



IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON STATE WETLAND PROGRAMS AND EARLY ADAPTATIONS

Association of State Wetland Managers
June 10, 2020
3:00 – 4:30 pm Eastern

Brenda Zollitsch, PhD – Senior Policy Analyst
Association of State Wetland Managers

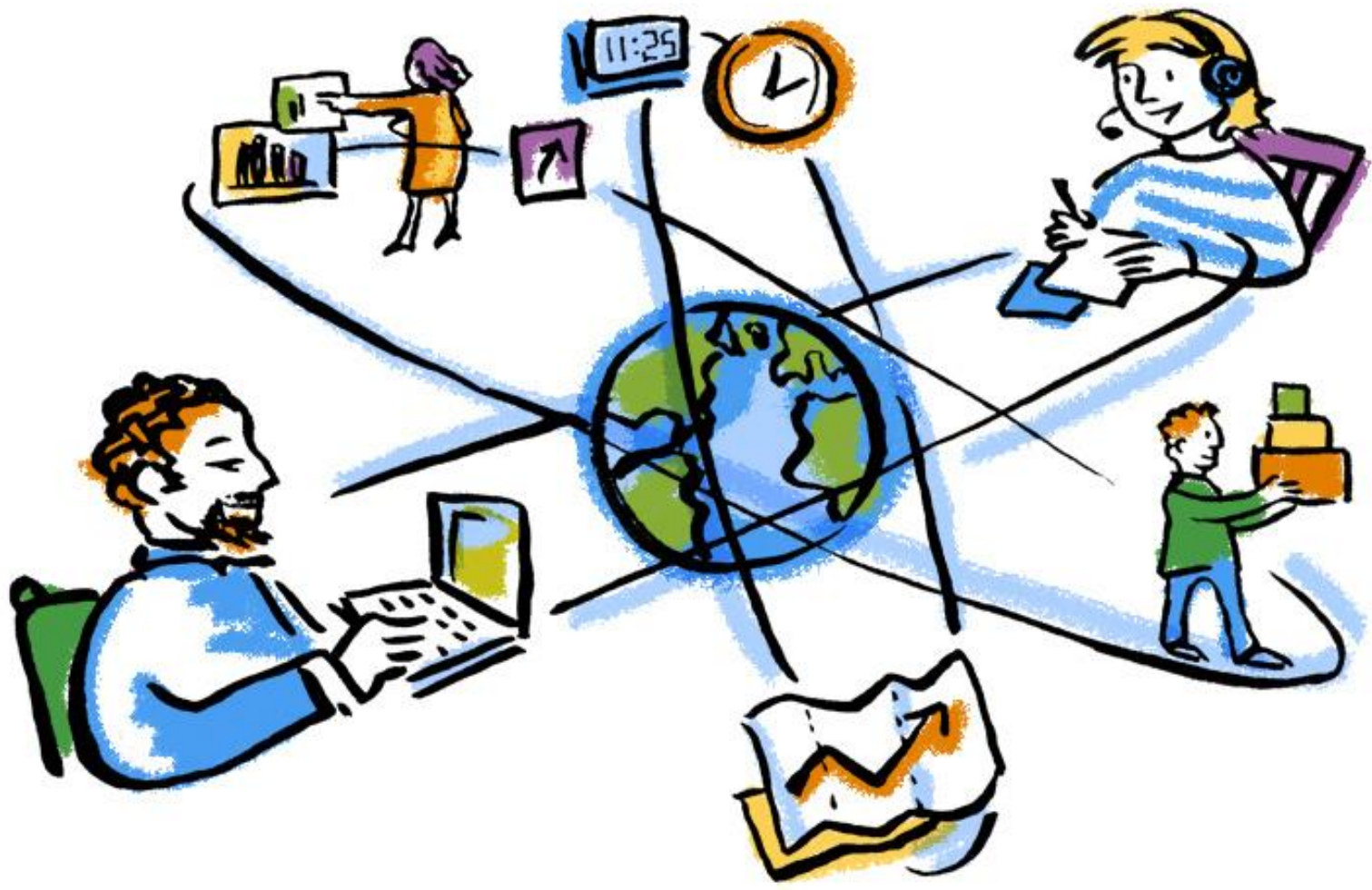
What does it look like out there?

