

# WSDOT Guidance on Preliminary Wetland Mitigation Site Selection

WSDOT Updated 2/12/08

This guidance is generic and may vary from region to region and project to project. Please verify with the region biologist and project engineer.

## INITIAL SITE SEARCH CRITERIA & PROCESS

The following are general screening criteria and the process for selecting mitigation sites. Deviation from these criteria is not recommended without Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) input. These criteria also apply when a consultant is performing mitigation site selection. This site selection process augments the WSDOT Wetland Mitigation Process.

### Abbreviations:

DE	Design Engineer
MB	Mitigation Biologist
LA	Landscape Architect/designer
EC	Environmental Coordinator
RH	Region Hydrologist
IDT	Interdisciplinary Team (includes DE, MB, LA, EC, & RH))

### Early Coordination & Mitigation Criteria Identification

The DE, EC, and MB will meet to identify mitigation type, mitigation area size, functions requirements, and watershed location.

1. Property size: The property needs to provide adequate area to complete the mitigation including buffers. DE, EC, and MB should meet to initiate the mitigation site selection process. DE will provide the wetland impact information to EC and MB. The impact information should include approximate impact area, wetland rating, HGM classification, USFWS classification, and approximate area of buffer impact. MB will determine the mitigation ratios and buffer widths. MB will calculate minimum mitigation acreage needs based on the wetland impact. See WSDOT guidance paper, *Wetland Mitigation Area Calculation*. The calculations will be provided to EC and DE.
2. Mitigation functions: At a minimum, the mitigation must provide the same wetland functions as those lost at the wetland impact sites, unless out-of-kind mitigation is proposed. MB will evaluate the impacted areas and complete a functional assessment. This will be provided to DE.
3. Mitigation location: The site needs to be in the same basin/sub-basin and watershed (WRIA) as the wetland impacts. It is sometimes possible to perform mitigation out of the basin/sub-basin in most jurisdictions, however approval will

be needed from the local agency (county or city). EC will verify local agency requirements concerning mitigation site basin and sub-basin location.

### **Mitigation Site Search**

MB will search for potential mitigation sites within the previously identified basin. The initial site selection criteria are as follows:

1. The site cannot be within the highway right-of-way. The site cannot be adjacent to a highway right-of-way if the highway may be widened in the future or if the mitigation site is intended to provide significant wildlife habitat functions.
2. There must be sufficient hydrology on-site to support the wetland mitigation. Look for a site that is adjacent to or contains existing wetland, hydric soils, stream, lake, or river. Sites that contain degraded wetland or that were formerly wetland prior to being filled or ditched should also be considered. Also look for a site that appears to have a source of surface water or indications of groundwater (standing water, willows, skunk cabbage, cottonwoods, cattails, etc.). If the site has existing wetlands, make certain there is sufficient hydrology for both the existing wetland and proposed mitigation area. Coordinate with the RH to make this determination.
3. The property must contain sufficient upland (non-wetland) area for wetland creation to comply with the Governor's Executive Order 89-10 (Protection of Wetlands: "No Net Loss"). The wetland creation area must be at least equal to the total wetland impacts, but ideally would be greater than total wetland impacts. Some sites may have drained wetland areas (such as agricultural land) that will provide re-establishment potential. Wetland re-establishment can be used in place of wetland creation.
4. If the property will only provide sufficient area to meet no net loss, then it must contain adequate wetland area for wetland enhancement. Wetland enhancement is possible if the existing wetland has been degraded, or if the existing wetland plant community and functions can be upgraded. Please note that if the mitigation site is part of a higher rated wetland, a larger buffer area may be required.
5. The site needs to provide sufficient area for wetland buffer per local jurisdiction Critical Areas Ordinance. The required buffer widths are typically dependent upon the wetland rating and adjacent land use.
6. Permanent site access needs to be available on the property for construction, monitoring, and site management. The access needs to accommodate a tracked drill rig, excavator, and dump truck and trailer. Also consider sufficient area necessary for the loading and unloading of the construction equipment.

7. The site will contain, or the contractor will arrange for, adequate area outside of sensitive areas and their buffers for equipment, material storage, and material stockpiling.
8. The property should not contain any restrictive land uses such as overhead power lines or underground utility pipelines. Nor should it be downstream from or adjacent to any land use that could be detrimental to the mitigation site or known contaminated sites. This may include automobile wrecking yard, petroleum storage facility, and agricultural fields that use crop spraying, etc. Dairies and feedlots may be acceptable land uses on adjacent, upslope, or upstream properties, if water quality functions are to be provided on the mitigation site.
9. Does the site contain mature forested or prairie vegetation? Implementation of the mitigation should not be dependent on the removal of mature forested upland vegetative areas to construct the mitigation. Removal of mature trees to implement mitigation must be warranted. Similarly, removal of existing prairie may not be allowed.

#### **Inter-Disciplinary Team Inspection**

Once the potential mitigation sites have been identified, DE will secure rights of entry. The right of entry needs to include language that states that the site will be disturbed by hand digging and soil probe, drilling for piezometer installation (truck and drill rig), and potholing by backhoe. When the rights of entry have been secured for approximately six properties, EC will schedule the IDT site evaluation inspection. The IDT will evaluate the sites and identify which sites are acceptable for mitigation. If none of the sites are suitable for mitigation, the site search will be expanded.