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AQUATIC HABITAT GUIDELINES IN WASHINGTON

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Abstract

Originating as the Stream Corridor Management Workgroup early in 1997, the first major milestone in seeking a statewide-integrated approach to working in and near streams, lakes, and wetlands was a Stream Corridor Management Symposium, held in Ellensburg in June 1998. Major partners in this effort were the Washington Departments of Transportation, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife.

The three-day symposium was structured with three areas of emphasis:

- The first section presented the fundamentals of watershed assessment, stream channel classification, hydrology, geomorphology, aquatic and terrestrial riparian ecology, function and fate of woody debris in streams.
- The second emphasis section was a presentation of alternative approaches to stream restoration, streambank stabilization, and the regulatory environment.
- The third emphasis section was an intensive, all-day peer review workshop for the draft *Integrated Streambank Protection Guidelines (ISPG)*, developed by a team led by Ken Bates and Michelle Kramer, at WDFW.

Continuing efforts by WDOT toward regulatory streamlining, the rapidly expanding list of anadromous salmonids designated Threatened or Endangered under the federal ESA, the creation of Washington's salmon recovery plan and Salmon Recovery Funding Board, combined with a widespread recognition that many private and government stream habitat restoration efforts were well-meant but poorly designed and executed. Many regulatory agency staff have general skills in resource and environmental management, and project proponents are often lay persons. Neither regulated community or regulators typically have skills in stream sciences. Anadromous salmonid recovery efforts must incorporate important marine and estuarine habitats, as well as freshwater components.

The Stream Corridor Management Symposium peer review workshop, subsequent technical editing and rewriting of the ISPG led to an understanding among WDOT, WDFW and Ecology that a systematic, structured approach was needed to address the technical and scientific dimensions of most routine activities and initiatives for watershed restoration efforts throughout Washington. Thus, the original workgroup became the steering committee for what is now known as the Aquatic Habitat Guidelines project.

The project addressed this huge task by developing a systematic survey of the issues and current state of the knowledge on categories including gravel mining and dredging in freshwater environments, marine dredging, freshwater overwater structures, marine overwater structures, process based channel design, treated wood in marine and freshwater environments, floodplain-riparian ecological issues, shoreline modifications, et cetera. These "white papers" were drafted by the best experts obtainable from resource and environmental management agencies, academia, and the private sector, and were subjected to peer review and iterative revision as in accepted scientific practice. From these peer reviewed white papers, a number of Guidance Documents will be produced, similar in scope and utility to the ISPG and guidance prepared by WDFW for culvert design and installation, and fishways and fish passage.

An \$850K grant from the Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board underwrote eight advanced White Paper drafts, which will be available by the end of April, 2001, for review and downloading electronically, with links from the participating agencies. The first guidance document will be the much-needed Channel Design Guidelines, which will be ready in 2002.

The US Army Corps of Engineers is joining the AHG Steering Committee, with their need for ESA programmatic for Section 404 CWA permitting and Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act responsibilities. NMFS and USFWS were invited, and attended the peer review workshop in Tacoma in November 2000.

Funding for continued development of guidelines documents for freshwater and marine overwater structures, treated wood, shoreline modifications, dredging and gravel mining, and AHG training and implementation are not yet committed by participating agencies.

The AHG program will be integrated into statewide implementation of transportation facility design, construction and maintenance, streamlined local, state, and federal regulatory review of activities in or near aquatic, riparian, and floodplain environments, stream restoration design, and we anticipate federal review of projects, programmatics, and Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) under Sections 4D, 7 and 10 of the federal ESA, using AHGs. Aquatic Habitat Guidelines are to be integrated into the Washington Salmon Recovery Plan, grant review under Centennial Clean Water Fund and Section 319, federal Clean Water Act grants, and other grant sources.