



Minnesota Mitigation Newsletter

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers & MN Board of Water and Soil Resources

Vol. I | Fall 2019

2019 Outreach Sessions

In January 2019 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District (St. Paul District) and MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) hosted workshops for mitigation bank sponsors, consultants, and other professionals, aimed at soliciting feedback and discussion on the current state and federal mitigation bank processes with a specific focus on ways to improve consistency and efficiency in Minnesota.

As a result of these workshops, the agencies developed a report summarizing session results and agency recommendations. The report for these listening sessions was finalized on March 31, 2019 and is available upon request from either Tim Smith at BWSR (tim.j.smith@state.mn.us) or Leslie Day at the Corps (leslie.e.day@usace.army.mil). The report includes agency recommendations resulting from the feedback received at the listening sessions.

In April 2019, the agencies hosted two training events for the mitigation banking community. These outreach events included presentations on various mitigation topics, agency updates, discussion on forthcoming guidance (see page 3) and agency process changes. Based on the positive response from the over 70 attendees of the trainings, the agencies plan to hold additional training events covering different topics in 2020.



Leslie Day, Corps Mitigation Coordinator, presenting at the Bloomington training

A Mitigation Newsletter?

For several years agency staff at the state and federal level have struggled with establishing and maintaining a line of communication with the mitigation community in Minnesota. The volume of wetland banking activity, number of individuals involved, and the constant evolution of the programs combine to make it a formidable challenge. After the listening sessions in January of this year both BWSR and the Corps committed to publishing a newsletter that would serve as a starting point for sharing information and providing mitigation program updates. We hope you find this a useful tool in this respect. Suggestions for improving the newsletter or for improving communication in general are welcome.

State Mitigation Database Project Moves Forward

A replacement for the State Wetland Bank database is getting closer. A request for proposals was published on August 25, 2019. MNIT and interested vendors have until October 9, 2019 to submit a proposal. The existing database was developed in 1999-2000 and utilizes a FoxPro application that no longer provides an efficient and reliable system for managing wetland mitigation activities. When completed, the new database will provide a modern, secure, and easily supportable application that will track and manage transactions for wetland banking, in-lieu fee, and project specific mitigation projects. BWSR also received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to include a monitoring module that will allow vegetation and hydrology data to be entered and accessed by the public through an on-line portal. BWSR hopes to have the project completed in late 2020 or the first half of 2021.



Wetland Bank Project Opportunities

This fall BWSR will be seeking landowners interested in working with the State to have wetlands restored on their property. The credits would be used for the Local Road Wetland Replacement Program (LGRWRP), Minnesota Department of Transportation projects, and for agricultural wetland banking. Participation options have not been finalized yet but may include easement sign-ups, credit purchase agreements from banks currently not under easement, and partnerships. More specific information on participation options, eligibility criteria, and requirements will be included in the sign-up/solicitation announcement.



Transaction Processing Notes

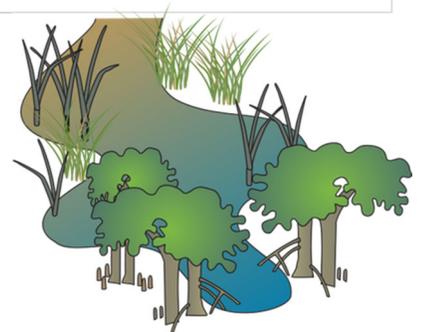
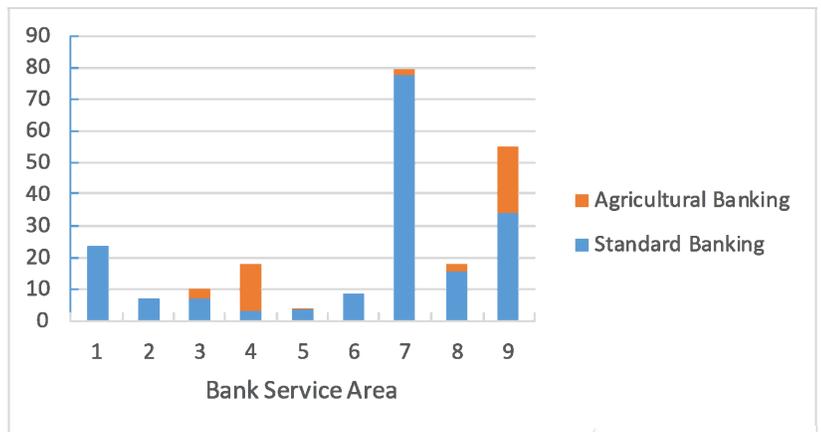
- In September Elsa Flage left her position at BWSR to pursue her Master’s Degree at the University of Minnesota. All transaction forms and fee payments should continue to be sent to the BWSR St. Paul Office care of the Wetland Banking Administrator. If you have questions about a specific wetland banking transaction or the process in general please contact Tim Smith (tim.j.smith@state.mn.us).
- You may notice some changes in the verification notices from BWSR. We have developed some new forms that improve our efficiency in processing transactions while satisfying our requirements in WCA rules. If you have feedback on the new forms please send your comments to Amy Waters at: amy.waters@state.mn.us.
- At BWSR our goal is to process wetland banking transactions as efficiently and expeditiously as possible. Our ability to meet this goal is directly tied to the completeness and accuracy of the information provided on the transaction forms. Incomplete and/or incorrect forms frequently require changes that require additional coordination with the Technical Evaluation Panel, Local Government Unit, and the St. Paul District. Please make sure that all transaction forms are filled out and have the required signatures in sections 4, 5, and 6 before submitting them to BWSR for processing.

