Federal Standard Compliant Wetland Data Project Coordination and Communications Plan

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Wetlands Inventory

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is the principal federal agency tasked with providing information to the public on the extent of the nation's wetland and deepwater habitats, as well as the status and trends of the nation's wetlands over time.

The USFWS's National Wetlands Inventory Program (NWI) fulfills this mandate and produces and distributes online maps and the underlying geospatial data on the nation's wetland and deepwater habitats. It also assesses changes in these habitats through the decadal Wetlands Status and Trends reports to Congress. These complementary products support policy development, land management planning and analyses, and research and modeling activities.

The NWI Program is part of the USFWS Headquarters Ecological Services Program with leadership staff based in Falls Church, VA; the Database Operations team based in Madison, WI; and the Field Operations staff dispersed throughout the country.

1.2 Purpose of Project Coordination and Communications Plan

This document is intended to clarify how NWI coordinates and reviews the production of federal standard compliant wetlands data. Outlining the process as well as the roles and responsibilities of the Field Operations staff and partners will facilitate the production of wetland data and its incorporation into the wetlands data layer.

2 Project Goals and Critical Success Factors

There are regional differences in wetland habitat types and various mapping conventions have been used on projects throughout the U.S. Wetland mapping data may vary depending on the mapping style of the photo-interpreter, the degree to which automation was used, and goals and objectives of specific projects. In response to these variations, the NWI Program strives for consistency in the linework and data production and the staff work towards improved coordination of mapping projects and consistent guidance to project partners and contractors. Identifying and relating the project goals and critical success factors with NWI Program staff early on is critical for expediting the data production process.

3 Communications Management

Communication with NWI Program staff in the earliest phases of project development will greatly improve project efficiency. Partners funding wetland mapping projects are strongly encouraged to contact NWI Field Operations staff and establish a project-specific relationship early on. The NWI Program can offer technical assistance including: example scope of work (SOW) text to ensure that federal standards are met; identifying existing NWI-approved mapping vendors; and reviewing proposal submissions.

A list of NWI staff can be found on the NWI program website: https://www.fws.gov/program/national-wetlands-inventory/contact-us.

4 Quality Management

All federally funded wetland mapping projects must comply with the Federal Wetland Mapping Standard as well as the Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States. Furthermore, wetland map producers should use the Data Collection Requirements and Procedures for Mapping Wetland, Deepwater, and Related Habitats of the United States as a guide. Data producers are advised to thoroughly read the three documents prior to project initiation. Key points include, but are not limited to:

- 95% of the features in the data set should have a horizontal accuracy error with respect to true ground position that is equal to or smaller than 49.21 ft. (15 m.) for estuarine and lacustrine deepwater habitat features or 16.40 ft. (5 m.) for all other features.
- The minimum target mapping units are as follows:
    - 0.5 acres for wetlands in the Continental U.S. (CONUS), Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and U.S. Territories.
    - 1 acre for estuarine and lacustrine deepwater habitat types in the Continental U.S. (CONUS), Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and U.S. Territories.
    - 5 acres for all habitat types in Alaska.
- There is no minimum wetland feature size. Any size polygon can be accepted, provided it is a representation of a wetland feature that is visible or verified. Mapping intricate sub-delineation of wetland types within a wetland is often not warranted.
- The standard does not require mapping of narrow linear habitats (NLH) which are defined as non-vegetated features that are <15 ft. width. If project goals require the inclusion of NLH features beyond the Wetland Mapping Standard, these features must be submitted to the NWI in a separate linear data layer that is provided within the national dataset schema. Refer to the Mapping Standard Compliant Wetland Data- Supplement document, the Mapping Narrow Linear Habitats as Line Features document, and the Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats Classification for National Wetlands Inventory Lines document for more information.
- Coastal project boundaries should include any coastal features/wetlands, ideally by extending boundaries to the NOAA 3-mile line (note: USFWS can assist with creating these boundaries if needed).
- Data should be in the Albers projection.

5 Compliance Related Planning

All data producers are responsible for verifying that they have necessary approvals and permits in order to comply with land access, and for federally funded projects, the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106, and the Endangered Species Act Section 7.

6 Schedule/Time Management

Below is an example outline of a complete NWI project timeline from start to finish. Partners and vendors should be familiar with this project framework and understand how quality control and master geodatabase integration fit into the process and timeline.

