

National Wetlands Inventory

A useful tool for considering the potential for wetland impacts from a highway project is the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been developing this inventory since the mid-1970s. As of 2009, the NWI included data for 90% of the lower 48 states. The NWI is largely based on interpretation of satellite imagery.

Although useful in various ways, NWI data should not be relied upon for current information about any specific wetland. Interpretation of satellite photos is not 100% reliable, and much of the satellite imagery is from the 1980s. Wetlands can form, expand, shrink or even disappear over time for a large number of reasons. Therefore, a site visit by a qualified biologist is needed to determine the presence (or absence), type and condition of a wetland in a particular location



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