Wetland Banking Market

Calendar year 2018 was an extremely busy one for both bank sponsors and agency staff. According to data collected by BWSR, agency staff reviewed 86 separate bank documents and processed 293 transactions involving the sale of 222 wetland credits (not including the Local Government Road Wetland Replacement Program). A summary of the 2018 withdrawal transactions is provided in the graph.

Did you know information on credit transactions and average price per credit for calendar years 2014 through 2018 is now available on the wetland credits and fees section of the BWSR website?

2018 Wetland Credit Withdrawals

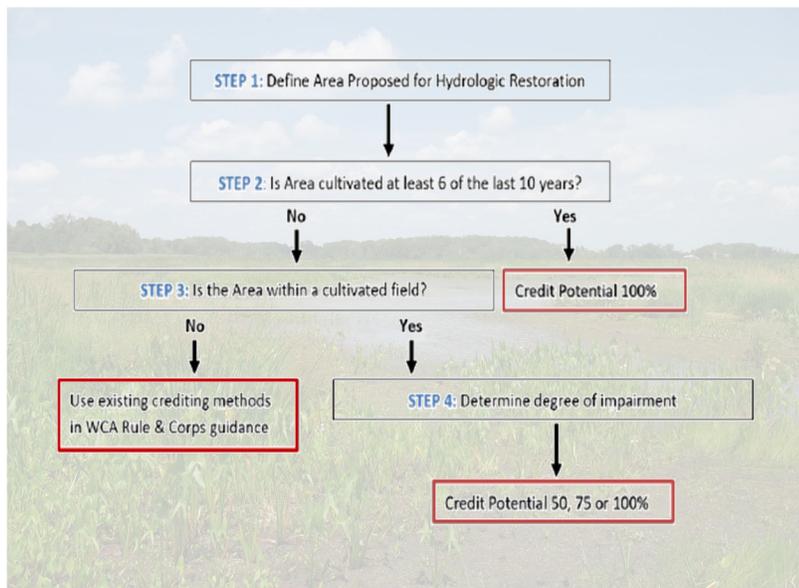


New! Cultivated Field Crediting Guidance

The Alternative Method for Determining Wetland Mitigation Credit Potential for Hydrologic Restorations on Cultivated Fields in Minnesota was issued jointly by the St. Paul District and BWSR on May 7, 2019.

The method can be used for areas that will be hydrologically restored and are subject to the effects of cultivation activities on a recurring basis. It is intended to help wetland bank applicants quickly determine the number of potential credits a proposed restoration project could generate provided all other requirements and standards for performance are met.

A guidance document on the cultivated field crediting (CFC) method is available on both agency websites.



Training Events

- BWSR Academy : October 29-31, 2019 at Breezy Point Conference Center in Breezy Point, MN
- Stream Mechanics Stream Functions Pyramid Workshops: stream-mechanics.com/workshops/
- MN SQT One Day Workshop: November 4 (MnDOT Arden Hills Training Center) & November 5 (MnDOT District 3A—Baxter Office), 2019, RSVP to colleen.m.meyer@usace.army.mil.



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Stream Quantification Tool (SQT)

What? A new stream functional assessment, the Minnesota Stream Quantification Tool (MNSQT), has been developed for the state of Minnesota. The MNSQT and the associated Debit Calculator consolidate established stream assessment and monitoring protocols covering hydrology, hydraulic, geomorphology, physicochemical and biological components in an Excel workbook to characterize stream ecosystem functions at a specific project reach.

Why? MNSQT and Debit Calculator will facilitate the Corps decision making process by providing a science-based, consistent, efficient, and repeatable approach to assess functional loss (debits incurred) at impact sites and functional lift (credits generated) at restoration sites. The MNSQT was developed by Stream Mechanics with cooperation between the St. Paul District, BWSR, MnPCA, MnDNR and US EPA. The US EPA provided funding for the development of the Minnesota SQT.

How will the SQT be used? On the permitting side, permit applicants in MN will be informed on a case-by-case basis when use of the Debit Calculator (a more streamlined version of the MNSQT) will be necessary to assess functional loss of streams at their proposed project site. For stream banking or permittee-responsible mitigation, all new projects in MN will be required to fully and accurately complete the MNSQT. Version 1 of the District's Stream Mitigation Guidance for Minnesota and Wisconsin will be released January 2020. Stakeholder outreach and training will be on-going. If you're interested in monthly updates about this effort or have suggestions for potential outreach opportunities, email jill.c.bathke@usace.army.mil with the subject line "stream SQT."

More information: The MNSQT and associated documents and public notices about this effort can be downloaded at: <https://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory/Mitigation/>

