



## 9 Alaska Wetlands Initiative

*As part of the Administration's 1993 Wetlands Plan, EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers convened stakeholders and solicited public input in Alaska to identify and address concerns with implementing the Clean Water Act Section 404 program in Alaska. The seven-month process resulted in a report issued on May 13, 1994, which identified 26 action items to be implemented by the Federal agencies, many in coordination with the State, Natives, and other participating stakeholders.*

### Alaska's Wetlands

Alaska is estimated to have approximately 175 million acres of wetlands, comprising approximately 43% of the surface area of the State—more wetlands acreage than the rest of the United States combined. The State is also characterized by high levels of Federal, State, and Native Corporation land ownership, a small population (over a third of which lives in Anchorage), relatively large Native and subsistence populations, and Arctic and sub-Arctic climates.

Alaska's diverse array of wetlands possess a variety of functions and values that contribute substantially to the Nation's economy and well-being. For example, wetlands serve as valuable habitat for wildlife and fisheries (the salmon industry in Alaska is the State's largest nongovernmental employer).

### Stakeholder Participation

The Initiative was developed in consultation with a diverse and comprehensive group of Alaskan stakeholders and the public. Stakeholders representing such interests as commercial fishing, environment, Natives, oil and gas, and the State, as well as the Department of Energy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service, participated in a series of meetings around the State. The public was invited to attend all stakeholder meetings, submit written comments, and participate in a Statewide teleconference linking 20 locations throughout Alaska. Stakeholders and the public identified concerns with the wetlands program, focusing on how circumstances in Alaska, such as climate and the extent of wetlands, affect implementation of regulatory requirements in the State.

### Actions

The Initiative report summarizes the results of the effort and presents the recommendations and actions, in combination with the initiatives identified in the Administration's Wetlands Plan, that will be undertaken in Alaska to address concerns

raised during the Initiative. Conclusions are built upon the factual information and technical data identified during the Initiative. Strong agreement among the Federal agencies provides the basis to implement the actions in a manner that ensures effective protection of Alaska's valuable wetlands while providing appropriate regulatory flexibility to reflect circumstances in Alaska. Key actions include —

- implementing abbreviated permit processing procedures for the construction of water, wastewater, and sanitation facilities in wetlands in Alaskan villages
- continuing to develop general permits, which efficiently allow activities with minimal impacts to proceed without the need for individual permit authorization
- strengthening relationships with the State, local governments, and Native Corporations and villages through such measures as establishing written partnerships regarding the regulatory program and placing greater emphasis on providing assistance for local wetlands planning mechanisms as they relate to the regulatory program
- clarifying "practicability" and "flexibility" considerations that allow implementation of the regulatory program to reflect circumstances in Alaska.

Copies of the report, titled "Alaska Wetlands Initiative: Summary Report," may be obtained from the EPA Wetlands Information Hotline.

For more information, contact the EPA Wetlands Information Hotline at 1-800-832-7828 (contractor operated).

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