



Association of State Wetland Managers Wetland Regulatory Capacity Building Series

Wetland Program Plans as Building Blocks for Wetland Regulatory Capacity Building

March 2021

Introduction to the EPA's Core Elements Framework (CEF)

At the state and tribal level, wetland programs are housed within many different agencies pursuing a range of goals that differ according to their specific priorities and the wide spectrum of wetland types and functions found within their jurisdiction. While each state or tribe may have their own wetland goals, there is a common set of program objectives that EPA believes comprise a comprehensive wetland program.

In 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) summarized these common objectives into the Core Elements of Effective State and Tribal Wetlands Programs, also called the Core Elements Framework (CEF). The CEF outlines the core elements of a state/tribal wetland program, describes each core element, and provides a comprehensive menu of program-building activities for each core element.

Helping States and Tribes Build Wetland Program Capacity

Using the CEF, states and tribes can design their own roadmap towards development of a more comprehensive wetland program. States and tribes can implement the CEF depending on their individual program goals and available resources. The CEF also encourages states and tribes to pursue a strategic approach for wetland program development through the creation of Wetland Program Plans (WPPs). States and tribes with approved Wetland Program Plans are typically more competitive in securing EPA State Wetland Program Development Grants than if the state/tribe lack a plan.

What are the EPA's Core Elements?

EPA identifies four (4) core elements that comprise and define effective wetlands programs. These core elements are basic program functions that form the foundation of wetlands management and protection within a state or tribal program. The 4 Core Elements are: 1) Monitoring and Assessment; 2) Regulatory activities (including 401 certification); 3) Voluntary Restoration and Protection; and 4)

Water Quality Standards for wetlands. For more information on the Core Elements visit the following: [EPA Core Element Framework](#) (including information on WPPs); [ASWM Wetland Program Plan Website](#)

Benefits and Minimum Requirements for Wetland Program Plans

Benefits of having Wetland Program Plans (WPPs) for States and Tribes

WPPs assist state and tribal program development by:

- Encouraging states and tribes to think strategically about what they are going to do over a period of several years to build their wetland programs.
- Facilitating a discussion between EPA and states/tribes that ensures both sides understand the direction a wetland program intends to take over a defined period of time.
- Serving as a communications plan in working with state or tribal leadership and potential partners or funders in identifying future needs and opportunities for program development.
- Allowing EPA to be more effective in providing useful technical assistance in program development.
- Improving likelihood of receiving EPA State Wetland Program Development Grants to help accomplish some of the regulatory program development tasks in the WPP.

WPP Basics

The development of WPPs is encouraged, but not mandated by EPA. They are reviewed, commented on, and approved by EPA Regions, but do not receive a “score.” WPPs should be generally consistent with EPA’s Core Element Framework, but do not have to include all 4 of the core elements. To ensure that WPP plans will meet EPA requirements, however, and to make the most efficient use of limited planning time and resources, states and tribes are encouraged to talk to their EPA Region early on about the content and process for developing WPPs.

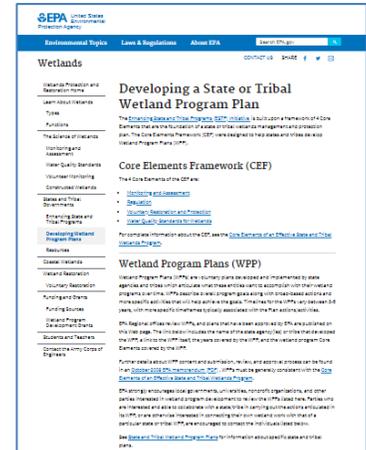
WPP Minimum Requirements

At a minimum, a state or tribal wetland program plan must include:

- A narrative description of overall program goal(s) for the defined period of the plan.
- Identification of actions/activities generally consistent with the Core Element Framework proposed to be undertaken.
- An implementation schedule for broader based actions and/or more specific activities (usually accomplished within an overall timeline of 3-6 years).
- If there are other documents that support a proposed action (e.g., monitoring or restoration strategy, etc.), please provide that reference (or a link in your WPP).

