



# Wetland Section Training Plan

## Regional Training Schedule & Core Curriculum

### Purpose

In 2017, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Wetland Section investigated the opportunity to provide regional technical and regulatory training to its Local and State partners who administer the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). The goals of this plan are to offer training that is more regionally relevant, accessible, and affordable than current options; reach a broader audience; alleviate the current “growing pains” that the BWSR Academy is experiencing by significantly reducing the content associated with wetlands presented at the Academy; and reduce Wetland Section staff training workloads by preparing a core set of technical and regulatory training modules that can be used for training events around the State.

This training plan includes two phases: 1) A move from Academy based training to regional training; and 2) integration of online modules for administrative training beginning in 2019. The transition would begin in 2018 with full implementation of Regional Training in calendar year 2019. On-line content would be developed as time and resources permitted beginning in 2018. The Wetland Section would still remain involved in BWSR Academy but the level of participation would be significantly reduced from the levels seen in 2017 and 2016. A preliminary list of topics that would be covered at BWSR Academy are provided later in this document.

### Regional Training Structure- PHASE I

Recognizing the need for accessible, affordable, and relevant training; the first phase of the plan emphasizes regional training. The goal is to offer, at a minimum, one training session in both the northern and southern areas of the State per year. The length of the training sessions will likely vary to accommodate specific local training needs but they are anticipated to be at least a half day and typically no more than a full day. The actual location would rotate through wetland specialist work areas. The content would be centered on the WCA Core Curriculum defined in this document, technical training of the three parameters of wetland delineation, and regional topics chosen by the Wetland Specialist responsible for organizing the session.

This plan also recognizes a training need within other State Agencies who administer WCA. Local Government Units (LGU) and Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) members from other agencies will be invited and encouraged to attend these regional training sessions. Specific topics and other Agency’s internal procedures could be integrated into training as value-added subjects. Future implementation of this plan could also include collaborations with other stakeholders and professional organizations.

Another optional facet to this phase is regional LGU meetings. Wetland Specialists will be encouraged to hold regular LGU meetings in their work areas (LGU attendance is optional). These meetings will be scheduled as needed but will most likely occur during the winter when WCA workload lessens. The meetings will be focused on reoccurring themes, common scenarios, and any rule or policy updates that may affect WCA implementation in the area. Each LGU meeting agenda should be reviewed and approved by Section Management prior to the meeting to ensure consistent messaging throughout the State.

## Training Schedule

Training sessions would be a full day and rotate around the State. Again, the length of the training sessions could be longer to accommodate specific local training needs. The location, frequency, and duration of each training event would be tailored to the specific training needs for a particular area as determined by the Wetland Specialist in coordination with the Training Plan Working Group. Training that involves a field component would occur during the “shoulder” seasons of the year- late May/early June and late September/early October. For example, the spring session may be held in Rochester followed by the fall session in Bemidji. The next year the spring session would be held in Duluth and the fall session in Marshall. However, training that is focused on topics that don’t require a field component could be held in the winter. The idea is to rotate the location in order to make the regular training as accessible to as many LGUs as possible. The rotation should also periodically include central locations around the “fringes” of the metro area (i.e. St Cloud). Also, while the training opportunities will be advertised state-wide, the section could consider sending invitations to specific LGUs based on location and training needs.

The training content (described below in the Core Curriculum) would address topics that are routinely presented at BWSR Academy and would thus eliminate the need for these to be covered at that event. Instead, beginning in 2018, the full wetland track that has been presented at the Academy will no longer be necessary. Topics such as WCA 101, Rule updates, and the Plant & Soils lab will continue to be presented at the Academy but will be incorporated into the Basic, Program, and Technical tracks, respectively. The Wetland Section will retain representation on the Academy Planning Team-albeit with fewer team members. Other topics could be added to the Academy agenda as determined necessary by the Academy Planning Team. Most of the wetland track topics normally presented at the Academy, however, will be covered in-depth during regional training beginning in the fall of 2018. An additional benefit of this approach is that it could potentially provide the opportunity for future Academy wetland topics to focus on wetland aspects that interface with other BWSR programs such as water planning.

