

Wetland Functional Assessment Guidebooks Using the Hydrogeomorphic Approach Application -Wetland Mitigation Banking, Restoration, and Large Development Projects

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In 1996, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) organized representatives from eleven state and federal agencies and from several private organizations to develop a scientifically based wetland functional assessment method. In 2000, after several years of field work and development, an Interagency Memorandum of Understanding was signed by eleven agencies for developing wetland guidebooks using the Hydrogeomorphic Approach (HGM)^a. This agreement committed the signatory agencies to cooperatively develop a common scientific platform using the HGM Approach and HGM Guidebooks to assess wetland functions. Since that time three guidebooks have been developed: (1) Flat Wetlands on Precipitation Driven and discontinuous permafrost in Interior Alaska, (2) Flat/Slope Wetland Complexes in the Cook Inlet Basin Ecoregion, (3) Riverine and River Proximal Wetlands in Coastal Southeast and Southcentral Alaska. These guidebooks were developed using the procedures identified by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the *National Action Plan to Develop the Hydrogeomorphic Approach for Assessing Wetlands Function*.^b The HGM Approach and the HGM Guidebooks provide agencies, private sector, and the public with a way to classify wetlands and to assess wetland functions based on local characteristics.

My presentation will briefly describe HGM wetland functional assessment methods. I will also describe in greater detail how the Alaskan HGM guidebooks have been used in wetland restoration, Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting project design, mitigation banks, and a large development projects. I will be using three specific examples including Sealaska Corporation's Regional Mitigation Bank, a large mining project in Interior Alaska, and a wetlands restoration project in Juneau, Alaska.

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^a State and Federal Interagency Memorandum of Understanding, March 2000, between the Alaska Departments: Environmental Conservation, Fish and Game, Natural Resources, Transportation and Public Facilities, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Region, and U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highways Administration. Concerning the Development of a Wetland Functional Assessment Method and Guidebooks: The Hydrogeomorphic Approach (HGM).

^b Federal Register: August 16, 1996 (Vol. 61, No. 160, Pages 42593-42603); Federal Register: June 20, 1997 (Vol. 62, No. 119, pages 33607-33620).