Local Hydrology Indicators for the Identification of Farmed Wetlands

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended
Background

On August 28, 2020, USDA issued a final rule for the Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. This final rule clarified how NRCS identifies hydrology criteria for Farmed wetlands (FWs). To decide if an area supports the required long-term inundation for a FW that is not identified as a playa, pocosin, or pothole, the final rule provides three options:

A. Observation of wetland hydrology indicators as identified in the local NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG);

B. Procedures identified in State Off-Site Methods for wetland identification set forth in the local NRCS Field Office Technical Guide; or

C. The use of analytic techniques, such as the use of drainage equations or the evaluation of monitoring data.
Farmed Wetland Definition

“a wetland that prior to December 23, 1985 was manipulated and used to produce an agricultural commodity at least once before December 23, 1985, and on December 23, 1985, did not support woody vegetation, and met the following hydrologic criteria: (i) If not a playa, pocosin, or pothole, experienced inundation for 15 consecutive days or more during the growing season or 10 percent of the growing season, whichever is less, in most years (50 percent chance or more)…”

As defined in Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended (7 CFR Part 12, “Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation”)
Option A – Local level indicators

The preamble to the final rule provides that NRCS will seek local input through:

- Consultation with the NRCS State technical committee
- Notice and comment in the Federal Register (on a state basis)

NRCS will issue the local level hydrology indicators in the FOTG.
NRCS is requesting STAC input on proposed Local Hydrology Indicators for the identification of Farmed Wetlands that are not playas, pocosins, or potholes
Local Hydrology Indicators
Farmed Wetlands

Indicators will be reflective of local conditions which meet the required inundation for 15 consecutive days or more during the growing season or 10 percent of the growing season, whichever is less, in most years.
Local Hydrology Indicators
Farmed Wetlands

NRCS Recommendation to STAC:

*Adopt all national FW hydrology indicators with no additions or edits.*
Local Hydrology Indicators
Farmed Wetlands

NRCS in Alaska will use the following Farmed Wetland Hydrology Indicators to make or assist in making the decision if the sampling unit supports long-term inundation:

FW-N01: Surface Water
FW-N02: Water Marks
FW-N03: Sediment Deposits
FW-N04: Drift Deposits
FW-N05: Algal Mat or Crust
FW-N06: Surface Soil Cracks
FW-N07: Evidence of Long-Term Ponding Visible on Aerial Imagery
FW-N08: Sparsely Vegetated Concave Surfaces
FW-N09: Water Stained Leaves
FW-N10: Aquatic Invertebrates
FW-N11: Perennial Obligative Plant Species
Local Hydrology Indicators
Farmed Wetlands

NRCS Proposes the following options to STAC:

- Adopt all national FW hydrology indicators with no additions or edits
- Provide opportunity to review in more detail and provide written commentary
- Hold dedicated meeting for those interested in discussion and feedback
More Information...

Alaska Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Provisions Webpage
https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/[state]/programs/farmbill/cc/

National Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Provisions Webpage

Contact: Scott Crockett, State Resource Conservationist
scott.crockett@usda.gov