnum acidic bogs, heaths). Bogs occupy one end of a gradient of wetlands dominated by organic soils, low nutrients, and low pH (between 3.5 and 5.0). The criteria we use to identify Category I bogs encompass a broader range of wetlands than what many scientists consider to be true bogs. Many scientists consider bogs to be only those acidic peat wetlands that receive almost all of their water from rainfall (J. Rocchio, WNHP, personal communication, March 2014). On the other hand, most definitions of bogs in dictionaries include any wetland with peat or muck soils; criteria that are more inclusive than we have in the rating system. Bogs, as defined in the rating system, include both true bogs that rely only on rainfall for their water, and acidic fens that receive some of their water from the surrounding landscape or groundwater.

True bogs and acidic fens are generally acidic and have low levels of nutrients available for plant growth. Plants growing in these sensitive wetlands are specifically adapted to such conditions and are usually not found elsewhere. Relatively minor changes in the water regime or nutrient levels in bogs may cause major changes in the plant community. Bogs, and their associated acidic peat environment, provide habitat for unique species of plants and animals. The ground is usually very spongy and covered with mosses (often of the genus *Sphagnum*). Some bogs will actually float on top of a lake or pond.

Forested bogs may be more difficult to identify. Bogs may contain highly stunted individual trees of Sitka spruce, western red cedar, western hemlock, lodgepole pine, western white pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, aspen, or crab apple. However, some bogs contain mature, full-size, trees, especially on the Long Beach Peninsula. These wetlands contain mature, full-sized trees of Sitka spruce, western red cedar, western hemlock, lodgepole pine, western white pine, Engelmann spruce, or aspen. The trees grow very slowly and may take many centuries to reach sizes common in much younger forests. The characteristics that typically identify these forests as bogs are peat soils and, frequently, the presence of true bog species such as Sphagnum moss. Sphagnum or other bog species may cover only a small portion of the ground, especially if there are pools of standing water in the forest or if there is substantial litter.

Identifying bogs can be challenging, particularly in a forested setting. It is necessary to confirm the presence of organic soils by digging soil pits, and it further requires the identification of particular plant species. It may also be difficult to determine the boundaries of a bog.

Key for Identifying Bogs in the Rating System

A wetland may meet the criteria for a bog in a small area within its boundaries. Even though the entire unit does not meet the criteria for these peat systems, the entire unit should be rated as a Category I wetland, or a wetland with a dual rating (see Section 4.7). The questions in the key apply to any areas within the unit being rated, and they do not have to apply to the entire unit.

SC 3.1 Does an area within the wetland unit have organic soil horizons (i.e., layers of organic soil), either peats or mucks, that compose 16 in. or more of the first 32 in. of the soil profile?

Yes - go to Question SC 3.3

No - go to Question SC 3.2

The following description of organic soils is from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service). Soils with an organic carbon content of 18% or more (excluding live roots) if the mineral fraction contains more than 60% clay; 2) soils with an organic carbon content of 12% if the mineral fraction contains no clay; or 3) soils with an organic carbon content between 12-18% based on the percentage of clay present (multiply the actual percentage of clay by 0.1 and add to 12%). It is not usually necessary, however, to do a chemical analysis of the soil to determine if a soil is organic. Organic soils are easy to recognize as black-colored mucks or as black or dark brown peats. Mucks feel greasy and stain skin when rubbed between the fingers. Peats have plant fragments visible throughout the soil and feel fibrous. Many organic soils, both peats and mucks, may smell of hydrogen sulfide (rotten eggs). Black soils that feel gritty or sandy, however, are usually not organic soils.

SC 3.2 Does an area within the wetland have organic soils, either peats or mucks, that are less than 16 in. deep over bedrock, or an impermeable hardpan such as clay or volcanic ash, or that are floating on top of a lake or pond?

Yes - go to Question SC 3.3

No - **is not** a bog for purpose of rating

SC 3.3 Does an area with peats or mucks have more than 70% cover of mosses at ground level, AND other plants, if present, consist of the species listed in Table 4 as a significant component of the vegetation (more than 30% of the total shrub and herbaceous cover consists of species in Table 4)?

Yes – **is a BOG** for purpose of rating

No - go to Question SC 3.4

NOTE: If you are uncertain about the extent of mosses in the understory, you may substitute that criterion by measuring the pH of the water that seeps into a hole dug at least 16 in. deep. If the pH is less than 5.0 and the plant species listed in Table 4 are present, the wetland is a bog.

SC 3.4 Is an area with peats or mucks forested (>30% cover) with Sitka Spruce, subalpine fir, western red cedar, western hemlock, lodgepole pine, quaking aspen, Engelmann spruce, or western white pine, AND any of the species (or combination of species) listed in Table 4 provide more than 30% of the cover under the canopy.

Yes – **is a BOG** for purpose of rating

No - **is not** a bog for purpose of rating

NOTE: Total cover is estimated by assessing the area of wetland covered by the shadow of plants if the sun were directly overhead. You are trying to determine whether 30% of the total footprint of plants within the polygon identified as a bog consists of plant species listed in Table 4.

NOTE: *Spiraea douglasii* is not included in the list because it is often found in peat systems that no longer have the low pH and other special characteristics of bogs. It is not considered to be an indicator species for the bogs dominated by mosses at the ground level.

If in doubt about classifying your wetland unit as a bog, it is important to consult someone with expertise in identifying bogs. The intent of the criteria is to include those bogs that have relatively undisturbed native plant communities.

Table 4. Species found in true bogs and acidic fens in western Washington (list provided by Joe Rocchio, Washington Natural Heritage Program)

Species	Field Notes compiled by Natural Heritage Program
<i>Agrostis aequivalvis</i> (= <i>Podagrostis aequivalvis</i>)	Coastal acidic fens
<i>Andromeda polifolia</i>	Not yet documented in WA; if present, likely restricted to bogs in northern part of Puget lowlands
<i>Carex echinata</i> ssp. <i>echinata</i>	Acidic fens; occasional marshes
<i>Carex echinata</i> ssp. <i>phyllomanica</i>	Coastal acidic fens; edges of marshes
<i>Carex limosa</i>	Restricted to acidic fens; on floating or quaking mats
<i>Carex livida</i>	Acidic fens, especially on the coast
<i>Carex magellanica</i> ssp. <i>irrigua</i>	Primarily acidic fens
<i>Carex pauciflora</i>	Restricted to bogs and acidic fens
<i>Carex saxatilis</i>	Acidic fens; lakeshores
<i>Carex stylosa</i>	Montane acidic fens
<i>Cladina rangiferina</i>	Only counts if found on top of moss hummocks
<i>Drosera anglica</i>	Montane acidic fens
<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	Mostly bogs and acidic fens; occasional in other acidic wet soil
<i>Dulichium arundinaceum</i>	Acidic fens and marshes

Species	Field Notes compiled by Natural Heritage Program
<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	Coastal bogs and acidic fens
<i>Equisetum fluviatile</i>	Common in acidic fens
<i>Eriophorum chamissonis</i>	Bogs and acidic fens
<i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i> ssp. <i>angustifolium</i>	Acidic fens
<i>Gentiana douglasiana</i>	Coastal acidic fens
<i>Gentiana sceptrum</i>	Bogs and acidic fens
<i>Juncus supiniformis</i>	Acidic fens; marshes, swamps
<i>Kalmia microphylla</i>	Bogs and acidic fens
<i>Ledum groenlandicum</i> (= <i>Rhododendron groenlandicum</i>)	Bogs and acidic fens
<i>Myrica gale</i>	Mostly coastal acidic fens
<i>Nephrrophyllidium crista-galli</i>	Coastal acidic fens; swamps and wet meadows
<i>Rhynchospora alba</i>	Bogs, acidic fens
<i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>	Coastal acidic fens
<i>Scheuchzeria palustris</i> ssp. <i>americana</i>	Montane acidic fens
<i>Triantha occidentalis</i> ssp. <i>brevistyla</i>	Mostly bogs to acidic fens
<i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i> (= <i>T. caespitosum</i>)	Montane acidic fens
<i>Trientalis europaea</i> ssp. <i>arctica</i>	Bogs and acidic fens
<i>Utricularia intermedia</i>	Bogs and acidic fens
<i>Utricularia minor</i>	Acidic fens
<i>Vaccinium oxycoccos</i>	Restricted to bogs & acidic fens
<i>Vaccinium uliginosum</i>	Acidic fens
<i>Xerophyllum tenax</i>	Restricted to bogs and acidic fens

SC 4.0 Forested wetlands

Does the wetland have at least **1 contiguous acre** of forest that meets the ecological criteria for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's old-growth or mature forests?

(Continue only if you have identified that a forested class is present in question H 1.1)

To answer this question, you will need to map out the areas of the wetland that are forested using the Cowardin classification (see question H 1.1 in Section 5.7). You will then have to determine whether the forest ecosystem meets the criteria for Priority Habitats listed below. **NOTE:** The WDFW definition for an old-growth forest has a size threshold that is larger than the one used in this rating system. This is the only difference between the definition used here and by WDFW.

- **Old-growth forests west of Cascade crest:** Stands with at least two tree species, forming a multi-layered canopy with occasional small openings; with at least 8 trees/ac (20 trees/ha) that are >32 in. (81 cm) diameter at breast height (dbh) or >200 years of age; and > 4 snags/ac (10 snags/ha) over 20 in. (51 cm) diameter and 15 ft (4.6 m) tall; with numerous downed logs, including 4 logs/ac (10 logs/ha) that are >24 in. (61 cm) diameter and >50 ft (15 m) long. High elevation stands, e.g., >2500 ft (762 m), may have lesser dbh [>30 in. (76 cm)], fewer snags [>1.5/ac (0.6/ha)], and fewer large downed logs [2 logs/ac (0.8 logs/ha) that are >24 in. (61 cm) diameter and >50 ft (15 m) long].

NOTE: The criteria for dbh are based on measurements for upland forests. Two-hundred year old trees in wetlands will often have a smaller dbh than those in uplands because their growth rates are often slower. The WDFW criterion is an "OR," so old-growth forests do not necessarily have to have trees of this diameter. Data collected in wetlands indicates that 200-year-old trees may have different diameters depending on the wetland type (Painter, 2007).

- **Mature forests west of the Cascade crest:** Stands with average diameters exceeding 21 in. (53 cm) dbh; crown cover may be less than 100%; decay, decadence, numbers of snags, and quantity of large downed material is generally less than that found in old-growth; 80-200 years old west.

NOTE: The criterion for dbh is based on measurements for upland forests. Eighty- to 200-year-old trees in wetlands will often have a smaller dbh because their growth rates are often slower. The WDFW criterion is an "OR," so mature forests do not necessarily have to have trees of this diameter.

NOTE: Trees can be either deciduous or coniferous.

NOTE: There are no requirements for the number of trees per acre in the mature forest definition. For the purpose of the rating system, we will assume that the **average dbh** refers only to the trees forming the canopy. This is based on clarification from WDFW:

The second part describes just how old a forest needs to be before we consider it mature (i.e., 80-200 years for western WA). This part of the definition should weigh heavily in identifying mature forest. And because most of Washington's forests have been invaded by a dense understory layer due to widespread fire suppression, I interpret our definition as not including the smaller understory trees. But if I was to

update this definition, mentioning that the dbh measured is only intended for the overstory trees only would certainly add clarity. (e-mail from Jeff Azerrad, WDFW, received April 10, 2013)

If you have 1 ac of old-growth or mature forest, the wetland is Category I.

If only part of the wetland meets the requirements for a Category I forested wetland, and its category based on functions is II or III, the wetland may be assigned a dual rating as described in Section 4.7.

SC 5.0 Wetlands in coastal lagoons

Coastal lagoons are shallow bodies of water, like a pond, partly or completely separated from the sea by a barrier beach. They may, or may not, be connected to the sea by an inlet, but they all receive periodic influxes of salt water. This can be either through storm surges overtopping the barrier beach, or by flow through the porous sediments of the beach. Coastal lagoons may have freshwater flowing into one side that dilutes the salinity below 0.5 ppt. The seaward edges of the lagoons, however, always contain some salt water at or near the bottom.

