

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
NORTHERN PLAINS REGION  
WETLAND DETERMINATION AND  
DELINEATION PROCEDURE**

For the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by  
the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 and  
the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996;  
and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act

We, the undersigned, hereby adopt this document,  
with attached state supplements, as the technical basis  
for the identification and mapping  
of wetlands by the Natural Resources Conservation Service  
within the Northern Plains Region.

Shuley Gammo 3/25/98  
Montana State Conservationist Date

Lucinda E. Butts Mar 25 1998  
Wyoming State Conservationist Date

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Scott Hoach Jr 3/25/98  
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## INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the procedure the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the Northern Plains Region will use to identify and map wetlands. It must be used with the National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM) and other documents mandated by NFSAM policy (including the Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual). It replaces the states' off-site mapping conventions that were completed in 1994.

States will review this procedure with their state and federal wetland partners. Partners are encouraged to show their concurrence with this improved approach to making wetland determinations by endorsing each state's finalized copy. States are required to obtain concurrence on this document from the Federal MOA partners.

States may supplement or modify this procedure to address local situations or partner concerns. Supplements or modifications that may result in inconsistencies in mapping must be reviewed and approved by the Northern Plains Regional Conservationist prior to their use.

This procedure considers landscape, soils, inundation and saturation frequency, vegetation, etc. This procedure is used to determine the location of potential wetlands to better define where field visits are needed to conduct or verify wetland determinations. A process defining the level of documentation needed to verify that wetland criteria are met in the field is being developed by the Northern Plains states. This process will be followed to ensure that wetland criteria documentation is consistent between states and with the NFSAM.

Terms in bold type are defined in Appendix A.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Persons making wetland determinations or verifying that one or more wetland criteria (soil, hydrology, vegetation) are met must have the appropriate **Wetland Job Approval Authority** delegated and documented in accordance with current policy.
2. Size of an area is not part of the wetland criteria. Areas large enough to display evidence of wetland on inventory tools or that are noted in the field will be evaluated on-site.
3. Inaccurate determinations will be corrected as allowed under the National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM).
4. **Wetland manipulations**, as defined by the NFSAM and observed on photography or in the field, will be documented and described. NRCS will notify other state or federal agencies of potential wetland related violations in accordance with the NFSAM.

6. **Artificial wetlands (AW)** will be identified by NRCS on **wetland determination maps**. Although AW areas are exempt from the Food Security Act (FSA), they are not exempt from the NRCS technical assistance policy and may or may not be exempt from the Clean Water Act.
7. USDA will maintain documentation of all certified NRCS wetland determinations. Certified wetland determinations will be recorded at Farm Service Agency county offices on their official photography. If digitized determinations are used, they will conform to Federal Geographic Data Committee guidelines.

## INVENTORY TOOLS

Tools used, where available, for wetland identification:

- ◆ National Cooperative Soil Surveys
- ◆ State or Local wetland maps
- ◆ USDI, Fish & Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory (NWI) Maps
- ◆ Farm Service Agency compliance slides
- ◆ Black and white aerial photography
- ◆ Color infrared aerial photography
- ◆ Digital orthoquads (DOQQ) imagery
- ◆ US Geological Survey topographic maps
- ◆ Landsat imagery
- ◆ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood hazard maps
- ◆ Climatic data
- ◆ Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) county hydric soils list.
- ◆ National Engineering Field Handbook, Chapter 19, "Hydrology tools for Wetland Determination"
- ◆ Stream gauge data
- ◆ Previous wetland determinations

## PROCEDURE

Determine whether the wetland determination will be made on **annually tilled cropland**.

For annually tilled cropland:

**Step 1.** Review the soil survey and the FOTG county hydric soils list to identify areas that may be potential wetlands. Identify listed hydric soil map units, map units with hydric soils as part of their name, and map units with conventional wetland symbols as evidence of a wetland. Areas with map units having hydric soils as inclusions, while not evidence, will receive extra attention during Steps 2-4.

