

**RIM-WRP**  
**Wetland Restoration Eligibility and Identification Guidance**  
**3/1/2011**

The primary purpose of the RIM-WRP partnership program is the restoration of drained and altered wetlands. The identification and evaluation of these drained and altered wetlands is therefore an important part of the eligibility assessment and conservation planning process.

For initial eligibility determinations, a simple process to identify restorable wetland areas will be used. This simple assessment does not require an extensive site assessment. The basis for this simple assessment will have two elements to it. The first element includes identifying the extent of wetland areas in a parcel through a review of available resources and the second is the verification of drainage and/or alteration of those wetland areas.

### **Step 1 – Identify Extent of Wetland Areas**

Wetlands areas are best identified within a parcel through the identification and mapping of hydric soils. The NRCS Web Soil Survey will easily display for each identified parcel the extent and area of all hydric and non-hydric soil map units (SMU). It also will provide the classification of each map unit along with its hydric rating

When attempting to identify wetlands through the presence of hydric soils, it is important to understand that many soil map units are typically composed of one or more soil types and will often contain inclusions of dissimilar soils that are not mapped. In other words, a map unit that is identified as being hydric may have small areas, or inclusions, of non-hydric soils within it. Conversely, a non-hydric map unit may have inclusions of hydric soils within it. The extent of these dissimilar inclusions, if they exist, varies with each map unit and also varies from site to site for the same soil map unit. Because of this, a review of the soil survey alone will not always provide the most accurate assessment of the hydric soils or wetlands. A review of other resources such as aerial photos in addition to a site visit will be necessary to accurately identify the number and extent of wetlands within a parcel offered for enrollment.

A list of resources to review and consider when identifying wetland areas includes:

- NRCS Web Soil Survey
- Current and historic aerial slides and/or photos looking for wet signatures during wetter years
- USDA wetland determinations (identification of “PC”, “FW” and “FWP” wetlands)
- FWS National Wetland Inventory Maps
- USGS Topographical Maps, Lidar or other survey data (if available)
- Drained wetland inventories
- Onsite investigations to determine extent of suspected hydric soil inclusions
- Extent of drainage works on the property
- Cropping history of the parcel
- Knowledge of landform type and depressional or wet areas that may exist (landowner discussions)
- Last but not least, sound professional judgment

### **Step 2 – Identify Drained/Altered Wetland Areas**

The simple process identified in Step 1 will provide a fairly accurate assessment of wetland areas that exists within an identified parcel. This assessment however will identify and include both existing and drained/altered wetlands. As program eligibility is dependent only on the presence and extent of drained/altered wetlands, the extent of those areas must be identified and mapped separate from existing wetland areas.

By definition drained/altered wetlands include wetland areas where the hydrology, vegetation or soils have been altered or removed, adversely affecting the functions and values of the former wetland. This is a fairly broad definition and includes all physically “drained” and “altered” wetlands along with “non-drained” farmed or

cropped wetlands that meet program cropping history requirements. The enrollment of these drained/altered wetlands and subsequent restoration of hydrology and/or vegetation constitutes the defined area of restorable wetland within each parcel.

Note that for applications that are funded in this partnership program, the respective conservation plans that will be prepared for both RIM and WRP intend to use this same general process for defining acres of existing wetlands and of restorable wetlands. In doing so, the following resulting benefits will occur:

- Practice acres within the respective conservation plans will be consistent
- The same or identical plan maps can be prepared
- Pending design and construction plans will not affect practice acres
- Conservation plan practice acres will not be subject to change unless easement boundaries and acres are modified, and
- By definition, this process will in many cases, provide a more accurate account of actual wetland acres of all types restored.

### **Step 3 – Determine Extent of Restoration that is Possible**

A final step in the eligibility determination process is a preliminary determination of the extent of restoration that can be performed. For a site to be eligible, it is required that it must be feasible and practicable to restore a majority (more than 50%) of its identified drained/altered wetland area. This is defined as:

- ◆ Wetlands with hydrologic manipulation – The restoration of drained and other hydrologically altered wetlands includes removing, blocking, manipulating or otherwise rendering inoperable any existing on-site wetland drainage system(s) and/or other wetland alteration(s) in an attempt to restore hydrology to these former wetland areas. This also includes the restoration of appropriate vegetative plant communities in these areas, as deemed necessary.
- ◆ Wetlands cropped under natural conditions – The restoration of cropped, natural wetlands that meet program cropping history requirements includes the establishment of appropriate vegetative plant communities in these wetland areas.

It is NOT required or expected that any detailed site assessment or survey work be conducted to support this initial determination for eligibility. It will be expected though that at minimum, available resources and drainage maps will be reviewed and when deemed necessary, a site visit performed to help make this initial determination.

### **Conclusion**

Eligible applications that are selected for RIM-WRP funding will be required to undergo a comprehensive site analysis which in many cases will include a topographic survey and comprehensive drainage assessment of the parcel. The results of this analysis will be reviewed to verify program eligibility requirements. The results of this analysis may also require that easement boundaries and sizes be modified therefore; it is recommended that every effort be made to complete this work prior to finalizing easement boundaries and performing legal surveys of the parcels.