Does the wetland meet all of the following criteria for a wetland in a coastal lagoon?

To be rated as a wetland in a coastal lagoon, a wetland and its associated lagoon have to meet all of the following criteria:

- The vegetated wetland lies in a depression with open water for at least part of the year that is adjacent to marine waters. This depression is wholly or partially separated from those marine waters by sandbanks, gravel banks, shingle, or, less frequently, rocks along part of its circumference (see Figures 50, 51). The banks can be vegetated or bare.
- The unvegetated areas of the lagoon contain water, in at least some parts of the lagoon, that is saline or brackish (>0.5 ppt) during most of the year (needs to be measured near the bottom).
- The lagoon retains some of its surface water at low tide during spring tides.

The categorization of wetlands in coastal lagoons is based on the size of the lagoon and the level of disturbance in the lagoon and its buffers. If a wetland in a coastal lagoon meets all three of the following criteria, it is Category I. If the criteria are not met, it is Category II.

- The wetland is relatively undisturbed (has no diking, ditching, filling, cultivation, or grazing), and has less than 20% cover of aggressive, opportunistic plant species (see list of species in section 5.7, H 1.5).
- At least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the landward edge of the wetland has a 100-ft buffer of shrub, forest, or ungrazed or un-mowed grassland. **NOTE:** The landward edge of the lagoon may represent a small section of the buffer, as in Figure 50.
- The wetland is larger than $\frac{1}{10}$ ac (4350 ft²).



Figure 50. A coastal lagoon on Hood Canal with associated wetlands that is separated from Puget Sound by a vegetated bar of gravel and sand. The lagoon has no surface-water connection to the sound. Salt water, however, can enter the lagoon through the bar or over the top during storms. The yellow arrow points to one area of vegetated wetland within the lagoon.



Figure 51. A coastal lagoon with a surface-water connection to Puget Sound. In this case, there is a salt marsh as well as a sand bar separating the lagoon from the sound.

SC 6.0 Interdunal wetlands

Is the wetland west of the 1889 line known as the Western Boundary of Upland Ownership?

Interdunal wetlands form in the deflation plains and swales that are geomorphic features in areas of coastal dunes. These dune forms are the result of the interaction among sand, wind, water, and plants. The dune system immediately behind the ocean beach (the primary dune system) is very dynamic and can change from storm to storm (Wiedemann, 1984). These wetlands provide critical habitat in this ecosystem (Wiedemann, 1984), but many of the more recently formed wetlands cannot be characterized using the questions on the rating form.

Wetlands located west of the 1889 line (also called the Western Boundary of Upland Ownership or WBUO) along the coast are considered interdunal wetlands because they have formed only in the last century or so. These wetlands all have formed as a result of accretions of the beach westward since 1889.

In practical terms, that means the following geographic areas:

- Long Beach Peninsula: Lands west of SR 103
- Grayland-Westport: Lands west of SR 105
- Ocean Shores-Copalis: Lands west of SR 115 and SR 109 (**Annotation:** And Ocean Shores Blvd SW, including lands west of E. Oceans Shores Blvd SW).

Interdunal wetlands greater than 1 ac that rate High for habitat (score 8 or 9 for habitat) are placed in Category I because they provide numerous habitat niches in this ecosystem that is little understood. Other interdunal wetlands that are 1 ac or larger or are in a mosaic that is larger than 1 ac (Fig. 52), are Category II (see section 4.3 for identifying mosaics). Wetlands not in a mosaic between 0.1 and 1 ac are Category III, and smaller ones (<0.1 ac) are Category IV (see Fig. 53). **If the interdunal wetland unit is larger than 1 ac, the Habitat questions on the rating form need to be answered to determine if the wetlands have enough habitat structure to be categorized as a Category I.**

NOTE: Small interdunal wetlands often form a mosaic behind the primary dunes (see Figures 52 and 53). If the interdunal wetlands meet the criteria for wetlands in a mosaic (see section 4.3 and repeated below), then the category should be based on the overall size of the mosaic rather than an individual patch.

- Each patch of wetland is less than 1 ac (0.4 ha), and
- Each patch is less than 100 ft (30 m) apart, on the average, and
- The areas delineated as vegetated wetland are more than 50% of the total area of both the wetlands and dunes.



Figure 52. Intertidal mosaic that is larger than 1 ac. Individual wetland areas within the oval may be smaller than 1 ac, but they form a mosaic that is larger than 1 ac.



Mosaic of wetlands
less than 0.1 ac in size

Mosaic of wetlands
less than 1 ac in size

Figure 53. Intertidal wetlands in mosaics less than 1 ac and less than 0.1 ac in size.

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Glossary

This is a new addition that includes terms defined exclusively for their use with the wetland rating system. Many definitions were adapted from Ecology's existing publications.

Adsorption – The attraction and adhesion of a layer of ions from an aqueous solution to the solid mineral surface with which it is in contact.

Agriculture (land use) – Field or pasture used for grazing or cultivation of crops.

Agriculture, high-intensity (land use) – Areas where the agricultural land use results in a higher density and frequency of human presence and activity or other general disturbances (including soil), structures, and impervious surfaces. These include dairies, nurseries, paddocks, corrals, and buildings for raising and maintaining animals, greenhouses, and crops that require annual tilling or seeding, frequent broadcast pesticide applications, or center pivot sprinkler or furrow (rill) irrigation.

Agriculture, low/moderate-intensity (land use) – Areas where the agricultural land use requires less frequent human presence and activity, no structures or few small structures, infrequent use of pesticides, and few impervious surfaces. These include perennial hayfields, pastures, orchards, vineyards, tree farms, and other perennial crops. Pastures and perennial crops that are drip or flood irrigated are also included.

Anoxic – A situation devoid of molecular oxygen.

Anthropogenic – Caused by human action.

Aquatic bed class – Any area of open water with at least 30% cover of rooted aquatic plants that grow principally on or below the water surface for most of the growing season in most years. Species are nonpersistent and include submerged or floating-leaved rooted vascular plants and submerged mosses.

Biodiversity – The number and relative abundance of all species within a given area.

Calibration – The process of developing the numeric scaling for each variable for each function. This was done using data from the reference sites in each wetland hydrogeomorphic class.

Canopy cover – The degree to which the foliage of the canopy (highest vegetation layer in an assemblage) blocks sunlight or obscures the sky.

Canopy stratum – The highest layer of vegetation in a forested plant community, typically consisting of large trees that extend over the other four strata.

Channel – A distinct linear depression that has a definable outlet and identifiable bank edges that have been shaped by flowing water. Includes human-made ditches and grassy swales that may have intermittent flows.

Class – A grouping based on shared characteristics in a classification scheme. In the Cowardin classification of wetlands, a class is the third level in the 'taxonomy' of wetlands, whereas in the hydrogeomorphic classification, it is the highest taxonomic unit.

Clearcut logging (land use) – Areas where all mature trees have been removed within five years of the time of the site visit. Saplings generally will not be more than 2 m tall.

Commercial (land use) – Land uses such as retail, wholesale, and other business offices.

Contributing basin – The boundary of the area that contributes surface water and groundwater to a waterbody, wetland, or point along a stream. Because groundwater is not mapped for individual wetlands, the boundary of the contributing basin is generally determined from the areas contributing surface water.

Cowardin plant class – Plant classes that are distinguished by the uppermost layer of plants (forest, shrub, etc.) that provides 30% or more surface cover within a polygon that represents all or part of a wetland. These are based on the method of classification for wetlands and deepwater habitats developed by Cowardin et al. (1979) for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Denitrification – The biological conversion of nitrate to nitrogen gas by microbes in anaerobic conditions.

Depressional wetland – Depressional wetlands occur in topographic depressions where the elevation of the surface within the wetland is lower than the surrounding landscape.

Diameter at breast height (dbh) – The diameter of a tree, measured 4.5 feet above the ground on the uphill side of the tree.

Die back – Degradation and death (senescence) of all or part of the aboveground portion of a plant in response to seasonal changes, weather, or disease.

Dike – An artificial embankment constructed to hold water to prevent flooding of adjacent land.

Disturbance – An event that disrupts the processes or structure of ecological systems. Disturbances may occur naturally (e.g., wildfires, storms, floods) or be caused by human actions (e.g., clearing land, building roads, altering stream channels). The effects of disturbances on ecological systems are controlled in large part by their intensity, duration, frequency, timing, and size and shape of area affected.

Drainage – The flow of water through well-defined channels or the network of channels through which water flows.

Edge habitat – The boundary where habitats meet or where successional stages of plant communities come together.

Emergent class – A Cowardin vegetation class where any area covered by erect, persistent, herbaceous plants, excluding mosses and lichens, provides at least 30% areal cover as the upper most vegetation layer.

Emergent plant – Herbaceous plants that are rooted in shallow water but have photosynthesizing structures above the water's surface.

Eutrophication – The process of enrichment of a water body with nutrients, especially nitrogen and phosphorous, leading to increased production of organic matter (e.g., undesirable overgrowth of vegetation and algae). This often occurs as a result of human activities.

Field teams – Teams of volunteers who were trained in the methods for collecting data and who collected data at reference wetland sites. These data were used to calibrate the models for the rating system.

Forested class – A Cowardin vegetation class where woody vegetation over 6 m (20 ft) tall is the uppermost vegetation layer that provides at least 30% of the areal cover.

Frequently flooded – A defining characteristic of riverine wetlands in western Washington. An area where overbank flooding occurs at least once every two years on average over a ten-year period.

Groundwater – Water that exists underground in saturated zones beneath the land surface. See also **water table**.

Guild – A group of species that have similar ecological resource requirements and foraging strategies, and as result, have similar roles in a community.

Herbaceous stratum – A layer of non-woody vegetation in a forested plant community, usually less than 2 m (6 ft) tall.

High intensity (land use) – Land uses that have high densities of impervious surfaces, vehicle traffic, and/or human presence and disturbance.

Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification – Classification of wetlands based upon landscape position (geomorphic setting), water source, and the flow and fluctuation of water in the wetland (hydrodynamics).

Hydrologic unit – Watersheds in the United States that were delineated by the U.S. Geological Survey using a national standard hierarchical system based on surface hydrologic features. The hydrologic units are arranged or nested within each other, from the largest geographic area to the smallest geographic area. These units are applied to the contributing areas of streams, rivers, and other waterbodies.

Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) – A hierarchical code applied by the U.S. Geological Survey to identify hydrologic units, consisting of two additional digits for each level in the nested hydrologic unit system used to identify any hydrologic area.

Hydroperiod – The pattern of water level fluctuations in a wetland. Includes the depth, frequency, duration, and timing of inundation or flooding. Patterns can be daily, monthly, seasonal, annual, or longer term.

Hyporheic zone – The subsurface region of streams and rivers that exchanges water with the surface.

Impounded water – Water subject to restricted flow that results in ponding of water above the soil surface that remains for a time after precipitation, flooding, or groundwater discharge.

Index – A numerical result that represents the deviation of performance of function from those wetlands judged to be the highest performers for each individual function for sites in that hydrogeomorphic class.

Indicator – Easily observed characteristics that are correlated with quantitative or qualitative observations of an environmental variable.

Industrial (land use) – Land uses such as manufacturing plants, mining, research and development facilities, warehousing, shipping, transporting, remanufacturing, stockpiling of raw materials, storage, repair and maintenance of commercial machinery or equipment, and waste management.

Institutional (land use) – Land uses such as schools, libraries, emergency response or public safety facilities, health care facilities, military base facilities, public transportation facilities, ports and marinas including airports, some public utilities.

Interspersion – The number and degree of intermixing of different vegetative and open water or unvegetated cover types in a wetland unit.

Inundation – A rising and spreading of water over land not usually submerged; flooding.

Large woody debris (LWD) – Dead or dying woody material on the wetland unit surface, or in water, that is at least 1.8 m (6 ft) long and a minimum of 10 cm (4 in.) in diameter at the widest part.

Low/moderate intensity (land use) – Land uses with lower densities of impervious surfaces, lower levels of traffic, and lower levels of human activity and disturbance.

