**ALASKA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Wetland Acreage</th>
<th>Remaining Wetland Acreage</th>
<th>Acreage Lost</th>
<th>% Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>170,200,000</td>
<td>170,000,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>-0.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alaska Wetlands:** Freshwater Alaskan wetlands include bogs, fens, tundra, marshes, and meadows; brackish and saltwater wetlands include flats, beaches, rocky shores, and salt marshes. Most of the State’s freshwater wetlands are peatlands (wetlands that have organic soils), and cover as many as 100 million acres. Alaska’s coastal wetlands are cooperatively protected and managed by local governments, rural regions, and the State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Individual Features</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Water Quality Standards</th>
<th>Mitigation</th>
<th>Monitoring and Assessment</th>
<th>Restoration</th>
<th>Public/Private Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**SUMMARY**

**Overall Program:**

The state has extensive wetland areas consisting of coastal wetlands along Alaska's 33,904 miles of shore, floodplains of major rivers, areas of wet tundra unlain by permafrost, and formally submerged lands. The state has regulatory standards for activities in both freshwater and coastal wetlands in the coastal zone. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) is the lead agency for managing wetlands in Alaska. Many activities in freshwater wetlands are under federal or state jurisdiction because they are on state or federal lands or are regulated pursuant to other statutes such as the Habitat Protection Program and the Forestry Practices Act.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Alaska District, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the Clean Water Act Section 404 Permitting Program. Over 80% of all actions subject to Section 404 are authorized by the Corps via general permits, which authorize categories of activities to proceed without an individual permit application. General permits allow actions with minimal impacts to proceed with little if any administrative burden. This allows regulators and others to concentrate attention on activities with potential for significant impacts. At present, there are 36 nationwide general permits that authorize such activities as placement of out fall structures, road crossings, utility line backfill, boat ramps, farm buildings, and minor discharges.

If an activity does have significant impacts it must undergo a more extensive regulatory review. At this point wetlands are regulated mainly through the 404 process. ADEC’s goal is to provide a more scientific and regionally based, rapid assessment tool, through the HGM methodology.
Innovative Features and New Programs/Initiatives:

A number of Alaska communities have adopted “wetland management plans.” The Corps has issued general permits for at least two of these; Juneau has formally applied for general permit authority from the Corps.

In 1996 ADEC began developing the Hydrogeomorphic Approach (HGM) as a way to build a common scientific platform from which to develop a comprehensive Wetlands Plan. ADEC has been leading the development of HGM regional guidebooks and has gained broad based support for this method. HGM is being used because it:

1. is a rapid assessment tool,
2. recognizes Alaska’s regional conditions,
3. improves the understanding of wetlands as has an open structure designed to use the best available science, and
4. is a component of a watershed.

State Wetland Conservation Plan

None.

No Net Loss/Net Gain Goal

Alaska is implementing President Bush’s August 1991 policy.

INDIVIDUAL FEATURES:

Regulation

Wetland Regulatory Statutes and Administrative Rules

Alaska does not have a separate regulatory framework. ADEC certifies Section 404 the Corps Dredge and Fill Permits, using the Alaska Water Quality Standards.

Other authorities used to protect and manage wetlands in Alaska include:


Alaska Land Act: Alas. Stat., s. 38.05.070-075. Wetlands on public lands are also regulated.

Habitat Protection Program. Alas. Stat. s. 16.05.870 et. seq. Permits are required for projects which would influence other critical fish habitat.

Wetland Definition and/or Delineation; Comparability With Federal Definition

All freshwater and saltwater wetlands in “coastal areas” are regulated except for those under the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government. Freshwater wetlands are defined by the Administrative code to include environments characterized by rooted vegetation which is partially submerged continuously or periodically by water with less than .5 parts per thousand salt content, not exceeding three meters in depth; “saltwater wetlands” are defined to include coastal areas characterized by “halophilic hydrophytes and macroalgae” extending from extreme low tide to an area above extreme high tide which is influenced by sea spray or tidally influenced water table changes.
This definition is probably comparable to the Section 404 definition except that it goes beyond the Section 404 definition in regulating vegetated areas to a depth of three meters.

**Evaluation Methodology**

Under a Memorandum of Understanding signed by eleven agencies, the Hydrogeomorphic Method of Functional Assessment is used where there are regional guidebooks developed and “where appropriate.” There are two guidebooks published and two more in process of being developed. The guidebooks developed are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Guidebooks</th>
<th>Wetlands Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Interior</td>
<td>Flats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Lower Cook Inlet Basin</td>
<td>Slope / Flats Complexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Coastal Southeast &amp; Southcentral</td>
<td>Riverine and Slope River Proximal (Expected June 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Coastal Southeast &amp; Southcentral</td>
<td>Tidal Fringe (Near Shore Ecosystems) (Scheduled for November 2004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regulated and Exempted Activities**

None identified.

**Special Provisions for Agriculture and Forestry**

An amended Forestry Practices Act was adopted in 1990. Forest practices regulations were adopted in 1992.

**Penalties and Enforcement**

State penalties do not compare with federal law and would need to be changed as a condition of 404 assumption.

**Permit Tracking**

Individual agencies maintain a variety of tracking systems. Enforcement occurs routinely for after-the-fact permits.