**Step 2.** Review NWI maps (where available). Identify any NWI wetlands as evidence of wetland.

**Step 3.** Based on local ground truthing, use the appropriate Farm Service Agency compliance slides to identify potential wetlands and their boundaries. Review all slides for manipulation to help assign the correct wetland determination label (Step 7.). The following signatures are considered evidence of a wetland:

- Hydrophytic vegetation
- Surface water
- Saturated conditions
- Mud flats
- Flooded or drowned-out crops
- Stressed crops due to wetness
- Differences in vegetation due to different planting dates
- Inclusion of wet areas as set-aside or idled
- Unharvested crops
- Isolated areas that are not farmed with the rest of the field
- Areas of greener vegetation (especially during dry years)
- Recurring cropping patterns that avoid wet areas

**Step 4.** Review all appropriate black and white photography, color infrared photography, and other tools for wetland evidence as in Step 3.

**Step 5.** All areas displaying any wetland evidence on the maps and imagery reviewed in Steps 1 through 4 will be considered potential wetlands. Conduct a field visit of all potential wetland areas and document using the Northern Plains process.

**Step 6.** Tracts or portions of tracts having adequate inventory tools, that display no wetland evidence after review of all available tools, may be determined as **non-wetland (NW)** without a field visit provided that a NW call is consistent with the reviewer's knowledge of the site's landscape conditions.

For example, an upland field containing no hydric soil map units or conventional wetland symbols, no NWI wetland areas, and no signatures on aerial photography could be determined non-wetland without a field visit if the reviewer knows site conditions are not likely to support a wetland.

**Step 7.** NRCS personnel having **Wetland Job Approval Authority** will make a certified determination based on the office and field information gathered. Areas will be labeled with the correct wetland determination labels and their boundaries delineated on Farm Service Agency official photography. Labels will be in accordance with current FSA wetland designations and definitions. Tracts or portions of tracts that are not inventoried for wetlands will be clearly outlined on the map and labeled with an "**NI**" (Not Inventoried).

**Determinations** of wetlands adjacent to or within irrigated areas, **saline seeps**, or modified water bodies require special effort because of the difficulty of differentiating between natural and artificial wetland components. If historical photography, soil maps,

and other data can be used to separate such areas, delineate and label them accordingly. If they cannot be separated, designate the area as an **Artificial Wetland and Wetland (AW/W)** or **Artificial Wetland and Farmed Wetland (AW/FW)** or **Artificial Wetland and Farmed Wetland Pasture (AW/FWP)** complex. Such areas are subject to the same program rules as **Wetland (W)**, **Farmed Wetland (FW)**, and **Farmed Wetland Pasture or Hayland (FWP)**.

**Prior converted cropland (PC)** will be determined and labeled consistent with NFSAM policy. Fields containing prior converted cropland and nonwetland will be labeled **PC/NW**.

Consistent with NFSAM policy and state or regional agreements, **other Waters of the U.S. (OW)** areas will be identified and included on certified determinations and accompanying maps.

- Step 8.** When a wetland or an area of hydric soil is found to occur in a map unit that is not documented in the FOTG county hydric soils list as having a hydric component, it is necessary to provide a copy of the map showing the location of this hydric soil to the field office soil scientist or area soil scientist. The soil scientist will determine if the FOTG county hydric soils list needs to be updated. This may require a field visit by the soil scientist to verify the occurrence of a hydric soil and/or to collect additional data. If it is determined that the hydric soil list needs to be updated, the soil scientist will submit a recommendation with supporting documentation to the State Soil Scientist for approval. After the State Soil Scientist has approved updating the hydric soils list, the field soil scientist will update the NASIS database and generate an updated FOTG county hydric soils list.

For areas that are not annually tilled cropland:

- Step 1.** Review the soil survey and the FOTG county hydric soils list to identify areas that may be potential wetlands. Identify listed hydric soil map units, map units with hydric soils as part of their name, map units having hydric soils as inclusions, and map units with conventional wetland symbols.
- Step 2.** Review NWI maps (where available).
- Step 3.** Examine aerial photography and Farm Service Agency compliance slides to help identify potential wetlands and their boundaries.
- Step 4.** Make an on-site wetland determination in accordance with NFSAM policy.
- Step 5.** Complete the certified determination as described in Step 7, above. Updates to the FOTG hydric soils list will be done as described in Step 8, above.