

Sampling Vegetation for Wetland Determinations

Hydrophytic Vegetation Criteria: National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM) part 527.4.

The determination of prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation will be made in accordance with the Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual, Technical Report Y-87-1 (COE 87 Manual).

In the event, the vegetation has been altered or removed, NRCS will determine if a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation typically exists in the local area on the same hydric soil map unit under non-altered hydrologic conditions.

Vegetation Sampling Procedures

Step 1. Stratify the site to be evaluated into representative plant communities.

Step 2. Sample the plant community (or communities) using either the routine or comprehensive methodology, as appropriate. The COE 87 Manual describes recommended methodologies.

Routine methodology involves simple, rapidly applied methods that result in sufficient qualitative data for making a determination. A visual assessment of the plant community is possible. This will entail documenting the species present and estimates of relative percent cover.

Comprehensive methods usually require significant time and effort to obtain the needed quantitative data. These methods are used on sites where the determination is complex or if rigorous documentation is required, such as appeals or sites where the plant community is difficult to evaluate using routine methods.

Step 3. Determine the dominant species within each community sampled.

Dominant species are usually identified using the 50/20 rule. See the help sheet for "Applying Vegetation Dominance: 50/20 Rule".

Step 4. Determine the wetland indicator status for each of the dominant species.

The plant indicator status for observed plant species is determined in Nebraska using the [National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands: Central Plains \(Region 5\)](#), or a [searchable database](#). If a plant is not on the main plant list, check the [synonymy section](#). A plant not found on any of these lists is usually considered an upland plant, although exceptions have been found which have an indicator other than upland. Any questions you have regarding the indicator status of unlisted plants may be directed to the state biologist.

Step 5. Determine if the community sampled has a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation.

Use the indicators outlined in the COE 87 Manual. The main indicator of a prevalence of hydrophytic vegetation is:

More than 50 percent of the dominant species are OBL, FACW, or FAC. (FAC⁺ species are considered as wetter than FAC species, while FAC⁻ species are considered as drier than FAC species.) This refers to the number of species that are dominants: Relative percent cover and other measurements of abundance in the community are not considered in this step.

VEGETATION WETNESS CONTINUUM

Wetter						Drier				
OBL	FACW ⁺	FACW	FACW ⁻	FAC ⁺	FAC	FAC ⁻	FACU ⁺	FACU	FACU ⁻	UPL

EXAMPLE:

There are three dominant species in a community with indicator status of: FACW, FAC⁻, and FACU. There is only one dominant species that is FAC or wetter, therefore, predominance of hydrophytic vegetation is not met.

The **FAC-neutral test** may be used if the indicator status of FAC species is questionable. When FAC species occur as dominants along with other dominants that are not FAC (either wetter or drier than FAC), the FAC species can be treated as neutral and the vegetation decision can be based on the number of dominant species wetter than FAC, as compared to the number of species drier than FAC. When a tie occurs or all dominant species are FAC, the nondominant species must be considered. NRCS should do a comprehensive analysis at this point.

Comprehensive analysis generally uses point intercept sampling to compute a **prevalence index** value for the site. Prevalence index computations are described on an attached sheet. Use form NRCS-LTP-34 to document a comprehensive analysis.

- Step 6. Compile plant community data on a simple map of the site (a sketch is satisfactory) that indicates approximate sampling locations.
- Step 7. Record the dominant species, their indicator status, and the decision about whether the vegetation criteria is met on the “Wetland Determination Summary Sheet”.