

## Wetlands and the Transportation Decision-Making Process

During the **Transportation Planning** stage, the WSDOT GIS Workbench may be used to identify sensitive resources in the project area and evaluate potential opportunities to **avoid and minimize adverse environmental effects** as project alternatives are identified. Field data from a [wetland inventory](#) is used to determine potential wetland impacts and early [mitigation options](#).

**Project Scoping** involves identifying and evaluating alternatives to find the most cost effective and overall environmentally acceptable solution. A [wetland inventory](#) may be requested to determine if wetlands and other aquatic resources are present in the project area. If it is important at this stage to know the exact location and extent of wetlands, a [Wetland Delineation and Assessment](#) can be requested. This includes a determination of each wetland's classification, characteristics, quality, and functions. Wetland boundaries are delineated and surveyed when they are close to or overlap with project work areas. The surveyed wetland boundaries are included on the plans for the project. If there are **unavoidable impacts**, these documents are used to evaluate the potential mitigation options. [Advance mitigation](#) is designed and constructed in this phase.

In the **Design and Environmental Review** stage, the level of environmental documentation is determined, and the process continues to **avoid and minimize wetland impacts**. If it has not already been conducted, a [Wetland Delineation and Assessment](#) should be requested to determine the exact boundaries of all wetlands, wetland buffers and other "waters" in the project area. A [Wetland Discipline Report](#) assesses the relative impacts of the proposed alternatives. If unavoidable impacts are probable, the best [mitigation option](#) is determined, and preliminary compensation concepts are developed.

The mitigation design continues to evolve after the environmental documentation completion date so that a [Draft Wetland and Stream Mitigation Report](#) is available for submittal in the **Environmental Permitting and PS&E** stage. A wetland mitigation plan detailing how lost wetland functions will be replaced is submitted to one or more regulatory agencies, typically the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#), [Washington Department of Ecology](#) and local governments, for their review and permit approval. Even when the impacts are so small as to fall below regulatory thresholds, WSDOT follows a "no-net-loss" directive requiring compensatory mitigation for any wetland loss

The first activity during the **Construction** phase is to install [High Visibility Construction Fencing](#) around sensitive areas to insure they are not inadvertently damaged. During this phase, WSDOT provides **compensation** for wetland impacts by restoring, enhancing, establishing (creating) and sometimes preserving wetlands.

Compensatory mitigation sites are [monitored](#) to ensure they meet required performance standards. Internal feedback is provided to site managers so they can direct [site management](#) activities and make future projects better. Annual [monitoring reports](#) are posted on the web to document the progress of each wetland mitigation site. If the mitigation site has met its performance standards and provided the required wetland area by the end of the monitoring period, WSDOT requests concurrence from permitting agencies that our permit obligations have been achieved.

Finally, when the site is self-sustaining, the mitigation site is transferred to the WSDOT **Maintenance** Division or a non-profit land management entity.