Mosaic – Made up of many different interspersed elements; used in regard to vegetation, wetland types, or groups of wetlands interspersed with uplands.

Moss/groundcover stratum - The lowest layer of vegetation in a forested plant community, usually less than 6 inches tall and typically consisting of bryophytes (mosses, liverworts, hornworts, other non-vascular plants), low-lying woody or herbaceous plants, or trailing plants that are usually perennial.

Outlet – The point (location) at which water is discharged out of the wetland at the surface.

Outlet, highly constricted – An outlet from a Depressional wetland that is small or heavily incised and permanently flowing, where marks of flooding or inundation are 3 ft or more above the bottom of the outlet. This includes narrow channels anchored in steep slopes. Evidence of erosion of the downgradient side of the outlet may also occur.

Outlet, intermittently flowing – Surface water flows out of a Depressional wetland during the wet season (seasonal outflow) or during heavy precipitation. This includes Depressional wetlands with occasional outflow resulting from stormwater runoff from an adjacent developed area.

Outlet, permanently flowing – The outlet in a Depressional wetland from a permanently flowing stream or ditch, generally at a point of groundwater discharge that does not dry out. In general, water should be flowing all year in 8 years out of 10 to be considered permanent.

Outlet, unconfined or slightly constricted – The outlet from a Depressional wetland where water is permanently flowing out of the wetland without restriction. In this case, high water marks are less than 3ft above the low point of the outlet. This includes sheetflow across a wide distance such as in a large floodplain wetland with no clear outlet, and beaver dams unless the water is backed up at least 3 ft above the top of the dam.

Oxic – A situation when molecular oxygen is present.

Persistent plants – Plants with structures that normally remain present at least until the beginning of the next growing season. These plants may senesce, but much of the aboveground structure remains through the non-growing season.

pH – The negative logarithm of hydrogen ion concentrations. A measure of the relative intensity of acidity or alkalinity of water, with the neutral point at 7.0. Values lower than 7.0 indicate an acidic solution; above 7.0 a basic, or alkaline, solution.

Recreation, high intensity (land use) – Areas used for recreational activities such as higher density or frequency of disturbances such as human presence and noise, grounds maintenance activities including pesticide and fertilizer applications and frequent mowing, bright lights, large structures, extensive impervious or artificial surfaces. These include ball fields, golf courses, marinas, and improved boat launches.

Recreation, low/moderate intensity (land use) – Areas used for recreational activities such as open spaces and parks with trails, hiking, biking, jogging, birdwatching, infrequent boating, unimproved boat launches, and non-motorized boats.

Reference wetlands – A group of wetlands within eastern or western Washington that represent the range of variation of functions in a hydrogeomorphic class.

Residential (land use) – Areas with housing, such as single- and multiple-family dwellings, educational facilities, day care, and custodial or long-term health care. This is considered a land use that generates pollution and excess runoff, regardless of density.

Residential, high intensity (land use) – Areas with apartments, town houses, and individual homes where there is more than one residence per acre on average.

Residential, low/moderate intensity (land use) - Areas where there is less than one residence per acre on average.

Runoff – The portion of rainfall or other precipitation that becomes surface flow.

Salmonid – Those fishes in the family Salmonidae, including trout, salmon, char, steelhead, and whitefish.

Scrub-shrub class – A Cowardin vegetation class where woody vegetation less than 6 m (20 ft) tall is the upper most vegetation layer that provides at least 30% areal cover.

Sediment – Material suspended in flowing water that ultimately settles to the bottom after the water loses velocity.

Sheetflow – Runoff water from a rain or other precipitation event that flows over the ground surface.

Shrub stratum – A layer of woody vegetation consisting of shrubs or young trees, usually taller than 2 m (6 ft), in a forested plant community. Rarely exceeds 6 m (20 ft) in height.

Species richness – The total number of species in a community or assemblage.

Sphagnum – A genus of grayish-green moss growing in dense layers in bogs that eventually forms peat.

Stratum – A layer of vegetation rooted in the wetland unit in a forested plant community. To count as a stratum in rating the wetland, the layer must cover at least 20% of the ground within the boundary of its plant assemblage. There are five potential strata: moss/groundcover, herbaceous, shrub, sub-canopy, and canopy.

Storage, dead – Water present in the wetland year-round or below the elevation of the outlet. It does not contribute to reductions in peak flows.

Storage, live – The volume of storage available in depressional wetlands for major rainfall or snowmelt events. It uses the difference between the deepest point in the wetland if it is dry or the level of permanent ponding when flooded, and the marks of seasonal ponding. This is also called seasonal or wet season storage.

Stormwater – That portion of precipitation that does not naturally percolate into the ground or evaporate, but flows via overland flow, pipes, and other features of a stormwater drainage system into a defined surface waterbody, or a constructed infiltration facility.

Sub-basin – For application of landscape potential questions in the rating manual, this is referring to the area of a 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC; also called HUC6 or subwatershed), which is in the range of 4-40 sq. mi.

Sub-canopy stratum – A layer of young or small trees usually ranging from 6-12 m (20-40 ft) growing under a canopy in a forested plant community.

Technical review team – Team of wetland experts that developed and calibrated the methods.

Undeveloped area (land use) – Areas outside the wetland unit where no human structures, roads, or activities that increase surface runoff occur. It includes areas of forest, shrubs, and grassland that are not cut or grazed; wetlands; and open water. Managed forest lands are also included, except those that have been clearcut within the last five years.

Upland – Any area that does not qualify as a wetland because the associated hydrologic regime is not sufficiently wet to elicit development of vegetation, soils, and/or hydrologic characteristics associated with wetlands. Also used to indicate areas upslope of slope wetlands and landward of lake fringe wetlands.

Urban (land use) – An area with a combination of residential (at >1 house per acre), commercial, industrial, high-intensity recreational, transportation, and institutional land uses. Typically these areas include high levels of impervious surface area.

Urban Growth Area (UGA) – A regional border designated by counties within which urban growth is encouraged and outside of which growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature. UGA boundary maps are available through Ecology's Coastal Atlas and county GIS systems.

Values – Wetland processes, characteristics, or attributes that are considered to benefit society.

Water table – The upper surface of the saturated zone. See also, **groundwater**.

Watershed – The drainage area contributing water, organic matter, dissolved nutrients, and sediments to aquatic resources. This includes the area that contributes groundwater to aquatic ecosystems, which may be different from the area contributing surface water. Watersheds can be drawn at varying scales from the smallest watershed of a first order stream to that of a major river (tens to thousands of square miles).

Wetland functions – The physical, biological, chemical, and geologic interactions among different components of the environment that occur within a wetland. There are many valuable functions that wetlands perform but these can be grouped into three categories – functions that improve water quality, functions that change the water regime in a watershed such as flood storage, and functions that provide habitat for plants and animals.

Wetland unit – The area of wetland that is being rated. This may include the entire area of the wetland, or it may be a subset of the wetland area as determined by the guidance in the manual on where and how to break wetlands into smaller units for rating purposes.

Wetlands – Those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. Wetlands do not include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland sites, including, but

not limited to, irrigation and drainage ditches, grass-lined swales, canals, detention facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, farm ponds, and landscape amenities, or those wetlands created after July 1, 1990, that were unintentionally created as a result of the construction of a road, street, or highway. Wetlands may include those artificial wetlands intentionally created from nonwetland areas created to mitigate conversion of wetlands.

References

In compliance with RCW 34.05.272, each reference is followed by a bracketed number, which indicates the type of the information source. The types of sources are listed below by number.

Some of these references are not cited directly in this document. They have been retained for reference to the literature used during development of the methods.

1. Peer review is overseen by an independent third party.
2. Review is by staff internal to Department of Ecology.
3. Review is by persons that are external to and selected by the Department of Ecology.
4. Documented open public review process that is not limited to invited organizations or individuals.
5. Federal and state statutes.
6. Court and hearings board decisions.
7. Federal and state administrative rules and regulations
8. Policy and regulatory documents adopted by local governments.
9. Data from primary research, monitoring activities, or other sources, but that has not been incorporated as part of documents reviewed under other processes.
10. Records of best professional judgment of Department of Ecology employees or other individuals.
11. Sources of information that do not fit into one of the other categories listed.

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Appendix A. Rating Form

The rating form has been updated to be consistent with the annotations in the text.

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Wetland name or number _____

RATING SUMMARY – Western Washington

Name of wetland (or ID #): _____ Date of site visit: _____

Rated by _____ Trained by Ecology? __ Yes __ No Date of training _____

HGM Class used for rating _____ Wetland has multiple HGM classes? __ Y __ N

NOTE: Form is not complete without the required figures (figures can be combined).

Source of base aerial photo/map _____

OVERALL WETLAND CATEGORY _____ (based on functions _____ or special characteristics _____)

1. Category of wetland based on FUNCTIONS

_____ **Category I** – Total score = 23 - 27

_____ **Category II** – Total score = 20 - 22

_____ **Category III** – Total score = 16 - 19

_____ **Category IV** – Total score = 9 - 15

FUNCTION	Improving Water Quality	Hydrologic	Habitat	
<i>Circle the appropriate ratings</i>				
Site Potential	H M L	H M L	H M L	
Landscape Potential	H M L	H M L	H M L	
Value	H M L	H M L	H M L	TOTAL
Score Based on Ratings				

Score for each function based on three ratings
(order of ratings is not important)

- 9 = H, H, H
- 8 = H, H, M
- 7 = H, H, L
- 7 = H, M, M
- 6 = H, M, L
- 6 = M, M, M
- 5 = H, L, L
- 5 = M, M, L
- 4 = M, L, L
- 3 = L, L, L

2. Category based on SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS of wetland

CHARACTERISTIC	CATEGORY
Estuarine	I II
Wetland of High Conservation Value	I
Bog	I
Mature Forest	I
Old Growth Forest	I
Coastal Lagoon	I II
Interdunal	I II III IV
None of the above	

Wetland name or number _____

Maps and figures required to answer questions correctly for Western Washington

Depressional Wetlands

Map of:	To answer questions:	Figure #
Cowardin plant classes	D 1.3, H 1.1, H 1.4	
Hydroperiods	D 1.4, H 1.2	
Location of outlet (<i>can be added to map of hydroperiods</i>)	D 1.1, D 4.1	
Boundary of area within 150 ft of the wetland (<i>can be added to another figure</i>)	D 2.2, D 5.2	
Map of the contributing basin	D 4.3, D 5.3	
1 km Polygon: Area that extends 1 km from entire wetland edge - including polygons for accessible habitat and total habitat	H 2.1, H 2.2, H 2.3	
Screen capture of map of 303(d) listed waters in basin (from Ecology website)	D 3.1, D 3.2	
Screen capture of list of TMDLs for WRIA in which unit is found (from web)	D 3.3	

Riverine Wetlands

Map of:	To answer questions:	Figure #
Cowardin plant classes	H 1.1, H 1.4	
Hydroperiods	H 1.2	
Ponded depressions	R 1.1	
Boundary of area within 150 ft of the wetland (<i>can be added to another figure</i>)	R 2.4	
Plant cover of trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants	R 1.2, R 4.2	
Width of unit vs. width of stream (<i>can be added to another figure</i>)	R 4.1	
Map of the contributing basin	R 2.2, R 2.3, R 5.2	
1 km Polygon: Area that extends 1 km from entire wetland edge - including polygons for accessible habitat and total habitat	H 2.1, H 2.2, H 2.3	
Screen capture of map of 303(d) listed waters in basin (from Ecology website)	R 3.1	
Screen capture of list of TMDLs for WRIA in which unit is found (from web)	R 3.2, R 3.3	

Lake Fringe Wetlands

Map of:	To answer questions:	Figure #
Cowardin plant classes	L 1.1, L 4.1, H 1.1, H 1.4	
Plant cover of trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants	L 1.2	
Boundary of area within 150 ft of the wetland (<i>can be added to another figure</i>)	L 2.2	
1 km Polygon: Area that extends 1 km from entire wetland edge - including polygons for accessible habitat and total habitat	H 2.1, H 2.2, H 2.3	
Screen capture of map of 303(d) listed waters in basin (from Ecology website)	L 3.1, L 3.2	
Screen capture of list of TMDLs for WRIA in which unit is found (from web)	L 3.3	

Slope Wetlands

Map of:	To answer questions:	Figure #
Cowardin plant classes	H 1.1, H 1.4	
Hydroperiods	H 1.2	
Plant cover of dense trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants	S 1.3	
Plant cover of dense, rigid trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants (<i>can be added to figure above</i>)	S 4.1	
Boundary of 150 ft buffer (<i>can be added to another figure</i>)	S 2.1, S 5.1	
1 km Polygon: Area that extends 1 km from entire wetland edge - including polygons for accessible habitat and total habitat	H 2.1, H 2.2, H 2.3	
Screen capture of map of 303(d) listed waters in basin (from Ecology website)	S 3.1, S 3.2	
Screen capture of list of TMDLs for WRIA in which unit is found (from web)	S 3.3	

HGM Classification of Wetlands in Western Washington

For questions 1-7, the criteria described must apply to the entire unit being rated.

