

## National Wetlands Monitoring Meeting (January 29-31, 2003) – Meeting Notes Summary

**January 29, 2003**

### **1) Overview of Wetlands Assessment Levels and Modules**

*(Mary Anne Thiesing, Region 2, EPA)*

What is the definition of aquatic life?

- All agree it is important to include waterfowl; even though do not spend entire life or even majority in water.
- It is important to provide specific definition as a means of providing more extensive protection for organisms.
- States determine definition and how to support/regulate it.
  - Broad of a definition is favorable, although there has been pressure to narrow it down.
  - Can be enumerative or narrative statement of biological activities.
- Most definitions do include all aquatic life that is involved with water.
  - Fish that use water for stock do not live there, but use the water.
  - States have looked at algae, birds, vegetation, etc.
  - Different states monitor different organisms

### **2) Incorporating Wetlands in Maine's Biological Monitoring Program**

*(Jeanne DiFranco, Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection)*

What is integrated?

- Different state conditions lead to different integration methods; approach is the same.
- Wetlands need to be looked at more uniquely
- More concerned with integration on logistical, administrative, and funding level.
  - This is not scientific integration
  - Creates problems from administrative stance.
  - All very dependent on the set up of agencies

What should states do when their agencies do not want to integrate?

- Integration needs to come from the bottom up
- It is hard to communicate and educate across various programs at all levels, it must be an interactive process
- Much of it has to do with public perception, which is most relevant to permits because of development pressures in New Jersey. If we want to integrate, need to work extra time than allowable to accomplish it
- Time, resources, and money are major problems, not that people do not think monitoring is important
- The problem is public priorities. Many people are more concerned with development and permits than integration

### **3) National Wetlands Inventory/Landscape Profiles and HGM modifiers**

*(John Cooper, Chief, Branch of Habitat Assessment, USFWS,  
Ralph Tiner, Northeast Region, Hadley, MA, USFWS)*

To what extent do you field check?

- We do Level One only, others do more assessment but we don't do everything. We take geospatial data and put it in a form for use. We could move next to a Level Two or Level Three, but we don't normally do these
- Cost/time is dependent on size of watershed and currency of data. Small watersheds take about a year. The Nanticoke map cost roughly \$50K to produce.

When you update can you discern forested land?

- Aerial data does not help with forested land, but we use other data. Usually we give the benefit of the doubt to wetland areas.
- We use whatever is supplied by the state although, not always uniform. Not all states use the same classification system.

#### **4) GIS Landscape Wetland Assessment Tools**

*(Ken Brazil, Arkansas SWCC)* <http://www.state.ar.us/aswcc/>

How do you prioritize projects?

- We use a landscape view to prioritize projects using GIS. A single year of land use-land cover data is not sufficient, we need several years of data

Was it difficult to get everyone (agencies) together? How long did it take?

- Took one year for database to be formed. We went out and talked to the permit directors to get them on board. The lead agency changes each fiscal year (rotating basis) to process money.
- We designed 10 fields of data in a report form. So we ask agencies for 10 data parameters, and get them to put it into a usable format for the Soil and Water Conservation Commission

#### **5) Combining Landscape Level and Rapid Assessment Methods for Wetlands**

*(Rob Brooks, Penn State University, Cooperative Wetlands Center)*

What is used to designate a threshold for impaired wetlands?

- There are several initiatives to figure out where threshold should be but is based on comparison to reference. [Note from editor: Ultimately, a regulatory threshold is a state decision.]

Why is a 1 km circle used?

- It's easy, convenient, and shows wetland and buffer. Any larger area crosses geologic areas.

#### **6) Coastal Wetlands Bio-assessment and Land Use Analysis in Massachusetts, 1997-2000**

*(Bruce Carlisle, Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management Program)*

[www.state.ma.us/czm/volunteermarshmonitoring.htm](http://www.state.ma.us/czm/volunteermarshmonitoring.htm)

How do you calculate land use index?

