



TECHNICAL *Update*

January 2004

REGULATORY AGENCIES IMPLEMENT NEW STREAM MITIGATION METHODOLOGY

On December 19, 2003, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality issued “*A Proposed Stream Attributes Crediting Methodology: Impact and Compensation Reaches.*” The purpose of the assessment is to provide a more predictable, reliable, and repeatable methodology to quantify stream impacts and compensatory mitigation in the Piedmont Physiographic Province only. This Province encompasses the area in the middle of Virginia, spanning from the Blue Ridge Mountains in the west to the Fall Line in the east. Stream impacts in the other Physiographic Provinces in Virginia (i.e. Coastal Plain) will continue to be based on previous, more qualitative techniques. The new assessment includes five indices -- channel incision, riparian condition, bank erosion, channelization, and instream habitat. Channel slope and stream order have also been incorporated into the methodology to further define the required compensation and in-kind versus out-of-kind mitigation.

Previous stream mitigation measures included stream and riparian buffer enhancement, restoration, and preservation and were evaluated on a linear foot basis. The new methodology will focus on the five variables using Stream Condition Units (SCU's), which are the product of an index value assigned based on stream attributes and the length of the impact reach.

What does all of this mean? The more qualitative techniques previously used to describe stream attributes and determine stream mitigation will not be acceptable in the Piedmont Physiographic Province. The new methodology will require a detailed field evaluation to assess each of the variables within the proposed impact and mitigation sites. Additionally, the changes require compensation for each of the five variables, but will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For example, previous stream mitigation may have included buffer restoration alone. Currently, however, this may not be accepted, as the other SCU's derived from channel incision, bank erosion, channelization, and instream habitats are not compensated. Additional stream restoration or preservation may be necessary to fulfill the requirements when compared to previous mitigation efforts. Stream mitigation will need to replace an equal number of SCU's for each variable impacted to the greatest extent practicable and ensure that the total number of SCUs mitigated is equal to those impacted.

Effective date is January 15, 2004. The Corps will then revisit the methodology following the initial three-month period and evaluate all comments and data, and decide what, if any, changes are necessary. Review will then occur quarterly during the first year and annually thereafter.

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