If the hydrologic criteria listed in each question do not apply to the entire unit being rated, you probably have a unit with multiple HGM classes. In this case, identify which hydrologic criteria in questions 1-7 apply, and go to Question 8.

1. Are the water levels in the entire unit usually controlled by tides except during floods?

NO – go to 2

YES – the wetland class is **Tidal Fringe** – go to 1.1

- 1.1 Is the salinity of the water during periods of annual low flow below 0.5 ppt (parts per thousand)?

NO – Saltwater Tidal Fringe (Estuarine)

YES – Freshwater Tidal Fringe

If your wetland can be classified as a Freshwater Tidal Fringe use the forms for **Riverine** wetlands. If it is Saltwater Tidal Fringe, it is an **Estuarine** wetland and is not scored. This method **cannot** be used to score functions for estuarine wetlands.

2. The entire wetland unit is flat, and precipitation is the only source (>90%) of water to it. Groundwater and surface water runoff are NOT sources of water to the unit.

NO – go to 3

YES – The wetland class is **Flats**

If your wetland can be classified as a Flats wetland, use the form for **Depressional** wetlands.

3. Does the entire wetland unit **meet all** of the following criteria?

___ The vegetated part of the wetland is on the shores of a body of permanent open water (without any plants on the surface at any time of the year) at least 20 ac (8 ha) in size,

___ At least 30% of the open water area is deeper than 6.6 ft (2 m).

NO – go to 4

YES – The wetland class is **Lake Fringe** (Lacustrine Fringe)

4. Does the entire wetland unit **meet all** of the following criteria?

___ The wetland is on a slope (slope can be very gradual),

___ The water flows through the wetland in one direction (unidirectional) and usually comes from seeps. It may flow subsurface, as sheet flow, or in a swale without distinct banks,

___ The water leaves the wetland **without being impounded**.

NO – go to 5

YES – The wetland class is **Slope**

NOTE: Surface water does not pond in these type of wetlands except occasionally in very small and shallow depressions or behind hummocks (depressions are usually <3 ft diameter and less than 1 ft deep).

Wetland name or number _____

5. Does the entire wetland unit **meet all** of the following criteria?

____ The unit is in a valley, or stream channel, where it gets inundated by overbank flooding from that stream or river,

____ The overbank flooding occurs at least once every 2 years.

NO – go to 6

YES – The wetland class is **Riverine**

NOTE: The Riverine unit can contain depressions that are filled with water when the river is not flooding

6. Is the entire wetland unit in a topographic depression in which water ponds, or is saturated to the surface, at some time during the year? This means that any outlet, if present, is higher than the interior of the wetland.

NO – go to 7

YES – The wetland class is **Depressional**

7. Is the entire wetland unit located in a very flat area with no obvious depression and no overbank flooding? The unit does not pond surface water more than a few inches. The unit seems to be maintained by high groundwater in the area. The wetland may be ditched but has no obvious natural outlet.

NO – go to 8

YES – The wetland class is **Depressional**

8. Your wetland unit seems to be difficult to classify and probably contains several different HGM classes. For example, seeps at the base of a slope may grade into a riverine floodplain, or a small stream within a Depressional wetland has a zone of flooding along its sides. **GO BACK AND IDENTIFY WHICH OF THE HYDROLOGIC REGIMES DESCRIBED IN QUESTIONS 1-7 APPLY TO DIFFERENT AREAS IN THE UNIT** (make a rough sketch to help you decide). Use the following table to identify the appropriate class to use for the rating system if you have several HGM classes present within the wetland unit being scored.

NOTE: Use this table only if the class that is recommended in the second column represents 10% or more of the total area of the wetland unit being rated. If the area of the HGM class listed in column 2 is less than 10% of the unit; classify the wetland using the class that represents more than 90% of the total area.

HGM classes within the wetland unit being rated	HGM class to use in rating
Slope + Riverine	Riverine
Slope + Depressional	Depressional
Slope + Lake Fringe	Lake Fringe
Depressional + Riverine along stream within boundary of depression	Depressional
Depressional + Lake Fringe	Depressional
Riverine + Lake Fringe	Riverine
Salt Water Tidal Fringe and any other class of freshwater wetland	Treat as ESTUARINE

If you are still unable to determine which of the above criteria apply to your wetland, or if you have **more than 2 HGM classes** within a wetland boundary, classify the wetland as Depressional for the rating.

Wetland name or number _____

DEPRESSIONAL AND FLATS WETLANDS

Water Quality Functions - Indicators that the site functions to improve water quality

D 1.0. Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?	
D 1.1. Characteristics of surface water outflows from the wetland: Wetland is a depression or flat depression (QUESTION 7 on key) with no surface water leaving it (no outlet). points = 3 Wetland has an intermittently flowing stream or ditch, OR highly constricted permanently flowing outlet. points = 2 Wetland has an unconstricted, or slightly constricted, surface outlet that is permanently flowing points = 1 Wetland is a flat depression (QUESTION 7 on key), whose outlet is a permanently flowing ditch. points = 1	
D 1.2. The soil 2 in. below the surface (or duff layer) is true clay or true organic (use NRCS definitions). Yes = 4 No = 0	
D 1.3. Characteristics and distribution of persistent plants (Emergent, Scrub-shrub, and/or Forested Cowardin classes): Wetland has persistent, ungrazed plants > 95% of area points = 5 Wetland has persistent, ungrazed plants > ½ of area points = 3 Wetland has persistent, ungrazed plants ≥ 1/10 of area points = 1 Wetland has persistent, ungrazed plants < 1/10 of area points = 0	
D 1.4. Characteristics of seasonal ponding or inundation: <i>This is the area that is ponded for at least 2 months. See description in manual.</i> Area seasonally ponded is > ½ total area of wetland points = 4 Area seasonally ponded is ≥ ¼ total area of wetland points = 2 Area seasonally ponded is < ¼ total area of wetland points = 0	
Total for D 1	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 12-16 = H 6-11 = M 0-5 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

D 2.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?	
D 2.1. Does the wetland unit receive stormwater discharges? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 2.2. Is > 10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland in land uses that generate pollutants? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 2.3. Are there septic systems within 250 ft of the wetland? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 2.4. Are there other sources of pollutants coming into the wetland that are not listed in questions D 2.1-D 2.3? Source _____ Yes = 1 No = 0	
Total for D 2	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 3 or 4 = H 1 or 2 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

D 3.0. Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?	
D 3.1. Does the wetland discharge directly (i.e., within 1 mi) to a stream, river, lake, or marine water that is on the 303(d) list? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 3.2. Is the wetland in a basin or sub-basin where an aquatic resource is on the 303(d) list? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 3.3. Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality? (Answer YES if there is a TMDL in development or in effect for the basin in which the unit is found.) Yes = 2 No = 0	
Total for D 3	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Value If score is: 2-4 = H 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

Wetland name or number _____

DEPRESSIONAL AND FLATS WETLANDS

Hydrologic Functions - Indicators that the site functions to reduce flooding and stream degradation

D 4.0. Does the site have the potential to reduce flooding and erosion?	
D 4.1. Characteristics of surface water outflows from the wetland: Wetland is a depression or flat depression with no surface water leaving it (no outlet) points = 4 Wetland has an intermittently flowing stream/ditch, OR highly constricted permanently flowing outlet points = 2 Wetland is a flat depression (question 7 on key), whose outlet is a permanently flowing ditch points = 1 Wetland has an unconstricted, or slightly constricted, surface outlet that is permanently flowing points = 0	
D 4.2. Depth of storage during wet periods: Estimate the height of ponding above the bottom of the outlet. For wetlands with no outlet, measure from the surface of permanent water or if dry, the deepest part. Marks of ponding are 3 ft or more above the surface or bottom of outlet points = 7 Marks of ponding between 2 ft to < 3 ft from surface or bottom of outlet points = 5 Marks are at least 0.5 ft to < 2 ft from surface or bottom of outlet points = 3 The wetland is a "headwater" wetland points = 3 Wetland is flat but has small depressions on the surface that trap water points = 1 Marks of ponding less than 0.5 ft (6 in) points = 0	
D 4.3. Contribution of the wetland to storage in the watershed: Estimate the ratio of the area of upstream basin contributing surface water to the area of the wetland unit itself. The area of the basin is less than 10 times the area of the unit points = 5 The area of the basin is 10 to 100 times the area of the unit points = 3 The area of the basin is more than 100 times the area of the unit points = 0 Entire wetland is in the Flats class points = 5	
Total for D 4	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 12-16 = H 6-11 = M 0-5 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

D 5.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support hydrologic functions of the site?	
D 5.1. Does the wetland receive stormwater discharges? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 5.2. Is >10% of the area within 150 ft of the wetland in land uses that generate excess runoff? Yes = 1 No = 0	
D 5.3. Is more than 25% of the contributing basin of the wetland covered with intensive human land uses (residential at >1 residence/ac, urban, commercial, agriculture, etc.)? Yes = 1 No = 0	
Total for D 5	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 3 = H 1 or 2 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

D 6.0. Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?	
D 6.1. Is the unit in a landscape that has flooding problems? Choose the description that best matches conditions around the wetland unit being rated. Do not add points. <u>Choose the highest score if more than one condition is met.</u> The wetland captures surface water that would otherwise flow downgradient into areas where flooding has damaged human or natural resources (e.g., houses or salmon redds): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooding occurs in a sub-basin that is immediately downgradient of unit. points = 2 • Surface flooding problems are in a sub-basin farther downgradient. points = 1 • Flooding from groundwater is an issue in the sub-basin. points = 1 • The existing or potential outflow from the wetland is so constrained by human or natural conditions that the water stored by the wetland cannot reach areas that flood. <i>Explain why</i> _____ points = 0 • There are no problems with flooding downstream of the wetland. points = 0 	
D 6.2. Has the site been identified as important for flood storage or flood conveyance in a regional flood control plan? Yes = 2 No = 0	
Total for D 6	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Value If score is: 2-4 = H 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

Wetland name or number _____

RIVERINE AND FRESHWATER TIDAL FRINGE WETLANDS

Water Quality Functions - Indicators that the site functions to improve water quality

R 1.0. Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?	
R 1.1. Area of surface depressions within the Riverine wetland that can trap sediments during a flooding event:	
Depressions cover $>3/4$ area of wetland	points = 8
Depressions cover $> 1/2$ area of wetland	points = 4
Depressions present but cover $\leq 1/2$ area of wetland	points = 2
No depressions present	points = 0
R 1.2. Structure of plants in the wetland (areas with $>90\%$ cover at person height, not Cowardin classes)	
Trees or shrubs $> 2/3$ area of the wetland	points = 8
Trees or shrubs $> 1/3$ area of the wetland	points = 6
Herbaceous plants (> 6 in. high) $> 2/3$ area of the wetland	points = 6
Herbaceous plants (> 6 in. high) $> 1/3$ area of the wetland	points = 3
Trees, shrubs, and ungrazed herbaceous $< 1/3$ area of the wetland	points = 0
Total for R 1	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 12-16 = H 6-11 = M 0-5 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

R 2.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?	
R 2.1. Is the wetland within an incorporated city or within its UGA?	Yes = 2 No = 0
R 2.2. Does the contributing basin to the wetland include a UGA or incorporated area?	Yes = 1 No = 0
R 2.3. Does at least 10% of the contributing basin contain tilled fields, pastures, or forests that have been clearcut within the last 5 years?	Yes = 1 No = 0
R 2.4. Is $> 10\%$ of the area within 150 ft of the wetland in land uses that generate pollutants?	Yes = 1 No = 0
R 2.5. Are there other sources of pollutants coming into the wetland that are not listed in questions R 2.1-R 2.4? Other sources _____	Yes = 1 No = 0
Total for R 2	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 3-6 = H 1 or 2 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

R 3.0. Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?	
R 3.1. Is the wetland along a stream or river that is on the 303(d) list or on a tributary that drains to one within 1 mi?	Yes = 1 No = 0
R 3.2. Is the wetland along a stream or river that has TMDL limits for nutrients, toxics, or pathogens?	Yes = 1 No = 0
R 3.3. Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality? (Answer YES if there is a TMDL in development or in effect for the drainage in which the unit is found.)	Yes = 2 No = 0
Total for R 3	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Value If score is: 2-4 = H 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

Wetland name or number _____

RIVERINE AND FRESHWATER TIDAL FRINGE WETLANDS

Hydrologic Functions - Indicators that site functions to reduce flooding and stream erosion

R 4.0. Does the site have the potential to reduce flooding and erosion?

