

## Alaska's Wetlands

The State of Alaska includes approximately 63% of the nation's wetland ecosystems (Hall et al. 1994). Estimates place the total acreage at approximately 130 million acres or about one-third of the State. Wetlands help maintain water quality by slowly filtering excess nutrients, sediments, and pollutants before water seeps into rivers, streams, and underground aquifers. They also offer a breeding ground and/or habitat for fish, wildlife, and plants. Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water 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 tundra, permafrost areas, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

For more information regarding Alaska's 404 Program:

- Alaska 404 Program Development

The following reports describe wetlands in Alaska:

- Alaska Wetlands Initiative  
[http://water.epa.gov/grants\\_funding/wetlands/facts/upload/alaska.pdf](http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/wetlands/facts/upload/alaska.pdf)
- Status of Alaska Wetlands (Hall et. al., 1994)  
<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/Documents/Status-of-Alaska-Wetlands.pdf>

## Permitting Construction in Wetlands

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (referred to as Section 404) established a permitting program to regulate any person, company, tribe, or government agency planning to work in waters of the United States (U.S.) or to discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S. The regulated activities typically requiring a Section 404 permit include:

- Discharging dredged or fill material in waters of the U.S., including wetlands;
- Site improvement fill for residential, commercial, or recreational development;
- Construction of revetments, groins, breakwaters, levees, dams, dikes, and weirs; and
- Placement of riprap and fill material for roads, airports, or buildings.

Several federal and state agencies are involved in Section 404 permitting

Roles of Various Federal and State Agencies and Local Governments

## **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Alaska District Regulatory Division**

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act requires that any person, company, tribe, or government agency planning to work in waters of the U.S. must obtain a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) before initiating any regulated activity. The Corps is the lead agency, in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), responsible for implementation of the 404 program in Alaska. Corps staff works with applicants to assist them in the permitting process. The Corps is responsible for issuing the public notice for

applications for individual projects using the "Public Notice of Application for a Permit." See the links below for specific information on the permit application and issuance process.

- Corps Regulatory Division Main webpage  
<http://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory.aspx>
- Corps FAQ on "Do I need a permit?"  
<http://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/FAQ.aspx>
- Corps listing of permit Public Notices  
<http://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/PublicNotices.aspx>
- Sketch of Corps Regulatory Jurisdiction

## **Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation - Division of Water - Wastewater Discharge Authorization Program**

Section 401 of the Clean Water Act provides states with the legal authority to review an application or project that requires a federal license or permit (in this case a 404 permit) that might result in a discharge into a water of the U.S. The applicant must apply for and obtain a Certificate of Reasonable Assurance from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) to conduct a regulated activity. By agreement between the Corps and ADEC, the "Public Notice of Application for Permit" public noticed by the Corps for an individual permit serves as the ADEC application for a Certificate of Reasonable Assurance. ADEC reviews the project as described in the Corps project public notice; coordinates with other state and federal agencies and local governments; reviews any public comments; and either approves, approves with conditions, waives, or denies the project based on compliance with the Clean Water Act, state water quality standards, and other applicable state laws. ADEC charges a fee to develop the Certificate of Reasonable Assurance. See the links below for specific information.

- ADEC Process for Issuing a Waiver of a Corps Permit
- ADEC On-line Permit Search
- ADEC Permit Fees
- Reassignment of 401 Certificate
- Handbook on 401 Water Quality Certifications
- Dredge Material Guidance for Upland Disposal (New)

The hydrogeomorphic (HGM) assessment approach for wetlands is presented in three regional functional wetland assessment guidebooks for understanding Alaska wetlands and assessing wetland impacts and functions. The hydrogeomorphic approach is a rapid assessment tool specifically developed for the dominant type of wetlands in three regions of the state: Interior, Southcentral and Southeast Alaska. These guidebooks provide methods and resources for assessing the wetland functions for planning, permitting and mitigation. These were cooperatively developed by 23 state and federal agencies and organizations.

- Interior Alaska Wetlands Functional Assessment Guidebook
- Cook Inlet Basin Ecoregion Wetlands Functional Assessment Guidebook
- Southeast/Southcentral Alaska Wetlands Functional Assessment Guidebook

## U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Region 10 – Alaska Operations Office

The Corps is the lead agency, in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in implementing the 404 wetlands program in Alaska. EPA works with the Corps to develop guidance and environmental criteria used in evaluating permit applications. EPA staff in Alaska review projects and has the authority to prohibit, deny, or restrict the use of any defined area as a disposal site. EPA enforces Clean Water Act Section 404 provisions.

- EPA Wetlands <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/>

### Local Governments

Several local governments have developed local wetlands management plans. See the links for the following communities.

- Anchorage wetlands- <http://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/Projects/Pages/AnchorageWetlan>
- Juneau wetlands - [http://www.juneauwatersheds.org/watershed\\_library.html](http://www.juneauwatersheds.org/watershed_library.html)
- Kenai Borough wetlands - <http://www.kenaiwetlands.net/>
- Homer wetlands - <http://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/planning>
- Mat-Su wetlands [http://www.matsugov.us/docman/doc\\_download/3768-final-mat-su-borough-wetlands-mgt-plan](http://www.matsugov.us/docman/doc_download/3768-final-mat-su-borough-wetlands-mgt-plan)

### Contacts

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Last updated:9/19/2014