- There are 21 different classes and we use best professional judgment, which makes a qualitative factor into a quantitative instrument.

What are you using for an impact range?

- Impact range is 1000 feet. After 2000 ft, starts to drop off
- Practically, it is difficult to convince the state to provide protection for anything more than a 100 ft. buffer. However, we can look up to a 1000 ft zone

## 7) WQS Primer, WQS and Criteria Strategy, Report out from ASWM session on WQS

*(Jennifer Wigal, Water Quality Standards Program, EPA HQ)*

Do you have to have WQS before you get funding?

- No, some grants are not contingent on that. 104(b)3 grants are used for development and pilot programs
- 106 funds can be used for development of WQS and monitoring.
- They must have standards for waters of the U.S.

How ongoing is BAWWG/ALUS work?

- Nutrient standards are different for different regions, which causes a struggle. We need to establish reference conditions and states/tribes and locals

Is EPA HQ's expectation that WQS have to be in place first to have a decent monitoring program?

- A monitoring program that achieves the objectives of the CWA Section 305(b) reporting requirement is based on whether waters are attaining or not attaining water quality standards. States' existing standards should already cover wetlands. It is important to make sure you are legally covered. Also, make sure inappropriate standards do not exist. You must have something in place to report on the condition of your wetlands.
- You are given a framework from the EPA- you construct your own standards.

**January 30, 2003**

## 8) Working Session#1 – Monitoring to Improve the Success of Compensatory Mitigation: Links to the Mitigation Action Plan

*(Palmer Hough, Wetlands Division, EPA HQ, and Rich Sumner, EPA, Region 10)*

Was there discussion of doing away with terms that have outlived their usefulness?

- Traditionally things are described in terms of mitigation, restoration, etc., so we are changing that.
- "In and out of kind," "on and off site" language is not used and not liked by scientists.
  - Many service people still use it in their letters
  - "In kind, off site" does not always work as the default.
    - If it's a small wetland, this should come out in the report

How does EPA choose how much money is allotted per subject?

- Three priorities for funding: Monitoring, mitigation improvement, and protecting vulnerable wetlands. 75% of all money goes to these things.

We need to keep practical things in mind, but not rule out everything

## Session#1 Report Out

What is logistical plan to get Action Plan items done?

- 2 steps are already complete and rest of plan is in the power point, also a task force working on it

Does the action plan recognize states in 401 process?

- Task #12 includes states as participants but we always want more state input.

**9) Working Session#2 – Development of Wetland Monitoring Strategies**  
*(Sarah Lehmann, EPA Region 5, and Chris Faulkner, EPA HQ)*

How do you anticipate states or tribes will develop their monitoring strategy and get funding?

- You should inventory your programs to determine who is monitoring wetland. There may be another agency or multiple agencies monitoring wetlands and doing well, so there's no need to overlap. There is not enough money in the Wetland Program Development Grants (104b3) to implement a wetland-monitoring program, so money and plans need to come under another section, likely 106. The 106 and monitoring strategy-planning process can incorporate, by reference, other sources of funding and the work of multiple agencies.

Is the expectation to have separate wetlands monitoring programs, or include it in the current program?

- The 106 program prefers one document, one program so that all resources reviewed at the same time, instead of, for example, a wetlands program, lakes program, streams program, etc. However, if that is how your state does it, and you cover all elements required for 106 funding, then that's acceptable. One document, one program preferred (Lehmann).

**a) Working Session #2, Part 2 – Technical guidelines: Components of an Adequate Bioassessment Program.**

*(Mike Barbour, TetraTech, and Chris Yoder)*

How do you integrate threatened and endangered species with the biological assessment?

- Catch in the construction of the biological condition gradient, and how it reacts to stress. Also, habitat scores can be used to reflect the habitat expectation to support threatened and endangered species

What do states do NOW?