<p>R 4.1. Characteristics of the overbank storage the wetland provides: Estimate the average width of the wetland perpendicular to the direction of the flow and the width of the stream or river channel (distance between banks). Calculate the ratio: (average width of wetland)/(average width of stream between banks). If the ratio is more than 20 points = 9 If the ratio is 10-20 points = 6 If the ratio is 5-<10 points = 4 If the ratio is 1-<5 points = 2 If the ratio is < 1 points = 1</p>	
<p>R 4.2. Characteristics of plants that slow down water velocities during floods: Treat large woody debris as forest or shrub. Choose the points appropriate for the best description (polygons need to have >90% cover at person height. These are <u>NOT</u> Cowardin classes). Forest or shrub for >¹/₃ area OR emergent plants > ²/₃ area points = 7 Forest or shrub for > ¹/₁₀ area OR emergent plants > ¹/₃ area points = 4 Plants do not meet above criteria points = 0</p>	
<p>Total for R 4 Add the points in the boxes above</p>	

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 12-16 = H 6-11 = M 0-5 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

R 5.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?

<p>R 5.1. Is the stream or river adjacent to the wetland downcut? Yes = 0 No = 1</p>	
<p>R 5.2. Does the upgradient watershed include a UGA or incorporated area? Yes = 1 No = 0</p>	
<p>R 5.3. Is the upgradient stream or river controlled by dams? Yes = 0 No = 1</p>	
<p>Total for R 5 Add the points in the boxes above</p>	

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 3 = H 1 or 2 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

R 6.0. Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?

<p>R 6.1. Distance to the nearest areas downstream that have flooding problems? Choose the description that best fits the site. The sub-basin immediately downgradient of the wetland has flooding problems that result in damage to human or natural resources (e.g., houses or salmon redds) points = 2 Surface flooding problems are in a sub-basin farther downgradient points = 1 No flooding problems anywhere downstream points = 0</p>	
<p>R 6.2. Has the site been identified as important for flood storage or flood conveyance in a regional flood control plan? Yes = 2 No = 0</p>	
<p>Total for R 6 Add the points in the boxes above</p>	

Rating of Value If score is: 2-4 = H 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

Wetland name or number _____

LAKE FRINGE WETLANDS

Water Quality Functions - Indicators that the site functions to improve water quality

L 1.0. Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?

L 1.1. Average width of plants along the lakeshore (use polygons of Cowardin classes):	
Plants are ≥33 ft (10 m) wide	points = 6
Plants are ≥16 ft (5 m) wide and <33 ft	points = 3
Plants are ≥6 ft (2 m) wide and <16 ft	points = 1
Plants are less than 6 ft wide	points = 0
L 1.2. Characteristics of the plants in the wetland: Choose the appropriate description that results in the highest points, and do not include any open water in your estimate of coverage. The herbaceous plants can be either the dominant form or as an understory in a shrub or forest community. These are not Cowardin classes. Area of cover is total cover in the unit, but it can be in patches. Herbaceous does not include aquatic bed.	
Cover of herbaceous plants is >90% of the vegetated area	points = 6
Cover of herbaceous plants is > ² / ₃ of the vegetated area	points = 4
Cover of herbaceous plants is > ¹ / ₃ of the vegetated area	points = 3
Other plants that are not aquatic bed > ² / ₃ unit	points = 3
Other plants that are not aquatic bed in > ¹ / ₃ vegetated area	points = 1
Aquatic bed plants and open water cover > ² / ₃ of the unit	points = 0
Total for L 1	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Site Potential If score is: **8-12 = H** **4-7 = M** **0-3 = L** *Record the rating on the first page*

L 2.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?

L 2.1. Is the lake used by power boats?	Yes = 1 No = 0
L 2.2. Is > 10% of the area within 150 ft of wetland unit on the upland side in land uses that generate pollutants?	Yes = 1 No = 0
L 2.3. Does the lake have problems with algal blooms or excessive plant growth such as milfoil?	Yes = 1 No = 0
Total for L 2	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Landscape Potential: If score is: **2 or 3 = H** **1 = M** **0 = L** *Record the rating on the first page*

L 3.0. Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?

L 3.1. Is the lake on the 303(d) list of degraded aquatic resources?	Yes = 1 No = 0
L 3.2. Is the lake in a sub-basin where water quality is an issue (at least one aquatic resource in the basin is on the 303(d) list)?	Yes = 1 No = 0
L 3.3. Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality? (Answer YES if there is a TMDL in development or in effect for the lake or basin in which the unit is found.)	Yes = 2 No = 0
Total for L 3	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Value If score is: **2-4 = H** **1 = M** **0 = L** *Record the rating on the first page*

Wetland name or number _____

LAKE FRINGE WETLANDS

Hydrologic Functions - Indicators that the site functions to reduce shoreline erosion

L 4.0. Does the site have the potential to reduce shoreline erosion?		
L 4.1. Distance along shore and average width of Cowardin classes along the lakeshore (do not include Aquatic bed): Choose the highest scoring description that matches conditions in the wetland.		
> ¾ of distance is Scrub-shrub or Forested at least 33 ft (10 m) wide	points = 6	
> ¾ of distance is Scrub-shrub or Forested at least 6 ft (2 m) wide	points = 4	
> ¼ distance is Scrub-shrub or Forested at least 33 ft (10 m) wide	points = 4	
Plants are at least 6 ft (2 m) wide (any type except Aquatic bed)	points = 2	
Plants are less than 6 ft (2 m) wide (any type except Aquatic bed)	points = 0	

Rating of Site Potential: If score is: 6 = M 0-5 = L

Record the rating on the first page

L 5.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?		
L 5.1. Is the lake used by power boats with more than 10 hp?	Yes = 1 No = 0	
L 5.2. Is the fetch on the lake side of the unit at least 1 mile in distance?	Yes = 1 No = 0	
Total for L 5	Add the points in the boxes above	

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 2 = H 1 = M 0 = L

Record the rating on the first page

L 6.0. Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?		
L 6.1. Are there resources along the shore that can be impacted by erosion? If more than one resource is present, choose the one with the highest score.		
There are human structures or old growth/mature forests within 25 ft of OHWM of the shore in the unit	points = 2	
There are nature trails or other paths and recreational activities within 25 ft of OHWM	points = 1	
Other resources that could be impacted by erosion	points = 1	
There are no resources that can be impacted by erosion along the shores of the unit	points = 0	

Rating of Value: If score is: 2 = H 1 = M 0 = L

Record the rating on the first page

NOTES and FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

Wetland name or number _____

SLOPE WETLANDS

Water Quality Functions - Indicators that the site functions to improve water quality

S 1.0. Does the site have the potential to improve water quality?		
S 1.1. Characteristics of the average slope of the wetland: (A 1% slope has a 1 ft vertical change in elevation for every 100 ft of horizontal distance.)		
Slope is 1% or less	points = 3	
Slope is > 1%-2%	points = 2	
Slope is > 2%-5%	points = 1	
Slope is greater than 5%	points = 0	
S 1.2. <u>The soil 2 in. below the surface (or duff layer)</u> is true clay or true organic (<i>use NRCS definitions</i>): Yes = 3 No = 0		
S 1.3. Characteristics of the plants in the wetland that trap sediments and pollutants: Choose the points appropriate for the description that best fits the plants in the wetland. Dense means you have trouble seeing the soil surface (>75% cover), and uncut means not grazed or mowed, and plants are higher than 6 in.		
Dense, uncut, herbaceous plants > 90% of the wetland area	points = 6	
Dense, uncut, herbaceous plants > ½ of area	points = 3	
Dense, woody, plants > ½ of area	points = 2	
Dense, uncut, herbaceous plants > ¼ of area	points = 1	
Does not meet any of the criteria above for plants	points = 0	
Total for S 1	Add the points in the boxes above	

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 12 = H 6-11 = M 0-5 = L

Record the rating on the first page

S 2.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the water quality function of the site?		
S 2.1. Is > 10% of the area within 150 ft on the uphill side of the wetland in land uses that generate pollutants?		
Yes = 1 No = 0		
S 2.2. Are there other sources of pollutants coming into the wetland that are not listed in question S 2.1?		
Other sources _____	Yes = 1 No = 0	
Total for S 2	Add the points in the boxes above	

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 1-2 = M 0 = L

Record the rating on the first page

S 3.0. Is the water quality improvement provided by the site valuable to society?		
S 3.1. Does the wetland discharge directly (i.e., within 1 mi) to a stream, river, lake, or marine water that is on the 303(d) list?		
Yes = 1 No = 0		
S 3.2. Is the wetland in a basin or sub-basin where water quality is an issue? (At least one aquatic resource in the basin is on the 303(d) list.)		
Yes = 1 No = 0		
S 3.3. Has the site been identified in a watershed or local plan as important for maintaining water quality? (Answer YES if there is a TMDL in development or in effect for the basin in which unit is found.)		
Yes = 2 No = 0		
Total for S 3	Add the points in the boxes above	

Rating of Value If score is: 2-4 = H 1 = M 0 = L

Record the rating on the first page

Wetland name or number _____

SLOPE WETLANDS

Hydrologic Functions - Indicators that the site functions to reduce flooding and stream erosion

S 4.0. Does the site have the potential to reduce flooding and stream erosion?	
S 4.1. Characteristics of plants that reduce the velocity of surface flows during storms: Choose the points appropriate for the description that best fits conditions in the wetland. Stems of plants should be thick enough (usually > 1/8 in), or dense enough, to remain erect during surface flows. Dense, uncut, rigid plants cover > 90% of the area of the wetland All other conditions	points = 1 points = 0

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

S 5.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the hydrologic functions of the site?	
S 5.1. Is more than 25% of the area within 150 ft upslope of wetland in land uses or cover that generate excess surface runoff?	Yes = 1 No = 0

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

S 6.0. Are the hydrologic functions provided by the site valuable to society?	
S 6.1. Distance to the nearest areas downstream that have flooding problems: The sub-basin immediately downgradient of site has flooding problems that result in damage to human or natural resources (e.g., houses or salmon redds) Surface flooding problems are in a sub-basin farther downgradient No flooding problems anywhere downstream	points = 2 points = 1 points = 0
S 6.2. Has the site been identified as important for flood storage or flood conveyance in a regional flood control plan?	Yes = 2 No = 0
Total for S 6	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Value If score is: 2-4 = H 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

NOTES and FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

Wetland name or number _____

These questions apply to wetlands of all HGM classes.

HABITAT FUNCTIONS - Indicators that site functions to provide important habitat

H 1.0. Does the site have the potential to provide habitat?

H 1.1. Structure of plant community: Indicators are Cowardin classes and strata within the Forested class. Check the Cowardin plant classes in the wetland. Up to 10 patches may be combined for each class to meet the threshold of ¼ ac if the unit is at least 2.5 ac, or more than 10% of the unit if it is smaller than 2.5 ac.

