



## Wetland Regulators Streamline and Simplify Permit Process

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Over the last few years, regulators at the state and Federal levels have placed an increasing emphasis on minimizing and mitigating impacts to linear streams, as distinct from and in addition to the more familiar policies on wetlands protection.

A number of protocols have been proposed and issued for calculation of impacts to linear streams and on valuation of mitigation for proposed impacts. In Virginia, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the US Army Corps of Engineers were unable to agree on a single methodology for measuring and valuating impacts to streams. As a result, since early 2005 delineators were forced to prepare two separate reports for each project, one using the SICAM protocol for DEQ and another using the SAAM protocol for the Corps of Engineers. This meant a complete duplication of effort for every wetlands delineation project with obvious time and cost implications for owners and developers.

The long awaited Unified Stream Methodology (USM) has now been issued by DEQ and the Corps and went into effect on February 1, 2007.

This development promises to streamline the wetlands permitting process significantly, reducing consultant fees associated with the wetland delineation process. Our analysis of the new protocol suggests that mitigation costs may also be significantly reduced.

For instance, consider a hypothetical project with the following parameters:

- Project - 24 lot residential development requiring stream impacts for road and driveway crossings, and house grading;
- Stream Impacts - 200 linear feet;
- Stream Quality - Moderate; i.e. mostly intact 200ft-wide shrub dominated riparian buffer, some straightening of the stream from past farming practices, partially incised stream banks and moderate sediment deposits in stream bed caused by upstream development.

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These conditions would result in the following stream compensation calculations using DEQ's SICAM methodology:

SICAM										
Channel Condition	Riparian Buffer	Instream Habitat Gradient (H/L)	Channel Alteration	Reach Condition Index (RCI)	Stream Quality	Stream Quality Factor	Length of Impact (feet)	Impact Factor	Compensation Requirement (feet)	Total Compensation Cost @ \$250/lf
Marginal	Marginal	Marginal	Minor	3.8	Suboptimal	1.3	200	1	260	\$65,000

The new USM protocol would provide a different compensation requirement:

USM						
Channel Condition	Riparian Buffer	Instream Habitat	Channel Alteration	Reach Condition Index (RCI)	Compensation Requirement	Total Compensation Cost @ \$250/lf
2	0.85	1.2	1.1	1.03	206	\$51,500

So, on this hypothetical project the USM would require mitigation costs approximately 20% less than the same project calculated using the SICAM. We expect similar results regardless of a project's stream impact quantity or quality.

This analysis does not take into account the market price of mitigation credits purchased from commercial mitigation banks, which are

commodity priced according to supply and demand. Other things being equal, however, the new methodology seems to be a significant step forward in rationalizing a confusing, difficult and expensive process.

For more information on the USM or wetlands permitting in general contact Dr. Bill Kirby or John Stokely at 703-934-0900.

### USM Goes Into Effect February 1, 2007

Wetland regulators streamlined and simplified the permit process. Unified Stream Methodology (USM) issued by DEQ and Corps goes into effect February 1, 2007.

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