

Wetlands Revisions and Definitions Proposed

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Proposed revisions to the 1989 Federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands were published by EPA in the Federal Register on August 14. Wetlands protection continues to be an important issue in golf course management, especially in managing construction and renovation projects. The following information summarizes the document that EPA provided to GCSAA. The information may be dry (pardon the pun), but basic understanding of wetlands determination and characteristics is important for today's golf course superintendent.

Definition

Wetlands are areas where land and water meet. In general, they are lands that are either inundated with surface water or saturated by groundwater long enough during the growing season to make it necessary for the vegetation to adapt to growing in saturated soil conditions. The periodic or permanent wetness is the fundamental factor that makes wetlands different from uplands. In certain seasons, many ecologically important wetlands may be dry or lack signs of plant life. Wetlands can range in size from tens of thousands of acres, to as small as a table top.

Proposed changes

The major changes would serve to increase the burden of proof required to identify and delineate a wetland. Clarifying and restricting the manner in which field indicators are used to determine whether the three criteria (see box)

are met should simplify wetlands delineation.

Except in limited specified circumstances, demonstration of all three parameters (wetland hydrology, hydrophytic vegetation and hydric soils) should be required for delineating vegetated wetlands. The exceptions to this rule would apply to a disturbed wetland area or an area specifically listed in the proposed Federal Manual.

Wetland types that are widely recognized as valuable, but may fail to meet one or more of the

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three criteria during all or some part of the year, are listed as exceptions. These include such areas as a playa lake, prairie pothole and vernal pools.

Another proposed change would lengthen the periods of inundation to 15 days and of saturation to 21 days during the growing season. (The 1989 manual required only seven days of inundation or saturation during the growing season.) The changes would also require saturation all the way to the soil surface. Localized differences in the growing season would also be considered.

The revised hydric soils criterion would specifically state that hydric soil exists in a potential wetland area.

Three Criteria for Identifying Wetlands

Wetland Hydrology—The presence of water is what makes a wetland a wetland. Unless specifically addressed in the proposed revised Federal Manual as exceptions or disturbed areas, areas without any of the hydrologic indicators provided in the proposed Federal manual are considered non-wetland areas.

Hydrophytic Vegetation—The term "hydrophytic vegetation" refers to plants that live in "wet" conditions. However, the majority of plant species growing in wetland areas also grow in non-wetlands or in upland areas. Thus, plants alone cannot be used to identify and delineate wetlands. If a plant species found in an area primarily occurs in wetlands (in a particular region), this fact is a consideration for wetland determination.

Hydric Soil—The National Technical Committee for Hydric Soils has developed criteria for what constitutes this soil type and has developed a list of these soils for the nation. "Hydric" is defined as "relating to or requiring considerable moisture." Wetlands typically possess hydric soils but the presence of hydric soil indicators does not necessarily mean that the area is a wetland.

In most cases, all three of the above characteristics must be met in order for a geographic area to be considered a wetland.