- Aquatic bed 4 structures or more: points = 4
 - Emergent 3 structures: points = 2
 - Scrub-shrub (areas where shrubs have > 30% cover) 2 structures: points = 1
 - Forested (areas where trees have > 30% cover) 1 structure: points = 0
- If the unit has a Forested class, check if:*
- The Forested class has 3 out of 5 strata (canopy, sub-canopy, shrubs, herbaceous, moss/groundcover) that each cover 20% within the Forested polygon

H 1.2. Hydroperiods

Check the types of water regimes (hydroperiods) present within the wetland. The water regime has to cover more than 10% of the wetland if the unit is < 2.5 ac, or ¼ ac if the unit is at least 2.5 ac to count (see text for descriptions of hydroperiods).

- Permanently flooded or inundated 4 or more types present: points = 3
- Seasonally flooded or inundated 3 types present: points = 2
- Occasionally flooded or inundated 2 types present: points = 1
- Saturated only 1 type present: points = 0
- Permanently flowing stream or river in, or adjacent to, the wetland
- Intermittently or seasonally flowing stream in, or adjacent to, the wetland
- Lake Fringe wetland** **2 points**
- Freshwater tidal wetland** **2 points**

H 1.3. Richness of plant species

Count the number of plant species in the wetland that cover at least 10 ft². Different patches of the same species can be combined to meet the size threshold and you do not have to name the species. **Do not include Eurasian milfoil, reed canarygrass, purple loosestrife, Canada thistle**

- If you counted: > 19 species points = 2
- 5 - 19 species points = 1
- < 5 species points = 0

H 1.4. Interspersion of habitats

Decide from the diagrams below whether interspersions among Cowardin plants classes (described in H 1.1), or the classes and unvegetated areas (can include open water or mudflats) is high, moderate, low, or none. If you have four or more plant classes or three classes and open water, the rating is always high.



None = 0 points



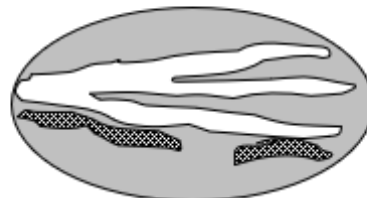
Low = 1 point



Moderate = 2 points



All three diagrams in this row are **High = 3 points**



Wetland name or number _____

<p>H 1.5. Special habitat features: Check the habitat features that are present in the wetland. The number of checks is the number of points. <input type="checkbox"/> Large, downed, woody debris within the wetland (> 4 in. diameter and 6 ft long). <input type="checkbox"/> Standing snags (dbh > 4 in.) within the wetland <input type="checkbox"/> Undercut banks are present for at least 6.6 ft (2 m) and/or overhanging plants extend at least 3.3 ft (1 m) over open water or a stream (or ditch) in, or contiguous with the wetland, for at least 33 ft (10 m) <input type="checkbox"/> Stable steep banks of fine material that might be used by beaver or muskrat for denning (> 30 degree slope) OR signs of recent beaver activity are present (cut shrubs or trees that have not yet weathered where wood is exposed) <input type="checkbox"/> At least ¼ ac of thin-stemmed persistent plants or woody branches are present in areas that are permanently or seasonally inundated (structures for egg-laying by amphibians) <input type="checkbox"/> Invasive plants cover less than 25% of the wetland area in every stratum of plants (see H 1.1 above for the list of strata and H 1.5 in the manual for the list of aggressive plant species)</p>	
Total for H 1	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Site Potential If score is: 15-18 = H 7-14 = M 0-6 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

<p>H 2.0. Does the landscape have the potential to support the habitat functions of the site?</p>	
<p>H 2.1. Accessible habitat (include only habitat polygons accessible from the wetland. <i>Calculate:</i> % relatively undisturbed habitat <u> </u> + [(% moderate and low intensity land uses)/2] <u> </u> = <u> </u> % Total accessible habitat is: > 1/3 (33.3%) of 1 km Polygon points = 3 20-33% of 1 km Polygon points = 2 10-19% of 1 km Polygon points = 1 < 10% of 1 km Polygon points = 0</p>	
<p>H 2.2. Total habitat in 1 km Polygon around the wetland. <i>Calculate:</i> % relatively undisturbed habitat <u> </u> + [(% moderate and low intensity land uses)/2] <u> </u> = <u> </u> % Total habitat > 50% of Polygon points = 3 Total habitat 10-50% and in 1-3 patches points = 2 Total habitat 10-50% and > 3 patches points = 1 Total habitat < 10% of 1 km Polygon points = 0</p>	
<p>H 2.3. Land use intensity in 1 km Polygon: > 50% of 1 km Polygon is high intensity land use points = (- 2) ≤ 50% of 1 km Polygon is high intensity points = 0</p>	
Total for H 2	Add the points in the boxes above

Rating of Landscape Potential If score is: 4-6 = H 1-3 = M < 1 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

<p>H 3.0. Is the habitat provided by the site valuable to society?</p>	
<p>H 3.1. Does the site provide habitat for species valued in laws, regulations, or policies? <i>Choose only the highest score that applies to the wetland being rated.</i> Site meets ANY of the following criteria: points = 2 <input type="checkbox"/> It has 3 or more Priority Habitats within 100 m (see next page) <input type="checkbox"/> It provides habitat for Threatened or Endangered species (any plant or animal on the state or federal lists) <input type="checkbox"/> It is mapped as a location for an individual WDFW Priority Species <input type="checkbox"/> It is a Wetland of High Conservation Value as determined by the Department of Natural Resources data <input type="checkbox"/> It has been categorized as an important habitat site in a local or regional comprehensive plan, in a Shoreline Master Plan, or in a watershed plan Site has 1 or 2 Priority Habitats (listed on next page) within 100 m points = 1 Site does not meet any of the criteria above points = 0</p>	

Rating of Value If score is: 2 = H 1 = M 0 = L *Record the rating on the first page*

Wetland name or number _____

WDFW Priority Habitats

See complete descriptions of Priority Habitats listed by WDFW, and the counties in which they can be found, in: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2008 (current year, as revised). [Priority Habitat and Species List](#).¹³³ This list was updated for consistency with guidance from WDFW.

This question is independent of the land use between the wetland unit and the Priority Habitat. All vegetated wetlands are by definition a Priority Habitat but are not included in this list because they are addressed by this rating system.

Count how many of the following Priority Habitats are within 330 ft (100 m) of the wetland unit:

- **Aspen Stands:** Pure or mixed stands of aspen greater than 1 ac (0.4 ha).
- **Biodiversity Areas and Corridors:** Areas of habitat that are relatively important to various species of native fish and wildlife. This habitat automatically counts if mapped on the PHS online map within 100m of the wetland. If not mapped, a determination can be made in the field.
- **Caves:** A naturally occurring cavity, recess, void, or system of interconnected passages under the earth in soils, rock, ice, or other geological formations and is large enough to contain a human.
- **Cliffs:** Greater than 25 ft (7.6 m) high and occurring below 5000 ft elevation.
- **Fresh Deepwater:** Lands permanently flooded with freshwater, including environments where surface water is permanent and often deep, so that water, rather than air, is the principal medium within which the dominant organisms live. Substrate does not support emergent vegetation. Do not select if Instream habitat is also present, or if the entire Deepwater feature is included in the wetland unit being rated (such as a pond with a vegetated fringe).
- **Herbaceous Balds:** Variable size patches of grass and forbs on shallow soils over bedrock.
- **Instream:** The combination of physical, biological, and chemical processes and conditions that interact to provide functional life history requirements for instream fish and wildlife resources. Do not select if Fresh Deepwater habitat is also present.
- **Nearshore:** Relatively undisturbed nearshore habitats. These include Coastal Nearshore, Open Coast Nearshore, and Puget Sound Nearshore.
- **Old-growth/Mature forests:** Old-growth west of Cascade crest – Stands of at least 2 tree species, forming a multi-layered canopy with occasional small openings; with at least 8 trees/ac (20 trees/ha) > 32 in. (81 cm) diameter at breast height (dbh) or > 200 years of age. Mature forests – Stands with average diameters exceeding 21 in. (53 cm) dbh; crown cover may be less than 100%; decay, decadence, numbers of snags, and quantity of large downed material is generally less than that found in old-growth; 80-200 years old west of the Cascade crest.

¹³³ <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00165/wdfw00165.pdf>
Wetland Rating System for Western WA: 2014 Update
Rating Form – Version 2, July 2023

Wetland name or number _____

- **Oregon White Oak:** Woodland stands of pure oak or oak/conifer associations where canopy coverage of the oak component is important. For single oaks or oak stands <0.4 ha in urban areas, [WDFW's Management Recommendations for Oregon White Oak](#)¹³⁴ provides more detail for determining if they are Priority Habitats
- **Riparian:** The area adjacent to freshwater aquatic systems with flowing or standing water that contains elements of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems which mutually influence each other.
- **Snags and Logs:** Trees are considered snags if they are dead or dying and exhibit sufficient decay characteristics to enable cavity excavation/use by wildlife. Priority snags have a diameter at breast height of > 20 in. (51 cm) in western Washington and are > 6.5 ft (2 m) in height. Priority logs are > 12 in. (30 cm) in diameter at the largest end, and > 20 ft (6 m) long.
- **Talus:** Homogenous areas of rock rubble ranging in average size 0.5 - 6.5 ft (0.15 - 2.0 m), composed of basalt, andesite, and/or sedimentary rock, including riprap slides and mine tailings. May be associated with cliffs.
- **Westside Prairies:** Herbaceous, non-forested plant communities that can either take the form of a dry prairie or a wet prairie.

¹³⁴ <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00030/wdfw00030.pdf>
Wetland Rating System for Western WA: 2014 Update
Rating Form – Version 2, July 2023

Wetland name or number _____

CATEGORIZATION BASED ON SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Wetland Type	Category
<i>Check off any criteria that apply to the wetland. Circle the category when the appropriate criteria are met.</i>	
<p>SC 1.0. Estuarine wetlands</p> <p>Does the wetland meet the following criteria for Estuarine wetlands?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The dominant water regime is tidal, — Vegetated, and — With a salinity greater than 0.5 ppt <p style="text-align: right;">Yes – Go to SC 1.1 No = Not an estuarine wetland</p>	
<p>SC 1.1. Is the wetland within a National Wildlife Refuge, National Park, National Estuary Reserve, Natural Area Preserve, State Park or Educational, Environmental, or Scientific Reserve designated under WAC 332-30-151?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I No – Go to SC 1.2</p>	Cat. I
<p>SC 1.2. Is the wetland unit at least 1 ac in size and meets at least two of the following three conditions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The wetland is relatively undisturbed (has no diking, ditching, filling, cultivation, grazing), and has less than 10% cover of non-native plant species. If non-native species are <i>Spartina</i>, see chapter 4.8 in the manual. — At least ¾ of the landward edge of the wetland has a 100 ft buffer of shrub, forest, or un-grazed or unmowed grassland. — The wetland has at least two of the following features: tidal channels, depressions with open water, or contiguous freshwater wetlands. <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I No = Category II</p>	Cat. I Cat. II
<p>SC 2.0. Wetlands of High Conservation Value (WHCV)</p> <p>SC 2.1. Does the wetland overlap with any known or historical rare plant or rare & high-quality ecosystem polygons on the WNHP Data Explorer?¹³⁵</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I No – Go to SC 2.2</p> <p>SC 2.2. Does the wetland have a rare plant species, rare ecosystem (e.g., plant community), or high-quality common ecosystem that may qualify the site as a WHCV? Contact WNHP for resources to help determine the presence of these elements.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes – Submit data to WA Natural Heritage Program for determination,¹³⁶ Go to SC 2.3 No = Not a WHCV</p> <p>SC 2.3. Did WNHP review the site within 30 days and determine that it has a rare plant or ecosystem that meets their criteria?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I No = Not a WHCV</p>	Cat. I
<p>SC 3.0. Bogs</p> <p>Does the wetland (or any part of the unit) meet both the criteria for soils and vegetation in bogs? <i>Use the key below. If you answer YES, you will still need to rate the wetland based on its functions.</i></p> <p>SC 3.1. Does an area within the wetland unit have organic soil horizons, either peats or mucks, that compose 16 in. or more of the first 32 in. of the soil profile?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes – Go to SC 3.3 No – Go to SC 3.2</p> <p>SC 3.2. Does an area within the wetland unit have organic soils, either peats or mucks, that are less than 16 in. deep over bedrock, or an impermeable hardpan such as clay or volcanic ash, or that are floating on top of a lake or pond?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes – Go to SC 3.3 No = Not a bog</p> <p>SC 3.3. Does an area with peats or mucks have more than 70% cover of mosses at ground level, AND at least a 30% cover of plant species listed in Table 4?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I bog No – Go to SC 3.4</p> <p>NOTE: If you are uncertain about the extent of mosses in the understory, you may substitute that criterion by measuring the pH of the water that seeps into a hole dug at least 16 in. deep. If the pH is less than 5.0 and the plant species in Table 4 are present, the wetland is a bog.</p> <p>SC 3.4. Is an area with peats or mucks forested (> 30% cover) with Sitka spruce, subalpine fir, western red cedar, western hemlock, lodgepole pine, quaking aspen, Engelmann spruce, or western white pine, AND any of the species (or combination of species) listed in Table 4 provide more than 30% of the cover under the canopy?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I bog No = Not a bog</p>	Cat. I