Useful Wetland Program Plan Related Web-based Resources

- [EPA Core Element Framework](#)
- [EPA Website for approved Wetland Program Plans](#)
- [October 2009 WPP memorandum from EPA](#)
- [ASWM Wetland Program Plan Website](#)
- [ASWM Wetland Program Plan Handbook](#)



ASWM Archived Webinars on Wetland Program Plans:

- [Introduction to Wetland Program Plans \(WPPs\)](#)
- [Sharing EPA's "Refresh" to the Enhancing State and Tribal Programs \(ESTP\) Framework](#)
- [Your Wetland Program as a Sustainable Finance Tool](#)

Developing Wetland Program Plans

Developing Your Wetland Program Plan

Over the years, common practices have emerged around the development of Wetland Program Plans (WPPs). Working collaboratively, EPA and ASWM have compiled some suggestions as your state or tribe explores or begins to develop their WPP.

- Identify the resources that you are trying to address (maps are useful, or a narrative description of wetland types found in your area, etc.).
- As you outline and develop your plan, consider how some of your proposed actions can support or build upon one another (e.g., monitoring and assessment activities can be used to support restoration efforts).
- Be sure to articulate your goals and objectives for each core element. Actions should reflect how you plan to achieve those goals and objectives. Describe your proposed actions as specifically but as simply as possible.
- Associate a “who” with an action if possible. Identifying responsible parties for each action can help with planning and implementation.
- If your state or tribe is a past EPA Wetland Program Development recipient, explain how those previous efforts tie into your future efforts. If WPP is being developed under a current EPA grant, identify the grant number.
- Make sure to identify a point of contact for the plan so others know whom they should address questions about the WPP or the actions contained within it.

Looking at Existing Approved State and Tribal WPPs

To view examples of other Wetland Program Plans, check out EPA's current WPP website, which includes all formally approved state and tribal WPPs in the United States:

<https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/state-and-tribal-wetland-program-plans#r1>

Creating Access to Partnerships and Funding through WPP Development

Using WPPs to Access EPA Wetland Program Development Grants (WPDGs)

Only program development activities can be funded through WPDGs (i.e., implementation activities cannot be funded). WPDG proposals can be awarded to develop WPPs or carry out the regulatory program development activities in an approved WPP. WPDGs including WPP planning are placed in a separate "track" in the WPDG Request for Proposals (RFP) and do not compete against non-WPP proposals. However, there will be more money made available in the WPP track of the WPDG RFP relative to the number of proposals

Learn more about EPA's WPDGs here: <https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/wetland-program-development-grants-and-epa-wetlands-grant-coordinators#about>

Bring Partners in on Planning Early and Often

Consider engagement with other program partners/supporters in putting together your WPP. Think of this as an opportunity to include other partnership efforts that intersect with your activities. Partnering is not a requirement for WPPs, but it can be helpful. Instead of thinking about WPPs as something you are doing just to access EPA funding, consider other potential funding sources (either from partners or that can be leveraged through partnering efforts) that could fund these actions. During your WPP development, identify your partners and briefly describe who is doing what.

About Wetland Program Development Grants (WPDGs)

WPDGs provide eligible applicants an opportunity to conduct projects that promote the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction and elimination of water pollution.

Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are typically put out in the spring time.

WPDGs assist state, tribal, local government (S/T/LG) agencies and interstate/intertribal entities in building programs to protect, manage and restore wetlands. States, tribes, local governments, interstate associations, and intertribal consortia are eligible to apply for the Regional WPDG Request for Proposals (RFPs). Nonprofits, interstate associations and intertribal consortia are eligible to apply for the National WPDG RFPs.

WPDGs provide applicants an opportunity to develop and refine comprehensive state/tribal/local government wetland programs. These programs are meant to:

- Build the capacity of state/tribal/local governments to increase the quantity and quality of wetlands in the U.S. by conserving and restoring wetland acreage and improving wetland condition.
- Use one or more of the following "Core Elements" in order to achieve this goal.

Related Documents

- [Category Definitions](#)
- [Eligible Activities for WPDGs](#)
- [Wetlands Factsheet Series](#)
- [WPDG Case Studies](#)
- [Building State and Local Capacity to Protect Wetlands \(Brochure\)](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Tribal WPDG Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

After Your WPP has Been Approved

Once a WPP is Approved by EPA

- WPPs are made public upon approval from EPA. It is helpful to be as specific as possible when articulating activities so that a reader would know if an activity has been accomplished or is proposed (i.e., grant proposals).
- States and tribes are encouraged to do annual updates to WPPs as standard practice, instead of waiting to hear from EPA.
- To the extent possible, your EPA Region will review WPP progress with your state/tribe approximately every two to three years, looking at whether milestones are being met and if not, why not? At this point, EPA will work with the state/tribe to help determine what actions can get the state/tribe back on track in meeting its WPP goals and objectives.

For more information, contact:

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