Managing State and Tribal Wetland Programs in the Middle of a Pandemic



Photo credit: Public domain image from PixelBay

- Many states initially saw the same level or an uptick in the number of permit applications
- Since then, numbers have stabilized
- Some development companies have put activities on hold
- Some slow down/delays in getting credit releases with banks
- In some states, all construction that wasn't emergency was halted, but is restarting in most of those states
- Stimulus package infrastructure investments
- E.O. to expedite projects due to economic emergency



Remote Working

Almost all staff working remotely from home (at least part of the time)

A few states are having rotating staff in office on different days with appropriate social distancing or only one staff member in the office at a time

Mail is handled by designated staff utilizing protective techniques



Designation as “essential workers”

- Some states are designating water staff (some incl. wetlands, some only drinking water and wastewater) as “essential workers” to allow for permitting and activities
- EPA is encouraging states and tribes to designate their water staff as “essential workers”
- In some cases all permitting activities are on hold and state is only responding to requests for technical assistance



Limited Use of Physical Office Spaces

- Most offices physically closed to the public
- Some physical sites closed completely (no staff or functions onsite)
- Rotating staffing schedules
- Not more than X number of staff in office at one time
- Not sharing common spaces at the same time
- Wiping down equipment after use
- Plexiglass barriers for administrative staff



Photo Source: MO DNR



Equipment & Connectivity

Initially limited by lack of state-issued equipment for remote working (laptops, phones)

- Limits of employee-owned equipment
- Lack of Internet connections/high speed connections

Most connectivity issues now addressed

- Distribution of government equipment
- Massive IT effort
- Innovations in more available software (GIS)



Changes to Site Inspections

Can we do site inspections?

- Not allowed to do any site inspections, including drive-by inspections
- Only responding to calls for emergency situations
- Only responding to requests for technical assistance
- Only one staff person on site for inspection with appropriate social distancing techniques



Photo credit: ACOE – Buffalo District



Changes to Site Inspections, Cont.

- Even if a state is doing site inspections, permitting can be limited if the Corps is not
- Some states are working towards allowing video recording and submittal currently
- A few are working to innovate, such as exploring the use of drones
- Major concerns about the loss of interpersonal connections and information exchange



Photo credit: ACOE – Buffalo District



Photo source: CODOT

Jurisdictional Determinations

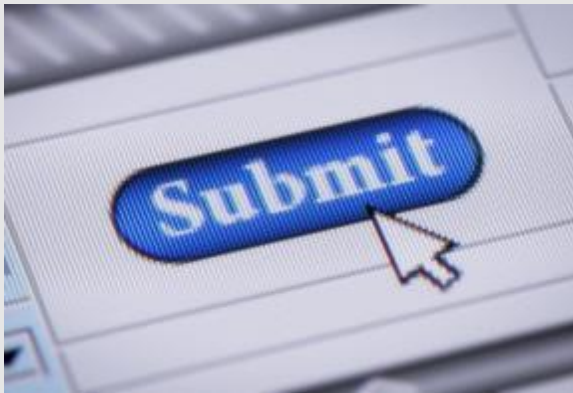
Some states have put JDs on hold

Some states are not doing site inspections for JDs (not clear how they are making the JD without one; need to clarify)





