

DRAFT

Enhancing State and Tribal Wetland Programs Initiative

What is the Enhancing State and Tribal Programs Initiative?

The goal of the Enhancing State and Tribal Programs (ESTP) Initiative is to enhance EPA's delivery of technical and financial support for state and tribal wetlands programs, with the goal of accelerating program development.

Key components of the ESTP include:

- increased dialogue between EPA and states/tribes on wetland program development,
- providing a clear articulation of program-building goals and activities – the Core Elements Framework,
- aligning the Wetland Program Development Grants with program development activities in the CEF, and
- providing targeted technical assistance for states and tribes.

The ESTP and Core Elements Framework were designed for state and tribal wetland programs that are in the developing stages but can be useful to all states/tribes including those that are refining more mature wetland programs.

What are the Core Elements of a State or Tribal Wetland Program?

The core elements are basic program functions that form the foundation of wetlands management and protection in a state or tribe. These include:

- 1. Monitoring and Assessment;**
- 2. Regulatory activities including 401 certification;**
- 3. Voluntary Restoration and Protection;**
- 4. Water Quality Standards for wetlands.**

In the past, EPA has endorsed six core elements of state and tribal wetlands programs: Regulation, Monitoring and Assessment, Restoration, Waters Quality Standards, Public-Private Partnerships, and Coordination among State and Federal Agencies. EPA has also referred to Outreach and Education as an overarching element. EPA streamlined this list to focus on the basic program functions. Partnerships, interagency coordination, and outreach are approaches that, among others, support these basic program functions.

What is the Core Elements Framework?

A foundation of the ESTP is the document *Core Elements of Effective State and Tribal Wetlands Programs*, also called the Core Elements Framework (CEF). Drafted in 2008 with state and tribal input, this document describes each core program element and provides a more comprehensive menu of program-building activities than EPA has summarized in the past. The CEF is intended to be fairly comprehensive so that states and tribes can choose from an array of actions those that are best suited to their goals and resources. EPA recognizes that program

development activities will continue to be incremental and bounded by the goals and resources within a state or tribe; the Agency does not expect simultaneous development of all core elements by every state and tribe.

For each core element the CEF provides a *menu* of program building activities. Actions listed should be considered a suite of activities that a state or tribe can pursue to advance development of that core element. Not all actions must be completed to have a functioning core element and steps don't necessarily have to be taken in sequence. The CEF has four chapters, one for each core element, which include:

- **Definitions: Provides a concise description of each core element:** Monitoring and Assessment, Regulatory activities, Restoration and Protection, and Water Quality Standards for wetlands;
- **Goals and Benefits:** Identifies federal goals associated with each core element and provides examples of state and tribal goals (e.g., more habitat for threatened and endangered species, greater protection from storms). This section also includes benefits that states and tribes could enjoy if they pursued each core element (e.g., well-defined restoration priorities that are informed by monitoring and assessment data could protect the most vulnerable wetlands in a watershed);
- **Menu of Program Development Actions:** outlines a set of objectives for each core element, key program – building actions, and a menu of activities that states and tribes can use to advance wetland program development and gauge progress.

The CEF also includes an introductory chapter and selected references and resources; the latter will be updated over time and case studies will be added.

How will the Core Elements Framework be used?

The CEF is intended primarily as a resource for states and tribes, in particular those that are building their wetland programs. EPA recommends that states and tribes consult the CEF in identifying goals and next steps for program development. EPA regions will use the CEF as a basis for program development discussions with states and tribes. Beginning in FY10, Wetland Program Development Grant (WPDG) Requests for Proposals will reference the CEF and ask that proposals describe how the project links with one or more program development actions in the CEF. This webpage will be updated in Spring 2009 to describe in more detail how the CEF will be incorporated into the WPDGs.

EPA will also use the CEF, along with information from states and tribes on their program development goals and needs, to prioritize and deliver targeted technical assistance beginning in FY09. Depending on expressed need, we will provide targeted trainings, distribute best practices by states and tribes with well-developed programs, and support peer-to-peer learning forums to help states and tribes enhance their programs.

What does the CEF Menu of Program Development Actions look like?

For each core element the CEF provides a *menu* of program building activities. Actions listed should be considered a suite of activities that a state or tribe can pursue to advance development of that core element. Not all actions must be completed to have a functioning core element and steps don't necessarily have to be taken in sequence. Below is an example chapter from the draft CEF for the core element Monitoring and Assessment. While it looks like many steps, it is organized into three sections which generally correspond to stages of program development. States and tribes in the beginning stages of a monitoring program may want to focus on steps in objective 1; those that have a monitoring program established would be most likely to take the steps under objective 2, and the steps under objective 3 are for those with substantial monitoring data in-hand, ready to use the information in program management decisions.

CEF Example: Monitoring and Assessment Program Development Actions (Draft 2/3/09):

The following actions and measures of progress outline how a state or tribe can engage in developing, implementing, and using a monitoring and assessment strategy to meet its program objectives. These actions are universal to any wetland assessment program, including those that use both functional or condition assessments to meet the program objectives.

