

Wetlands Mapping Standard Questions and Answers

Background

The Department of Interior announced the adoption of a Wetlands Mapping Standard that provides minimum requirements and guidelines to help standardize wetlands mapping efforts. The new standards are designed to guide current and future wetlands digital mapping projects and enhance the overall quality and consistency of wetlands data.

Q: What is a wetland and why map it?

A: Wetlands are among the Nation's most biologically productive and economically important habitat types. They cover approximately five percent of the surface of the conterminous United States and are abundant in certain states—and rare in others. The mapping of wetlands is essential to calculating wetland losses and gains. Once wetlands are mapped, many types of assessments can be performed. Wetland assessments are critical to: monitor wetland health, make permit decisions, target volunteer wetlands restoration, maintain biodiversity, restore species, measure mitigation success, undertake watershed management, protect water supplies, and enhance community planning efforts.

Q: What is the background on the development of the Wetlands Mapping Standard?

A: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the federal agency responsible for developing and overseeing the digital mapping of wetlands nationwide and providing that information to the public and other agencies. Wetland map products are currently maintained and made available by the Service's National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). Prior to this, there were no standards approved by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) for accurately mapping wetlands.

Q: Where is the mapped information housed?

A: The Service's maintains an extensive geodatabase of wetlands information. It includes the digitally uploaded wetlands data, including information contributed by outside agencies and groups. This forms the Wetlands Spatial Data Layer of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). A national standard was needed to facilitate inclusion of new wetlands data into the NSDI.

Q. What is the NSDI and how is it maintained?

A: Geographic information is critical to promoting economic development, improving stewardship of our natural resources, and protecting the environment. The FGDC is an interagency committee that promotes the coordinated development, use, sharing, and dissemination of geospatial data on a national basis. The FGDC coordinates the federal government's development of the NSDI a nationwide data publishing effort.

Q. Why is a Wetlands Mapping Standardization necessary?

A: Standards prevent duplication of effort and are the key that opens the door to cooperation in maintaining the consistency of data. In the last year, only a third of the new and updated data added to the NSDI was produced using funds from the NWI. The Wetlands Mapping Standard was developed and now formally endorsed by the FGDC as mandated by Office of Management and Budget Circular A-16 of August 19, 2002. http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/rewrite/circulars/a016/a016_rev.html

Q: What is the geographic area covered by features stored in the geodatabase?

A: Five discrete geographic areas were designated as wetland mapping areas. They are named CONUS (conterminous United States), Alaska, Hawaii, PR-VI (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and Pac Trust (Pacific Trust Territories). Alaska contains the state of Alaska, including the Aleutian Islands. Hawaii contains the principle islands of Hawaii, including Hawaii, Maui, Kahoolawe, Lanai, Molokai, Oahu, Kauai, and Niihau. CONU contains the 48 conterminous states. PR - VI contains the islands of Puerto Rico and the U. S. Virgin Islands. Pac Trust contains the U.S. island possessions and trust territories of the South Pacific.

Q. What are the components of the Wetlands Mapping Standard?

A. The standard begins with an introduction section addressing objectives, scope, applicability, related standards, development procedure, and maintenance authority. The next section covers the definitional and quality requirements of the standard. These requirements include source imagery, wetlands classification, (habitat definitions), metadata, targeted mapping unit, and quality components, such as completeness, accuracy, and logical consistency.

Q. What is the scope of the standard?

A. The standard directs the incorporation of all federally funded wetlands data into the geodatabase (administered by the Service) and the Wetlands Data Layer of the NSDI.

Q. When is the use of this Wetlands Mapping Standard mandatory?

A. Use is mandatory when wetland mapping projects are federally funded or conducted by the Federal government. Federal funded mapping projects are those financially supported either directly or indirectly by one or more federal agencies. Non-federally funded projects are supported by state, local, or private funds with no contribution either directly or indirectly from Federal sources.

Q: What is the effective date of this standard?

A. The effective date is July 7, 2009. Federally funded projects that began prior to the mapping standard's effective date will be exempt. Also exempt are federally funded projects for which contracts have been finalized prior to the effective date; even if the actual work has not begun.

Q: Does this standard relate to regulatory or jurisdictional analysis?

A. The standard is neither designed, nor intended, to support legal, regulatory, or jurisdictional analyses of wetland mapping products, nor does it attempt to differentiate between regulatory and non-regulatory wetlands.

Q. Is there a mechanism to obtain an exemption to the Wetlands Mapping Standard?

A. Yes, An exemption from a specific minimum requirement in the standard may be granted based on data quality, but not on cost. An authorized exemption or waiver from a specific minimum requirement in the standard may be requested in order to incorporate non-compliant wetlands data. Allowing extremely limited and well-justified inclusion of non-compliant data where data meeting the standard does not yet exist may allow for comprehensive coverage of "best available" data more quickly, meeting the needs of many end users.

Q. How do I obtain a waiver?

A. The official waiver form, instructions, and contact information are available from the FWS at <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/wetlandslayer/wetlandssubcommittee.html>. The FWS is the final authority for approving or rejecting the waiver request.

Q. How do I get a copy of the Wetlands Mapping Standard?

A. The standard may be downloaded from the Internet at:
<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/documents/gNSDI/FGDCWetlandsMappingStandard.pdf>

Q. How will the public obtain access to the wetlands data and find more information on this standard?

A. Please see links below.

Download Wetlands Digital Data

URL: <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/Data/index.html>

Frequently Asked Questions about Wetlands

URL: <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/FAQs.html>

Background on FGDC Wetlands Subcommittee

<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/wetlandslayer/wetlandssubcommittee.html>