Changes in Permit Application Submittal Requirements

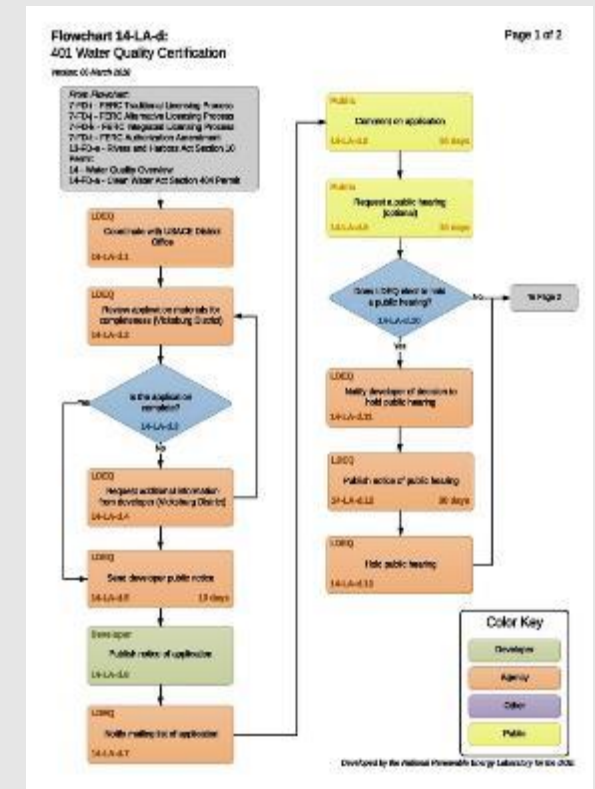


- Protocols for working remotely and processing applications without hard copies (Example: MA)
- Asking for electronic as well (so can be sent to staff working remotely); although require print certification and can't get to office. Sending on letterhead and electronic via email.
- Most accepting mailed-in applications (still need paper copies)
- Table/slot for no-contact drop-offs
- May result in delays in processing mailed-in only applications
- Adopting use of email conventions (e.g. subject line wording: TOWN NAME - NOI - Street Address -Applicant Name)
- May submit permit applications, compliance reports and fee payments through new online forms (Example: VT)

Relief from Certain Mandated Deadlines, Fees and Protocols



- Allow for electronic filing and signatures in certain circumstances
- Relief to municipalities related to hearings, decisions, appeals, and other deadlines
- Suspension of requirement to conduct public hearing within 21 days of receipt of a Notice of Intent [NOI]
- At least one state has put fees that they can on hold; others are not considering this
- However, some states are not charging late fees.
- Many states are making adjustments to monitoring activities and requirements



Public Notice and Public Hearings

- Many states are struggling with how to meet public involvement requirements
- How do you hold public hearings when:
 - Offices are closed
 - With social distancing
 - Bringing together people with travel restrictions
- Who can request permit review? Do you send the application to them electronically?



Public domain photo from Pixabay



Impacts to Wetland Program Resources



WETLAND PROGRAM
STAFFING AND BUDGETS
+ INNOVATING TO INCREASE REACH



EXTENT OF
TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS



ACCESS TO TRAINING
FOR STAFF

Invitation to Share With ASWM

Join ASWM National Dialogue on COVID-19

- **State and tribal wetland program staff** are invited to share their input on:
 - Site inspections, JDs, No contact, travel, budgets, staffing, training, permitting processes, public meetings/notice, and any other considerations around adapting to the pandemic

To become a member of the ASWM National Dialogues states and tribes group, please send an **email to brenda@aswm.org** and asked to be added (please incl. name, agency, email, phone)



National Dialogue on State and Tribal Wetland Program COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts and Adaptations

TOPIC: STATE AND TRIBAL SHARING ON PROGRAM IMPACTS AND ADAPTATIONS

ASWM is currently exploring ways that states and tribes are being impacted by and managing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (and associated economic, political, social and other ramifications) and facilitate peer to peer sharing around adaptations that have worked for you and others.

Please share with us your wetland program's COVID-19-related challenges as well as your ideas, questions and suggestions for ways to cope and adapt to this new working environment.

All responses will be de-identified prior to sharing beyond ASWM Internal staff members. Information gathered will be used by ASWM's Capacity Building Project Workgroup to help plan the development of support resources for states and tribes.

Responses will be accepted on this topic on an ongoing basis, however, a summary of input to this national dialogue will be shared with presenters one week prior to the webinar. Any additional questions submitted after this point will be answered as time allows.

Questions about this form or your submission should be addressed to: Brenda Zollitsch at (207) 892-3399 or brenda@aswm.org.

Email address *

Valid email address

This form is collecting email addresses. [Change settings](#)

First Name *

Short answer text

Last Name *

Short answer text



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

BRENDA ZOLLITSCH
SENIOR POLICY ANALYST
ASSOC. OF STATE WETLAND MANAGERS

brenda@aswm.org

(207) 892-3399

