



Illustration by Libby Walker Davidson

WETLANDS FACT SHEET

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Topic: Pre-Project Review

February 1999

PRE-PROJECT REVIEW

The Agency of Natural Resources Wetland Office reviews projects for wetland impacts under the Vermont Wetland Rules and under Act 250. The Wetland Office makes technical recommendations regarding wetlands on project applications. Design changes to protect wetlands are often requested. To save time and money, the Agency strongly encourages developers to work with the Wetland Office early in the planning process prior to submitting an application to the Wetland Office or to Act 250. Wetland concerns can then be identified and conflicts resolved early in the process.

If a project involves wetlands, contact the Wetland Office in the early planning stages and request a site visit by sending a location map (taken preferably from an VSWI map (see below) or a USGS quad) and a copy of the site plan with contour information. Allow plenty of time for this phase of the review. The wetlands staff will make every effort to set up a site visit within three weeks upon receipt of the plans.

For projects involving wetlands, the Wetland Office commonly recommends that wetlands be delineated and shown on the site plan in areas where development is proposed. To expedite the permit review process, an applicant can hire a wetland consultant to identify and delineate wetlands at the project site prior to a site review by the Wetland Office. When the delineation is complete, the wetland staff will review the delineation and make comments on the project design. In all cases, projects should be designed to avoid impacts to wetlands and maintain undisturbed buffer zones.

PROJECT PLANNING

Before contacting the Wetland Office, an applicant can also use available maps to begin identifying the approximate locations of wetlands. The actual location and extent of wetlands, however, must always be determined in the field.

- **Obtain a Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory (VSWI) Map**
VSWI maps indicate the approximate locations of state-designated significant wetlands. Copies of VSWI maps can be ordered from the Wetlands Office at the above address. Maps are mailed out approximately every two weeks. VSWI maps should also be available for use in District Environmental Offices, Regional Planning Commission Offices, and Town Offices. Keep in mind that VSWI maps are only accurate at identifying wetland areas that are 2 to 3 acres and larger and that the actual wetland boundaries may vary considerably from that shown on the map.

- **Check the County Soil Survey**

Hydric soil, or soil influenced by the presence of water in the upper part, is one parameter used to determine whether an area is classified as wetland. Soil surveys can be used to determine whether there are any mapped hydric soil units or soil units with known hydric inclusions. Checking the mapped soil types can help indicate the potential for wetlands in a particular area. A list of hydric soils in Vermont is available from the U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service, 69 Union Street, Winooski, Vermont 05404, (802)951-6795.

What Does the Wetlands Office Look For On Project Plans?

The Wetland Office looks for several fundamental pieces of information when reviewing project plans that involve wetlands. The basics are listed below:

1. Accurate wetland boundaries should be delineated and flagged in the field. Preferably, flags should be numbered sequentially along the wetland boundary.
2. The wetland delineation should be surveyed in the field and transferred onto the site plan. Numbered flags should be identified on the site plan.
3. At a minimum, a 50-foot, naturally vegetated, undisturbed buffer zone should be established and shown on the site plan contiguous to all wetlands which are identified on NWI maps. Appropriate buffers should also be established around all other wetlands. Wetland buffers may be enlarged or reduced depending on the wetland functions needing protection. Consult the wetlands program for input on a case by case basis.
4. There should be no dredging, filling, cutting of vegetation or altering the water levels of any wetlands in any way.
5. Appropriate erosion control measures should be established and maintained along the wetland buffer down gradient of any construction activities. Erosion control plans should be shown on the site plan. Refer to the Vermont Handbook for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control on Construction Sites. Copies of the handbook are available from the Water Quality Division.