This plan proposes to offer the first Regional Training in the fall of 2018. As an effort to minimize a “gap” in training, back-to-back sessions in both the North and South regions will be held in September and October of 2018. The staggered regional training schedule (making use of the shoulder seasons) described previously will then formally begin in 2019.

Finally, this plan proposes to maintain a Wetland Section Training Plan Working Group which would, at minimum, consist of the BWSR Wetland Delineation Certification Program (WDCP) Coordinator/Wetland Professional Association (WPA) liaison and Wetland Section Academy Planning Team member. This working group will solicit specific training needs during the first Section staff meeting of the year and then set the training rotation schedule accordingly based on need. The Working Group will assist the Wetland Specialist who is facilitating the training event with organizing topic content, identifying presenters/trainers, and preparing course materials. The Working Group can also assist with identifying local trainers and/or others with a relevant knowledge base that could add other perspectives/information to the training event.

Figure 1: Proposed Training Plan Schedule

BWSR Wetland Section Training Plan													
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	
WDCP						5 day Delineation Soils 1/2 Day Veg Scavenger Hunt	Advanced Plant ID	Basic Plant ID	1 Day Delineation	5 day Delineation Soils 1/2 Day Veg Scavenger Hunt	Aerial Review		
BWSR Academy			Planning Mtg	Planning Mtg			Planning Mtg				Academy		
Wetland Training		Regional LGU Mtgs			Regional Training						Regional Training		
Other	Section Mtg			Section Mtg				All Staff Mtg		Section Mtg			

## WCA Core Curriculum

The WCA Core Curriculum outlined in the following bullets is intended to cover the fundamental knowledge needed for a LGU to effectively administer WCA. This plan proposes to formalize a syllabus for each of these core areas that will be the basis for the material presented at the Regional Trainings and/or LGU meetings. This information would also be integrated into the online modules described in Phase II of this plan. These topics will not remain static. Rather, emphasis should be placed on updating training topics to reflect changes in wetland science, Rule, and Agency policy. Additionally, the curriculum should encourage a “hands on” approach in small group settings with the inherent flexibility to be able to address regional aspects of these topics.

- WCA 101** - An overview of the WCA including scope and definitions. In addition, focus on the basic administrative requirements, LGU duties, TEP functions as well as available exemptions and no-loss criteria.
- Exemptions** - This course will provide explanations about how to navigate the tricky language of exemptions and how to determine exemption applicability. It will provide exposure to all exemptions, but will focus on exemptions most commonly used within the geographic area of the training. The hosting Wetland Specialist(s) will determine which specific exemptions need more in depth coverage. This course will also clarify what constitutes an exemption determination/decision and how to handle exemption applications and noticing requirements.
- Delineation Review** - The focus of this course is to assist the LGU/WCA TEP member in the review of wetland delineations both in the field and reports. The contents will choose from these core ideas: review of technical parameters for identifying wetlands (field indicators), regional supplements, 2015 Joint Guidance for Submitting Wetland Delineations, 2016 Guidance for Offsite Hydrology/Wetland Determinations, delineation report checklist, report contents (maps, data sheets, content, etc.), Chapter 5 Difficult Situations, growing season, Level 1, 2, 3, Comprehensive, informal approvals, WCA process for noticing and any other regional topics as identified by W.S.
- Replacement Plans & Sequencing**- The WCA has a very prescriptive process for reviewing replacement plan applications. However, often times these applications involve multiple iterations, extended timeframes, and other aspects that require the use of flexibility and judgment by LGU staff and TEP members. This course will focus on how WCA permits wetland impacts and include examples of complicated application processes and discuss how they might be handled by LGU

staff in ways that are fair to the applicant, consistent with WCA rules, and accommodating to TEP members.