Objective 1 (for programs in the earliest stages of monitoring and assessment): Develop a monitoring and assessment strategy consistent with *Elements of a State Water Monitoring and Assessment Program for Wetlands* (EPA, 2006) that states and tribes can use to manage wetlands according to their objectives

Actions [†]	Menu of Activities [†]
a. Identify program decisions and long-term environmental outcome(s) that will benefit from a wetlands monitoring and assessment program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Document program’s long-term environmental goals ⇒ Identify programs that will ultimately use monitoring data, e.g. track trends, 401 certification, restoration, permitting ⇒ Collaborate with water quality programs in a state/tribe ⇒ Identify how wetland data can be used to implement watershed planning
b. Define wetlands monitoring objectives and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Coordinate with most relevant partners, for example: federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, universities, regional and national work groups ⇒ Examine other sources for monitoring information within the state or tribe ⇒ Identify monitoring objectives ⇒ Define data needs and uses ⇒ Coordinate with your State/Tribe Water Quality Monitoring Program to identify shared goals and activities ⇒ Examine how to integrate wetlands monitoring strategy into existing water quality monitoring efforts as feasible ⇒ Document wetlands monitoring strategy
c. Develop monitoring design, or an approach and rationale for site selection that best serves monitoring objectives (e.g., census, probabilistic survey, rotating basin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Determine classification scheme in order to group the type, class, and size of wetlands ⇒ Describe site selection process ⇒ List universe of wetland resources from which sites could be selected if available ⇒ Determine which data are already available.
d. Select a core set of indicators to represent wetland condition or a suite of functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Identify indicators that are relevant for established monitoring objectives ⇒ Confirm indicators are scientifically defensible ⇒ Develop/select field method(s) ⇒ Add supplemental indicators if needs dictate and as resources allow
Notes: [†] EPA encourages states and tribes to follow “Actions” and “Activities” in Objectives 1 and 2 sequentially.	

Objective 2 (for programs prepared to implement a monitoring and assessment plan): Implement a sustainable monitoring program consistent with the wetlands monitoring strategy

Actions [†]	Menu of Activities [†]
a. Ensure the scientific validity of monitoring and laboratory activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Draft and peer review Quality Management Plan ⇒ Draft and peer review Quality Assurance Project Plan ⇒ Draft and peer review Field Operations Manual ⇒ Select, prioritize, and peer review candidate assessment indicators
b. Monitor wetland resources as specified in strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Identify and train staff to monitor for each indicator ⇒ Verify monitoring strategy by conducting sufficient number of pilot monitoring projects (small-scale projects to test methods, calibrate, enhance reference network, etc.) ⇒ Develop a schedule for monitoring wetland resources ⇒ Track sites that are monitored
c. Establish reference condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Define reference condition (the gradient from unimpaired to impaired) ⇒ Define reference standard condition (e.g., Best Attainable Condition, Least Disturbed Condition, Minimally Disturbed Condition, Historical Condition, Best Professional Judgment) ⇒ Determine process for measuring reference standard condition (e.g., reference sites, historical data) ⇒ Select reference sites using a systematic approach
d. Track monitoring data in a system that is accessible, updated on a timely basis, and integrated with other state or tribal water quality data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Design a data management system that supports program objectives ⇒ Administer and update data system so that state or tribe can use it for analysis ⇒ Make data system compatible with and regularly update WQX ⇒ Integrate with other water quality data systems (e.g., state watershed planning databases) ⇒ Georeference data as it is gathered for reporting ⇒ Identify sites to sample repeatedly for a trend network
e. Analyze monitoring data to evaluate wetlands extent and condition/function or to inform decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Document data analysis and assessment procedures ⇒ Develop assessment method to determine condition thresholds relative to reference standard condition (i.e., departure from reference standard condition) ⇒ Establish baseline wetland condition ⇒ Analyze changes in wetland extent or condition relative to reference conditions ⇒ Analyze changes in wetland extent or condition in response to climate change ⇒ Regularly report wetlands status and trends (e.g., annual reporting of no net loss, net gain, or 305(b) reports for wetlands)
<p>Notes: [†] EPA encourages states and tribes to follow “Actions” and “Activities” in Objectives 1 and 2 sequentially.</p>	

Objective 3 (for the most developed programs that already monitor and assess wetlands): Incorporate monitoring data into agency decision-making

Actions	Menu of Activities
a. Evaluate monitoring program to determine how well it is meeting a state/tribe's monitoring program objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Develop schedule to evaluate monitoring program ⇒ Track program reviews ⇒ Ensure the assessment method is providing the necessary information ⇒ Make changes as necessary to the program ⇒ Review other wetlands program elements (e.g., restoration, regulation, water quality standards) ⇒ Modify other aspects of wetlands program as needed based on review of monitoring data
b. Evaluate the environmental consequences of a federal or state/tribal action or group of actions; modify programs as needed based on M&A data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Inform state/tribal wetland permit decisions ⇒ Inform 401 certification decisions on federal actions ⇒ Modify permitting or 401 certification practices as needed based on assessment information
c. Improve the site-specific management of wetland resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Incorporate monitoring and analysis into restoration techniques ⇒ Establish ecologically-meaningful benchmarks for gauging restoration success ⇒ Evaluate the performance of compensatory mitigation sites ⇒ Evaluate the ecosystem services provided by individual wetlands.
d. Develop geographically-defined wetland protection, restoration, and management plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Identify and prioritize management areas (e.g. identify vulnerable wetlands, prioritize restoration potential) ⇒ Incorporate wetlands into a comprehensive Watershed Plan that serves state and tribal water quality management needs and addresses all waters ⇒ Evaluate progress toward meeting wetland objectives identified in other projects/programs, for example: State Wildlife Action Plans ⇒ Inform broader watershed activities (e.g., reducing erosion, providing floodplain storage, reducing nutrient loading, etc.)