6.1 Project Initiation and Check Out

- An initial project proposal is developed, stakeholders including Federal, State, Tribal, and Local agencies are notified, and funding is secured.
- IF NWI was not involved in the funding proposal process, the Project Lead contacts NWI via their Regional Wetland Coordinator, the Field Operations Team Lead, and/or the Wetlands Database Administrator to alert them of the project.
- The statement of work is refined, and the contract or agreement is directed to established venders that can map federal standard compliant wetland data.
    - There should also be a Quality Control (QC) Plan in place. Alternatively, a QC Plan can be developed during the project kick-off meeting (see below).
- A vendor/contractor is selected.
- The vendor contacts the NWI Master Geodatabase Administrator or the Regional NWI Coordinator to request a NWI project checkout.
    - The Vendor provides a geospatial boundary for the project as a shapefile or a feature class in a geodatabase.
- The NWI Wetland Coordinator will be identified as the NWI Project Lead.
- The vendor downloads and completes a Project Initiation Form from the NWI website.
- The NWI Master Geodatabase Administrator will respond via email with a link to download a 'Checkout zip file', including two databases with: 1) NWI reference data to inform in the mapping process; and 2) an empty file geodatabase with the NWI schema structure where vendors can populate their mapping projects.
    - NWI Program tracking begins.
    - NWI Program assigns a project tracking number, checked out and delivered to the vendor.
    - The project is entered into the NWI's internal "Active Projects" tracking database.

6.2 Project Kick-off Meeting

- A coordination meeting can be initiated by the partner, mapping vendor, or NWI Wetland Coordinator. All three entities should be included in the meeting.
- Meeting objectives and agenda items:
    - Review the completed Project Initiation Form and revise as needed.
    - Review the primary points of contact for communications related to the project.
    - Review statement of work, contract, and agreement requirements.
    - Discuss NWI role and responsibilities.
    - Discuss partner, vendor, and subcontractors (if any) roles and responsibilities.
    - Develop a fieldwork plan.
    - Confirm or determine the proper photo or imagery base and year to be used for data development.
    - Discuss and/or develop a Data Quality Control Plan (see example) with multiple data review iterations and tentative submission dates. The Data Quality Control Plan is a generally a non-binding document that assists all parties with timeline development and pre-planning.
    - Plan a tentative schedule of recurring meetings (suggested at least quarterly) to revisit timelines, answer routine questions, plan field work, etc.
    - Discuss any additional needs including requirements that may affect producing federal standard compliant data or other topics.
- Follow up information and decision making can occur via email.

6.3 Data Production and Review

- The vendor produces federal standard compliant data in accordance with contract agreement requirements and guidance from NWI.
- Data production includes field activities and internal QC as identified in a Scope of Work (SOW).
- The vendor and NWI engage in iterative quality control reviews according to the NWI Data Quality Control Plan until 100% of the final product meets the QC requirements. In order to provide sufficient time for NWI staff to review the data, vendors are advised to submit their final product no later than four weeks prior to a contract or agreement end date. Projects with ancillary products will need more time for additional review.
- The vendor is responsible for 100% internal QC of each iteration of their data and running the NWI Verification Tool prior to submitting for NWI Program QC.
- The vendor must provide the imagery and any ancillary data sources that are used in the photo interpretive process.
- NWI can provide a FileShare link for data transfer.
- NWI will provide comments back to the vendor in a spatial annotation, linear or polygonal feature class format, in addition to a written narrative, if necessary.
    - NWI will flag examples of required and suggested changes as the project area is reviewed from cell to cell or by cardinal direction. Feedback may include multiple examples of a generalized comment as well as many examples of lower priority recommendations (e.g., assigning a different water regime). Comments for one area should be extrapolated to the entire project area.

6.4 Final Submission

- The vendor will submit the data and the project map report to the NWI Project Lead for QA/QC. NWI is responsible for at least 20% QC of the submitted data. Generally, up to 30% of the total project area will be reviewed for QC purposes.
- Example map reports and a template can be found here. Accepted data will be placed in the queue for publication in the next NWI Mapper update release.
- March 15th is the deadline for the May 1st mapper update and July 15th is the deadline for inclusion in the October 1st mapper update.