¹³⁵ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/NHPdata>

¹³⁶ https://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/amp_nh_sighting_form.pdf

Wetland name or number _____

<p>SC 4.0. Forested Wetlands</p> <p>Does the wetland have at least <u>1 contiguous acre</u> of forest that meets one of these criteria for the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife’s forests as Priority Habitats? <i>If you answer YES, you will still need to rate the wetland based on its functions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Old-growth forests (west of Cascade crest): Stands of at least two tree species, forming a multi-layered canopy with occasional small openings; with at least 8 trees/ac (20 trees/ha) that are at least 200 years of age OR have a diameter at breast height (dbh) of 32 in. (81 cm) or more. — Mature forests (west of the Cascade Crest): Stands where the largest trees are 80- 200 years old OR the species that make up the canopy have an average diameter (dbh) exceeding 21 in. (53 cm). <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I No = Not a forested wetland for this section</p>	Cat. I
<p>SC 5.0. Wetlands in Coastal Lagoons</p> <p>Does the wetland meet all of the following criteria of a wetland in a coastal lagoon?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The wetland lies in a depression adjacent to marine waters that is wholly or partially separated from marine waters by sandbanks, gravel banks, shingle, or, less frequently, rocks — The lagoon in which the wetland is located contains ponded water that is saline or brackish (> 0.5 ppt) during most of the year in at least a portion of the lagoon (<i>needs to be measured near the bottom</i>) — The lagoon retains some of its surface water at low tide during spring tides <p style="text-align: right;">Yes – Go to SC 5.1 No = Not a wetland in a coastal lagoon</p> <p>SC 5.1. Does the wetland meet all of the following three conditions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The wetland is relatively undisturbed (has no diking, ditching, filling, cultivation, grazing), and has less than 20% cover of aggressive, opportunistic plant species (see list of species in H 1.5 in the manual). — At least ¾ of the landward edge of the wetland has a 100 ft buffer of shrub, forest, or un-grazed or un-mowed grassland. — The wetland is larger than 1/10 ac (4350 ft²) <p style="text-align: right;">Yes = Category I No = Category II</p>	Cat. I Cat. II
<p>SC 6.0. Interdunal Wetlands</p> <p>Is the wetland west of the 1889 line (also called the Western Boundary of Upland Ownership or WBUO)? <i>If you answer YES, you will still need to rate the wetland based on its habitat functions.</i></p> <p>In practical terms that means the following geographic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Long Beach Peninsula: Lands west of SR 103 — Grayland-Westport: Lands west of SR 105 — Ocean Shores-Copalis: Lands west of SR 115 and SR 109 and Ocean Shores Blvd SW, including lands west of E. Oceans Shores Blvd SW. <p style="text-align: right;">Yes – Go to SC 6.1 No = Not an interdunal wetland for rating</p> <p>SC 6.1. Is the wetland 1 ac or larger and scores an 8 or 9 for the habitat functions on the form (rates H,H,H or H,H,M for the three aspects of function)? Yes = Category I No – Go to SC 6.2</p> <p>SC 6.2. Is the wetland 1 ac or larger, or is it in a mosaic of wetlands that is 1 ac or larger? Yes = Category II No – Go to SC 6.3</p> <p>SC 6.3. Is the unit between 0.1 and 1 ac, or is it in a mosaic of wetlands that is between 0.1 and 1 ac? Yes = Category III No = Category IV</p>	Cat I Cat. II Cat. III Cat. IV
<p>Category of wetland based on Special Characteristics If you answered No for all types, enter “Not Applicable” on Summary Form</p>	

Appendix B. Salt-Tolerant Plants

Salt sensitivity rating of the estuarine wetland and associated uplands flora of the Pacific Northwest (*=estimated) from Hutchinson (1991). Some species names have changes since 1991. New names as of November 2022 from USDA PLANTS Database and the 2020 [National Wetland Plant List](#)¹³⁷ (in parentheses if different). Names that have not changed are labeled “NC.” The list was reorganized to be alphabetical within each salinity class.

Very sensitive

Old Name	New Name
<i>Angelica arguta</i>	NC
<i>Berberis aquifolium</i>	<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>
<i>Caltha asarifolia</i>	<i>Caltha palustris</i>
<i>Carex rostrata</i>	NC
<i>Equisetum fluviatile</i>	NC
<i>Galium cymosum</i>	<i>Galium trifidum</i> subsp. <i>columbianum</i>
<i>Habenaria dilatata</i>	<i>Platanthera dilatata</i> var. <i>dilatata</i> (<i>Piperia dilatata</i>)
<i>Heracleum lanatum</i>	<i>Heracleum maximum</i>
<i>Hypericum formosum</i>	<i>Hypericum scouleri</i> subsp. <i>scouleri</i>
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	NC
<i>Juncus nevadensis</i>	NC
<i>Lysichitum americanum</i>	<i>Lysichiton americanus</i>
<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	NC
<i>Mentha piperata</i>	<i>Mentha</i> ‘ <i>piperita</i>
<i>Myosotis laxa</i>	NC
<i>Picea sitchensis</i>	NC
<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	NC
<i>Tsuga heterophylla</i> *	NC

Sensitive

Old Name	New Name
<i>Aira praecox</i> *	NC
<i>Alisma plantago-aquatica</i> *	NC
<i>Alnus rubra</i>	NC
<i>Angelica lucida</i> *	NC

¹³⁷ https://wetland-plants.sec.usace.army.mil/nwpl_static/v34/home/home.html
 Wetland Rating System for Western WA: 2014 Update
 Version 2, July 2023
 Appendix B

Old Name	New Name
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i> *	NC
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i> *	<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i> subsp. <i>cyclosorum</i> (<i>Athyrium cyclosorum</i>)
<i>Bidens cernua</i>	NC
<i>Bromus mollis</i>	<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i> subsp. <i>hordeaceus</i>
<i>Calamagrostis nutkaensis</i> *	NC
<i>Carex obnupta</i> *	NC
<i>Cornus stolonifera</i> *	<i>Cornus sericea</i> (<i>Cornus alba</i>)
<i>Equisetum arvense</i> *	NC
<i>Glyceria grandis</i> *	NC
<i>Holcus lanatus</i> *	NC
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i> *	NC
<i>Juncus articulatus</i>	NC
<i>Juncus oxymers</i>	NC
<i>Lathyrus japonicus</i>	NC
<i>Lonicera involucrata</i> *	NC
<i>Maianthemum dilatatum</i> *	NC
<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	NC
<i>Physocarpus capitatus</i> *	NC
<i>Polystichum munitum</i> *	NC
<i>Potentilla palustris</i> *	<i>Comarum palustre</i>
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> *	NC
<i>Pyrus fusca</i>	<i>Malus fusca</i>
<i>Ribes sanguineum</i> *	NC
<i>Rosa gymnocarpa</i>	NC
<i>Rosa nutkana</i>	NC
<i>Rubus</i> spp.	NC
<i>Rumex conglomeratus</i>	NC
<i>Sagittaria latifolia</i>	NC
<i>Scirpus microcarpus</i>	NC
<i>Sium suave</i>	NC
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	NC
<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.*	NC

Moderately sensitive

Old Name	New Name
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	NC
<i>Agropyron repens</i>	<i>Elymus repens</i>
<i>Ammophila arenaria</i> *	NC

Old Name	New Name
<i>Cicuta douglasii</i>	NC
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	NC
<i>Lathyrus palustris</i> *	NC
<i>Limosella aquatica</i>	NC
<i>Lotus uliginosus</i>	<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>
<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	NC
<i>Phragmites communis</i> *	<i>Phragmites australis</i>
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	NC
<i>Poa pratensis</i>	NC
<i>Rumex crispus</i> *	NC
<i>Salix hookeriana</i> *	NC
<i>Scirpus acutus</i>	<i>Schoenoplectus acutus</i>
<i>Scirpus validus</i>	<i>Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani</i>
<i>Sonchus arvensis</i>	NC
<i>Trifolium</i> spp.	NC
<i>Vicia gigantea</i> *	<i>Vicia nigricans</i> subsp. <i>gigantea</i>

Moderately tolerant

Old Name	New Name
<i>Agrostis alba</i>	<i>Agrostis gigantea</i>
<i>Aster subspicatus</i>	<i>Symphotrichum subspicatum</i> var. <i>subspicatum</i>
<i>Eleocharis acicularis</i>	NC
<i>Eleocharis palustris</i>	NC
<i>Eleocharis parvula</i>	NC
<i>Elymus mollis</i> *	<i>Leymus mollis</i>
<i>Festuca arundinacea</i>	<i>Schedonorus arundinaceus</i>
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	NC
<i>Hordeum brachyantherum</i> *	NC
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	NC
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	NC
<i>Oenanthe sarmentosa</i> *	NC
<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> *	NC
<i>Potentilla pacifica</i>	<i>Argentina egedii</i> (<i>Potentilla anserina</i>)
<i>Ranunculus cymbalaria</i>	(<i>Cyrtorhyncha cymbalaria</i>)
<i>Scirpus americanus</i>	<i>Schoenoplectus americanus</i>
<i>Scirpus cernuus</i> *	<i>Isolepis cernua</i>
<i>Trifolium wormskjoldii</i>	<i>Trifolium wormskioldii</i>

Tolerant

Old Name	New Name
<i>Carex lyngbyei</i>	NC
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>
<i>Glaux maritima</i>	(<i>Lysimachia maritima</i>)
<i>Hordeum jubatum</i>	NC
<i>Juncus gerardii</i>	NC
<i>Lilaeopsis occidentalis</i>	NC
<i>Orthocarpus castillejoides*</i>	<i>Castilleja ambigua</i>
<i>Scirpus maritimus</i>	<i>Bolboschoenus maritimus</i> (<i>Schoenoplectus maritimus</i>)
<i>Stellaria humifusa</i>	NC
<i>Typha angustifolia*</i>	NC

