

Alaska Geospatial Council

Wetlands Working Group Charter

1 Background

Approximately 65% of the nation's wetlands are located in Alaska covering approximately 174 million acres, or about 43% of the State's surface area (Hall et al, 1994). Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Alaska's wetlands include moist and wet tundra types, permafrost areas, marshes, bogs, fens, marshes, swamps, and salt marshes. The state's many intertidal, riparian and shallow water ponds and associated wetlands are recognized as important breeding habitats for numerous migratory bird species. The value of wetlands to wildlife in Alaska is not limited to migratory birds; many mammals, fish and other species utilize the habitat year round. Wetlands located within key watersheds also provide rearing habitat to juvenile salmon. Intertidal wetlands serve as a transition zone for anadromous fish moving to and from freshwater to the marine environment.

Wetlands provide many other valuable ecological functions, such as insulation for permafrost (temperature regulation) and maintenance of water quality by slowly filtering excess nutrients, sediments, and pollutants before water seeps into rivers, streams, and underground aquifers. Wetlands provide valuable flood attenuation in some flood prone areas due to the ability to intercept, retain and slowly release large amounts of surface water. Wetlands are also valued for their many recreational uses from hiking, photography/wildlife watching, hunting/fishing, and paddling (canoe and kayak). In Alaska, many of the areas that are economically important to the state are located in areas with high concentrations of wetlands.

Alaska is one fifth the size of the entire United States and is the only state with land area north of the Arctic Circle. Despite its resource potential and global impact, however, Alaska has the most limited geospatial data coverage of all states in the nation. Accurate, detailed geospatial information that meets national standards is lacking for much of the state, inhibiting responsible development, permitting and resource conservation, delaying or preventing adequate response to natural disasters and emergencies, and preventing effective measurement and monitoring of ecological processes.

2 Purpose

The Wetland Technical Working Group (WTWG) provides the opportunity for Federal, State, and local agencies, Non-Profits, and Industry across Alaska to come together in a collaborative and cooperative environment to address wetland inventory and mapping needs for the state. The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) Wetland Mapping Standard (2009) provides guidance and standards for the mapping of wetlands in Alaska. In addition, recently acquired imagery (SPOT 5) and elevation data (IfSAR) for the state provide unprecedented base spatial datasets to support landscape level wetland inventory. The initial purpose of the WTWG will be to evaluate existing standards, classification systems, inventory methods, and management needs in order to provide guidance to public agencies and private industry on recommended approaches for wetland inventory.

As approaches to base level wetland inventory are adopted and implemented, the WTWG will move on to consider wetland data needs that address finer resolution decision support such as wetland rapid assessment methods, jurisdictional determination, and mitigation. The ultimate goal of the committee will be the

development of a comprehensive suite of wetland inventory and data development approaches that address data needs from the landscape to the site level using standardized methods that are consistent with national and state guidance. Additional considerations for future discussion may include: alternative classification systems; approaches to wetland functional assessment; the role of wetlands in watershed plan development; and, integration of wetlands data with other base inventory layers such as the National Hydrography Dataset.

3 Objectives/Actions

- Identify and advise AGC on issues related to wetland theme development and stewardship;
- Coordinate, develop and make recommendations for goals and/or strategies to improve Alaska's wetland data.
- Assess, evaluate and adapt current national and state standards for wetland data to create a value added product to meet Alaska's needs.
- Develop, implement and revise stewardship guidance and procedures for wetland data;
- Serve as a regional voice and advocate for wetland data in Alaska to the Alaska Geospatial Council and other key advisory groups (e.g., the federal Alaska Mapping Executive Committee).
- Develop collaborative funding strategies to further wetland inventory and assessment activities.
- Develop a communication, outreach and advocacy strategy to facilitate knowledge transfer related to wetland mapping processes and to track mapping status and opportunities for collaboration.

4 Membership

Membership is voluntary and is open to all, including all levels of government, utilities, academia and the private sector. The working group will be led by a chair and co-chair with at least one of these positions being occupied by a state agency representative at all times. The chair and co-chair positions will be revisited annually by the working group and changes in responsibility will be endorsed by group consensus. The chair will maintain membership lists and make these lists publicly available on the WTWG website at agc.dnr.alaska.gov.

Participation in the WTWG does not preclude involvement in AGC-related geospatial procurement, as the group does not vote on Council matters or have fiduciary responsibilities. Procurement matters are separate from this group and will be decided by State government representatives on the Alaska Geospatial Council and conducted through established state procurement procedures.

5 Leadership

The Wetland Technical Working Group is chaired by a designated member of the group as established by consensus annually. The Alaska Geospatial Council will ratify the selection of Chair and this Charter. The responsibilities of the Chair shall include:

- Manage the membership list.
- Preparation and distribution of quarterly meeting agenda, including location and time.
- Chair meetings (as defined below) and preside over decisions.
- Provide executive oversight and leadership for working group activities.
- Report recommendations and provide status updates to the Alaska Geospatial Council.
- Ensure that minutes are accurate and publicly available.

In the event the Chair fails to perform these duties [over a period of 6 months], the Co-chair will assume lead responsibilities until a new Chair is selected by consensus of the working group at the next quarterly meeting or by email poll.

6 Meetings

A minimum of four (4) meetings shall be convened each calendar year. Additional meetings may be called at the discretion of the Chair and/or Co-chair.

7 Communication

Written communications will take place via e-mail. A working group page will be maintained on the <http://agc.dnr.alaska.gov> website by the Department of Natural Resources GIO. Website postings will include:

- Charter
- Membership
- Meeting minutes
- Data standards and stewardship documents
- Activities calendar
- Other information as determined by the Council.

The working group will review and update website information annually or more frequently as needed.

8 Decision Making

Meetings shall be guided by consensus rule of those attending the meeting. Decisions that do not have a consensus may be tabled until the next meeting. A call for consensus may be issued via email to membership; if no objections are raised within 10 working days consensus will be considered achieved.

The Chair is the final arbiter if consensus cannot be reached in an appropriate amount of time.

9 Amendments

Amendments to this charter can be made at any regular meeting if the amendments are listed in the meeting's agenda and the amendment has consensus.

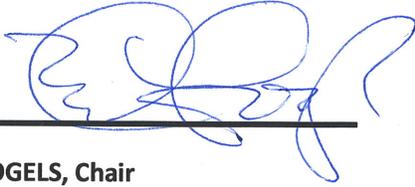
10 Dissolution

The working group will continue to function as long as it is required by the Alaska Geospatial Council. The Council may dissolve the working group at any time if it is determined to be no longer necessary.

11 References

Hall, Jonathan V., W.E. Frayer, and Bill O. Wilen. 1994. Status of Alaska Wetlands. U.S. Fish and Wildl. Serv. 32pp.

Alaska Geospatial Council
Approval of the Alaska Geospatial
Wetlands Technical Working Group Charter



ED FOGELS, Chair
Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources

Date: 12/22/16