- States are playing catch-up, wetlands need to learn from what streams and lakes did wrong.
- States would likely be held to a rigorous scale and have their funding allocations based on a monitoring program evaluation.
- The goal should be that regardless of 305(b) assessment and mitigation, what you are striving for and accomplishing is adequate (Faulkner)

**Report Out – Developing Monitoring Strategies**

- Keep it simple
  - Forget about water chemistry and focus on biology, again, keep it simple
  - If try to push data analysis for implementation (perfecting indices, etc.), will drive agencies nuts with everything to be done.
- EPA reiterates that, under Clean Water Act, water bodies need to have water quality standards and when wetlands are waters of the U.S. and waters of the state, then they need to fit within the framework of the federal and state guidelines for designated uses and narrative and numeric criteria to protect those uses.

**January 31, 2003**

**10) Future Training Needs**

*(Matt Schweisberg, New England Region, EPA)*

How close are we to putting a training program on biocriteria on the ground?

- Dependent on other items in work plan and the priorities set by the group
- A four-hour course is already under planning for National Biocriteria Symposium in Idaho in March 2003

What needs should be considered when designing monitoring program

- Extension delivery service center of training for different regions of country – on-site, on-call after course, for those having trouble implementing after course.
- Reduce the number of examples, case studies, and focus on the SAME example.
- Could have hypothetical wetland to go through step by step, at all training levels

For those states not thinking about monitoring

- Need a basic class on how to design a monitoring STRATEGY that encompasses all issues of property rights, etc., farmed wetlands

### **11) Wetland interface with TMDL program**

*(Todd Dabolt, Watershed Rule Team, EPA HQ)*

Should you set [WQ] standard first to avoid lawsuits? Yes, but need data for that.

How does a probability monitoring design fit into TMDL programs?

- TMDLs are site-specific
- Regions 1&2 working with ORD offices to apply it to aquatic life use support to see if it will work.
- Region 3 has done probabilistic surveys and have numbers of “impaired wetlands in a watershed”

Reporting impairment against a WQ standard or against reference condition

- If the identified impairment is a pollutant then need TMDL, but if it’s really pollution (e.g., hydrologic modification), then don’t need TMDL
- In states where storm water is an issue in impairing wetlands, pollutants come in too, so TMDL is needed. For other states where the impairment is from tiling, ditching, etc., that is considered pollution, so TMDL is not required.

Pollution vs. pollutant – need to be cautious

- If finessing definitions because of TMDL requirement, going to get into trouble (difference between intellectual fib and outright wrong)

Even if wetlands are not impaired, wetlands are still important in watersheds. It is

### **12) Data Management and Analysis& Reporting**

*(Robert King. STORET, EPA HQ)*

STORET is free and comes with an example or prototype organization

- Can store documents and graphics
  - Maps that show sampling sites, discharge sites, actual location, PDF files
- Individual documents can be up to 4 gigs in size

Search compatibility, taxonomic database included

- If using EPA funds to collect raw data, that data must be put into STORET. This includes water quality grants.
- Regional STORET managers handle the uploads

Development of Version 3

- The hope is that more wetlands people will be involved this time to make it more wetlands-friendly, especially with regards to vegetation
  - Region 1 has STORET working group to make sure all regional users put data into STORET
- Planning at least three meetings to gather input for version 3, at least one to occur in D.C., and possibly the rest to occur at other locations around the country (King)

### **Future Directions for the Working Group**

*(Doreen Vetter, EPA HQ)*

TMDL and Wetlands Draft Issue Paper

- Electronic version will go out to workgroup and some individuals will get informal input from their colleagues

Monitoring Strategies

- States who are more advanced in their programs review the draft RMC criteria and provide recommendations for including wetlands
- Need to develop info for public and legislators at basic level

Further work on Water Quality Standards for Wetlands; develop workplan and strategy for FY03

- Finish out matrix with all states and tribes
- I.D. programmatic gaps

Module on ALUS approach to wetland assessment

- Early-late summer meeting (1-1 ½ day meeting)
- Especially for tiered aquatic life use