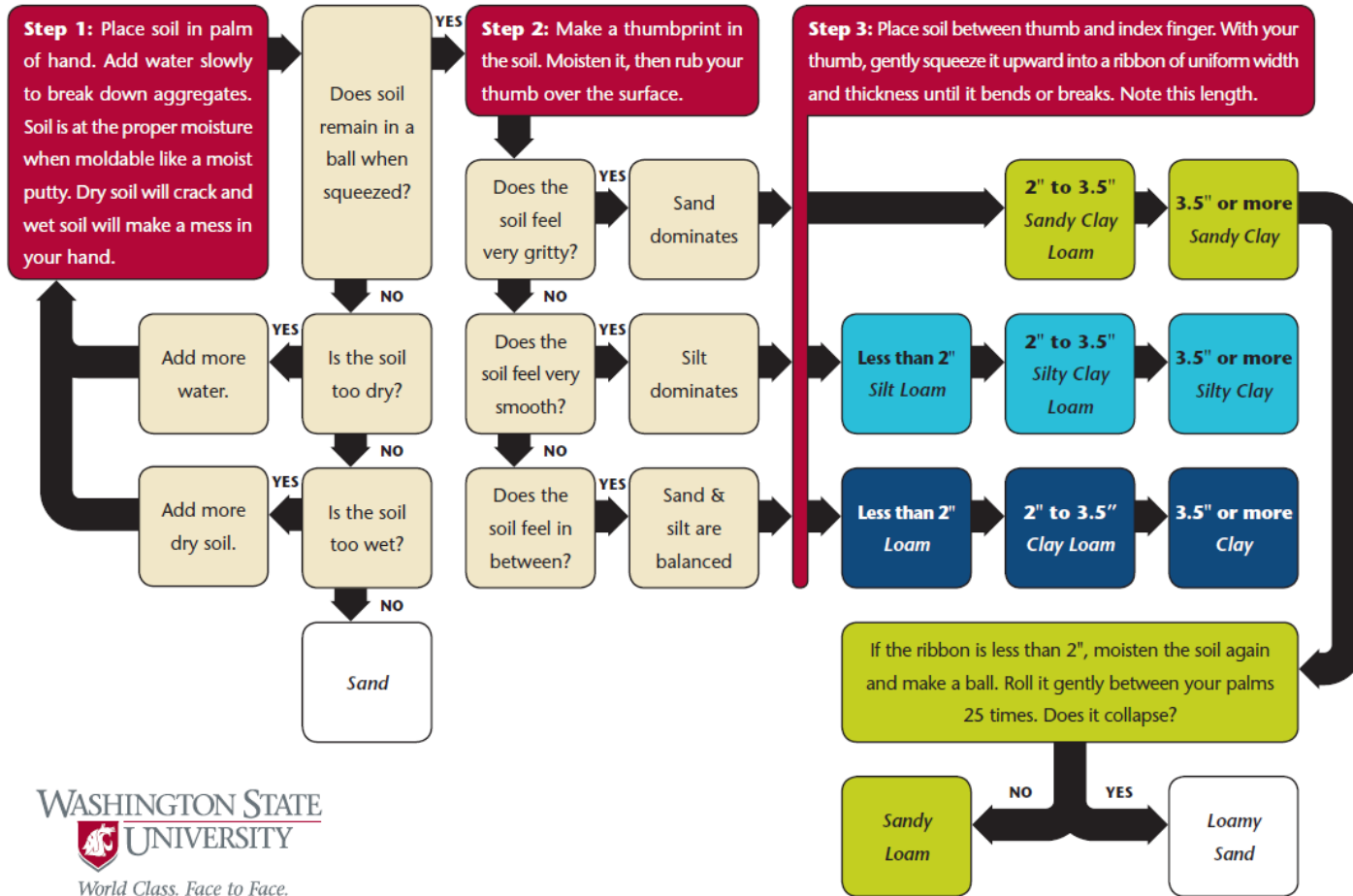
Very tolerant

Old Name	New Name
<i>Atriplex patula</i>	NC
<i>Cotula coronopifolia</i>	NC
<i>Distichlis spicata</i>	NC
<i>Grindelia integrifolia*</i>	NC
<i>Jaumea carnosa</i>	NC
<i>Juncus balticus</i>	<i>Juncus arcticus</i> subsp. <i>littoralis</i>
<i>Plantago maritima</i>	NC
<i>Salicornia europea</i>	<i>Salicornia depressa</i>
<i>Salicornia virginica</i>	<i>Salicornia depressa</i>
<i>Sarcocornia pacifica</i> ¹³⁸	<i>Salicornia pacifica</i>
<i>Spergularia canadensis</i>	NC
<i>Spergularia marina</i>	<i>Spergularia salina</i>
<i>Suaeda maritima*</i>	<i>Suaeda calceoliformis</i>
<i>Triglochin concinnum*</i>	<i>Triglochin concinna</i>
<i>Triglochin maritimum*</i>	<i>Triglochin maritima</i>

¹³⁸ Not listed in Hutchinson, old name used in USDA Plants and NWPL

Appendix C. Estimating Soil Texture

Estimating Soil Texture



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Appendix D. Modeling Functions and Values in this Rapid Method

The Structure of the Method

Rapid methods for analyzing the environment often use data that are both qualitative and quantitative. The analyses may also involve numeric models that in themselves represent qualitative, multi-criteria decision tools (Hruby, 1999). As a result, generating a single score or index for a wetland function requires algorithms (rules that are similar to equations) for combining different characteristics that may not be mathematically compatible. Qualitative data and quantitative data both have to be transformed into ordinal numbers so they can be combined. In the method described here, wetland functions are first scored using ordinal numbers based on three separate aspects of a function (Site Potential, Landscape Potential, and Value). Each aspect is then rated as [H]igh, [M]edium, and [L]ow based on the sum of the ordinal numbers. The ratings are combined using a decision matrix that assigns final scores to each function (see first page of the rating form in Appendix A).

The three aspects of functions used to rate them are: 1) the potential of the site to provide each function, 2) the potential the landscape has to maintain the function at the site scale, and 3) the value each function may have for society at that location. Each aspect of a function is scored, but the score is transformed to a qualitative rating of High, Medium, or Low. The rating of each aspect is then given equal weight in the final score for that function.

The questions and scoring of the site potential used in this method are the same as the Potential used in the 2004 *Washington State Wetland Rating System for Western Washington* (Hruby, 2004b). The Opportunity score from the 2004 rating system, however, is not used. Rather, the information once provided by the Opportunity score is expanded into two categories. Functions are rated based on their landscape potential and values instead of opportunity. These changes provide better information to meet the objectives of this method.

The numeric models used to characterize functions in rapid methods do not model actual environmental processes but rather are multi-criteria decision models where each indicator represents a decision criterion to describe the level of function (Hruby, 1999).

Wetland Functions and Their Indicators

The functions provided by wetlands derive from the interactions among different components of the ecosystem and the landscape. These interactions are called *environmental processes*. Processes are dynamic and can occur at all geographic scales. Thus the functions performed by a wetland can be influenced by events occurring within the wetland unit as well as in the watershed. For example, the river adjacent to a wetland may be deepened (downcut) as a

result of increased runoff from upgradient development. This changes the effectiveness of the wetland at storing overbank flood waters (a hydrologic function).

Any factor that changes how well, or how much, a function is performed by a wetland can be considered a control of that function. Another term often used in the scientific literature is *driver*. The drivers of functions in wetlands determine how well the functions are performed. An event that affects a driver is called a *disturbance* by ecologists (Dale et al., 2000). The type, intensity, and duration of disturbances can significantly change environmental processes (Dale et al., 2000), and thereby wetland functions.

Climate, geology, and topography are major processes in a watershed that control how water, sediment, and nutrients move. These processes, along with factors that occur within the boundary of a wetland, control the functions performed by the wetland. If human activities change these processes in a watershed, then the functions in a wetland will also change (Sheldon et al., 2005). Any rating of functions at a site, therefore, also requires information about the watershed in which it lies.

The ecological functions that provide value to society fall into three major groups: 1) hydrologic, 2) improving water quality, and 3) habitat and maintaining food webs. Each of these can be sub-divided into separate functions. For example, hydrologic functions may include flood storage, velocity reduction, groundwater recharge, and de-synchronization of flood-flows (Hruby, 2001). The Rating System characterizes only the three major groups of functions to meet the need for being rapid.

In rapid methods such as this one, functions and values are analyzed by answering a series of questions that note the presence, or make simple measurements, of environmental indicators. Indicators are easily observable characteristics that are correlated with quantitative or qualitative observations of the performance of a function (Hruby, 1999; National Research Council [NRC], 2002). Most indicators represent relatively stable characteristics that describe the structure of the ecosystem or its physical or geologic properties (Brinson et al., 1995). Indicators, unfortunately, cannot reflect actual rates at which functions are performed because rates can change in time. Our knowledge however, “is sufficiently well developed such that indicators can be used as shortcuts to judge whether functions are occurring at appropriate levels” (NRC, 2002, p. 120).

The Values of Functions

The three basic functions rated in this method are all considered to be valuable and need to be replaced if lost. The wetland functions that are addressed in the tools developed by Ecology for Washington State are defined as the ecological processes that provide services/values to society (Hruby, 2001). This is a subset of the possible functions wetlands perform. There are many ecological processes that are not usually considered of any significant value to society (e.g., providing habitat for Nematode worms or mosquitoes; taking up nitrogen from surface waters but then releasing it back into the surface water when plants decompose).

Since all three functions are considered to be valuable, the approach used in the value sub-unit of the method is to rate the values relative to other wetlands in the landscape. The value part of the score is intended to highlight those wetlands where a function is more valuable to

society because of factors in the surrounding landscape. For example, flood storage is more valuable in a watershed where flooding causes major damage than in a watershed without flooding issues. A wetland that is moderately effective at cleaning up pollutants is assigned a higher value if it is in a watershed that already does not meet water quality standards. In this case, the wetland removes pollutants that would otherwise further degrade water quality. A wetland that provides habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species (T/E species) is more valuable than one that provides habitat for other wetland-dependent species since society has passed laws that give preference and added value to T/E species.

Calibrating the Indicators

An initial list of indicators identified from a review of the literature was used to develop protocols and data sheets for sampling reference sites. Indicators were divided into three types:

- Those present at the site itself (indicators of site potential).
- Those found in the surrounding landscape (indicators of landscape potential).
- Those that indicate that the function performed is providing some value to society (indicators of value).

Data on each indicator were collected at a minimum of 20 sites for each hydrogeomorphic class of wetlands in western Washington. Sites were chosen to represent the widest possible range of environmental conditions found in the class. Data on some of the indicators could be collected from aerial color photographs, but all of this information was verified by at least one visit to each site.

The calibration process involved the following steps:

1. Deletion of indicators that could not be readily estimated from aerial photographs or during a brief field visit (< 3hrs). This represents a compromise between the science and the needs of the user. Some important indicators of function could not be used because they could not be measured within the time allocated, or could not be collected with reproducible results by the majority of environmental scientists. For example, the organic or clay contents of wetland soils are an important indicator of chemical processes that improve water quality (Rosenblatt et al., 2001; NRC, 2002), but these cannot be readily measured in the field. The indicators of organic and clay soils therefore had to be simplified. Users are asked to determine if organic or clay soils are present in the unit based on the mapping done by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). If it is not mapped, users are asked to perform one simple field test to determine if the soil meets the NRCS criteria. If the organic or clay content does not meet the percent needed to classify it as an organic soil or clay soil, the unit is considered not to have the indicator. In this case, the reproducibility of the data collection among different users was judged to be more important than achieving additional scientific rigor by scaling the amount of organic or clay material in the soil.
2. The indicators for Site Potential were calibrated to the data collected for the Washington State Function Assessment Methods (Hruby et al., 1999; Hruby, Granger, & Teachout, 1999) and as described in Hruby (1999), and Hruby (2009). This involved

developing an independent and qualitative assessment of how well a wetland performs a function and then calibrating the scores of the indicators to get the best fit to the independent assessment. The calibration involved alternatively changing the scoring for each indicator and the scaling within an indicator to get the best fit to the independent assessment.

3. Indicators for the Landscape Potential were calibrated by reviewing the literature on wetland indicators, and determining what aspect of the indicators represent the high and low levels of functioning. The data for each indicator collected at the reference sites are then sorted based on the values representing the highest level of function to the lowest in the reference wetlands. This ranking of data generates a distribution that is used to help determine where the breaks in the scoring should occur. The final decisions on scoring, however, were developed from graphical analyses of the distribution of scores of all sites. The goal was to ensure a relatively even distribution of ratings among the calibration sites. Although statistical methods are being developed for multi-criteria decision models (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2007; Fuller et al., 2008), these methods are not yet applicable to a categorization that incorporates values, special characteristics, as well as quantitative indicators.

Further details on the approach used to calibrate the rapid assessment methods developed by Ecology can be found in Hruby et al. (1999), Hruby (2001), and Hruby (2009).