- **Wetland Replacement/Mitigation** - Replacement of lost wetland functions and values is the fundamental concept behind WCA. Attendees will become familiar with all three methods to provide wetland replacement including project specific, wetland banking, and the in-lieu fee program (ILF) as well as the review and approval process associated with each. Emphasis will be placed on the establishment of wetland banks under WCA and coordination of the review process with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under the Federal Clean Water Act as well as site selection and the concept of a Compensation Planning Framework (CPF).
- **Enforcement Procedures & Appeals** - MN Rule 8420.0900 outlines WCA enforcement procedures. Strict adherence to this part is always recommended. This course provides an overview of enforcement authority, cease and desist orders, restoration and replacement orders, and appeals.
- **“Soft Skills”** - At times administering WCA can confront LGUs with difficult situations. This course helps develop “tools” in dealing with difficult landowners, conflict resolution, effective communication, technical writing, meeting facilitation, the “spirit” of public service, and leadership.
- **Administrative & Noticing Requirements** - WCA requires that most types of applications be noticed for review and comment. Topics in this course will assist newer LGU staff (or staff that need a refresher) on all aspects of WCA administration. Core concepts will include: reviewing applications for completeness; writing complete, informative, and legally defensible notices; writing accurate findings of fact; organizing and running a TEP; and data management with the integration of Geographic Information Systems. This course will also cover the decision making timelines and requirements of MN Statute 15.99.

## Administering WCA Modules- PHASE II

Another training need that has been identified is to provide basic administrative training for the day-to-day responsibilities of a typical WCA LGU. Phase II of this plan proposes to publish online modules teaching the WCA Core Curriculum. As workload allows, this plan proposes to begin producing these modules in 2019. The modules will be modeled after current hydrology modules found on BWSR’s website. The target audience is WCA LGUs with less than two years of experience or as a “refresher” for other staff. There will be a suite of modules for staff to complete in order to have a basic knowledge base of the fundamentals of WCA administrative responsibilities. Each module will vary but most will likely be approximately 20-30 minutes. They will essentially be a “condensed” version of the full WCA Core Curriculum. The suite should contain approximately 3-5 modules focused on the fundamental administrative responsibilities. They could be structured with ascending levels of difficulty with quizzes at the end of each module. One key benefit is that the training suite will remain online allowing the end user can watch them in their office without any expense other than their own time.

## Recommendations

The following are specific staff recommendations to the Wetland Section Manager and Senior Management Team (SMT) to implement both Phase I and Phase II of the Training Plan as written:

- 1)** Section staff continue to participate in the Academy Planning Team. However, the BWSR Academy Wetland Track should be dissolved in 2018 with the incorporation of wetland-related topics into other existing tracks. This plan proposes to present 3-4 topics per year. Specific sessions/topics to keep include WCA 101, Soil & Vegetation workshop, Rule & Policy session (as needed), emerging issue session (as needed). Wetland topics that interface with other programs such as water planning should be emphasized;
- 2)** Define a WCA Core Curriculum based on the content of the plan and prepare training materials for use in the fall of 2018;
- 3)** Implement Phase I in the fall of 2018 with the first two Regional Training sessions. In 2019, begin offering rotating regional training and LGU meetings as scheduled by wetland specialist;
- 4)** Define the scope and content of the online modules described in Phase II of the plan and, subject to time and resource availability, begin developing online content in 2019;
- 5)** The Section should form a Wetland Section Training Team (WSTT) to meet on an as needed basis, but no less than once each year. The team should at minimum consist of the staff Wetland Delineation Certification Program (WDCP) Coordinator/Wetland Professional Association (WPA) liaison and Wetland Section Academy Planning Team member. The SMT point of contact for this team will be the Section Manager. The WSTT would be tasked with coordinating the implementation of this plan and training schedule. Another task would be to maintain a list of training topics based on emerging issues, common scenarios, reoccurring issues, etc. Finally, the WSTT should periodically assess the effectiveness of this plan and adjust as necessary.