**State General Permit “PGP” or “SPGP” for 404**

A state general permit was drafted for activities in the corridor for the Alaska natural gas pipeline. Also a Corps general permit has been issued for Anchorage. State (in 1992) began working on applying for regional GPs for similar activities and specific geographic areas. Programmatic GPs may also be sought when any new state regulations are comparable to federal regulations.

**Assumption of Section 404 Powers**

Assumption has been reviewed several times and so far rejected. The current Administration is exploring assumption or a SPGP. It is also exploring alternatives available to manage isolated wetlands.
Joint Permitting

Joint 401, 404, and coastal zone public notices are provided with a 30-day comment period. The Governor's office coordinates coastal project reviews for projects under the jurisdiction of a number of state agencies; a single state decision is issued.

Special Area Management Plans and Advanced Identification Plans

See description of local role, above.

Role of Local Governments

Much of the actual regulation of wetlands is being carried out by local governments. Juneau, Anchorage, Sitka, Kodiak and the Kenai have adopted wetland management plans which set forth quite detailed policies. The state supports delegating authority to local governments.

Staffing (Regulatory Staff)

For 2003 the total state wetland staff is 2.

Water Quality Standards

Wetlands and Water Quality Standards

Alaska Stat. sec. 46.03100, 46.03110.

The state has a Section 401 water quality certification program but no specific water quality standards for wetlands.

Wetland Definition (How and where are wetlands defined? Is it the same definition as described under regulation above?)

Yes. See above.

Designated Uses

None.

Narrative and/or Numeric Criteria

None.

Antidegradation Policy

None.

Other

None identified.

Staffing (Wetland Water Quality Staff)

See regulatory staffing above.
Mitigation

Mitigation Policy

No formal mitigation policy has been adopted to date although there has been some discussion.

Mitigation Banks

A mitigation bank is in the process of being established for the Juneau Wetlands Program. An advisory board charged with administering the “bank” was appointed. The Sealaska Native Corporation has drafted a private mitigation bank proposal for Southeast Alaska. The Matansuka Susitna Borough is considering a bank also.

In Lieu Fee Program

No.

Ad Hoc Arrangements

None.

Mitigation Database

None.

Staffing (Mitigation Staff)

None.

Monitoring and Assessment

Mapping /Inventory

ADEC produced an inventory of tidally-influenced wetlands in 1977.

Approximately 18% of Alaska’s wetlands have been mapped by the National Wetlands Inventory; most areas in Alaska have not been mapped or classified. However, detailed inventories have been conducted for some communities and coastal areas.

Wetland Classification and Assessment

Juneau, Homer, Sitka, Kodiak, and Anchorage have classified their wetlands as part of the local Wetland Management Planning process. Classification varies from sophisticated (Adamus) to aerial photographic methods with limited ground truthing.

As stated previously, in 1996, ADEC, with assistance and funding from other state and federal agencies decided to focus its efforts to develop a relatively new method for determining how wetlands function. This method is the Hydrogeomorphic Approach or HGM. HGM methodology is a rapid assessment based on regional wetland characteristics.

ADEC is leading the development of HGM in Alaska with assistance from EPA, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Corps, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey and other agencies and organizations. ADEC is following the strategy for developing HGM described in the National Action Plan to Develop the Hydrogeomorphic Approach for
Overall Wetland Gain and Loss Tracking System

Alaska does not. The Corps does.

Staffing (Monitoring and Assessment Staff)

.5 for HGM Development.

Restoration

Program Description

No specific state program. However the state has used 319 funds to support wetland restoration planning.

Restoration Program Goals

No specific statewide goals.

Eligibility Criteria

N/A

Restoration Database

None.

Staffing (Wetland Restoration Program Staff)

None.

Public/Private Partnerships

Acquisition Program

There has been selective use of conservation easements, density credits. This needs considerable more attention at present. Land Trusts are becoming very active and have acquired hundreds of acres of wetlands.

Public Outreach/Education

There is no specific program. ADEC has used HGM Training to promote understanding of wetlands and their functions.

Tax Incentives

None.
Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided through the 401 certification process.

Other Nonregulatory Incentives for Private Landowners

N/A

Wetland Training and Education

Agency delineation training has been provided through Corps contractors. Education is provided through Alaska Water Watch Program (volunteer groups), Sea Week Curriculum, and ADF&G wetland efforts.

ADEC has lead HGM training for more than 300 people statewide.

Watershed planning

No statewide effort currently exists. A few towns every year do planning.

Special Problems

Winters are long in Alaska. A limited period of time "single window" occurs during the summer that is available for carrying out construction activities. Much of the state is wetland. Classification and delineation problems are challenging based on the sheer size of state. Current regulations are not sufficient for fulfilling federal requirements for assumption.

Coordination

None identified.

Contact Person(s)

Jim Powell
Division of Air and Water Quality
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
410 Willoughby Avenue
Juneau, AK 99801-1795
(907) 465-5321

Contact Points

http://www.state.ak.us/dec/water/wnpspc/wetlands/wetlands.htm

http://www.state.ak.us/dec/water

Guidebooks, Brochures, Websites, Other Educational Materials

1) HGM Functional Assessment Guidebooks:

http://www.state.ak.us/dec/old_dec/dawq/waterpermits/wetlandsguides.htm


