

### Mitigation: Improving the grade

Nationally, wetlands protection has been failing. Studies have shown less than half of approved mitigation successfully offsets wetlands lost to development – a far cry from the state and national goal of “no net loss” of wetlands. Washington has had a similar low wetland mitigation success rate. The causes include poor site selection, bad design, and lack of compliance. It is likely other environmental mitigation efforts are just as unsuccessful. The Department of Ecology is helping reverse the trend. Our goal is 100 percent environmental success – getting to **Mitigation that Works**.

### Launching Mitigation that Works Forum

The Mitigation that Works Forum was convened in December 2007. Composed of representatives from Washington land trusts, non-profit organizations, business and developer associations, and federal, state and local agencies, the Forum’s charge was to develop and agree on a shared vision for successful environmental mitigation – and identify practical actions to make all aspects of mitigation work better.

### Forum report outlines actions, recommendations

Forum members built on previous efforts, such as the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee and Shared Salmon Strategy, to establish a better approach and went beyond wetland mitigation. The Forum developed a recommendations and actions report that was published in December 2008 (see side bar for the web link).

In its report, the Forum makes a number of key recommendations to Ecology and other environmental agencies including:

- **Reinforcing importance of avoiding and minimizing impacts to valuable, difficult-to-replace resources.** This includes developing avoidance and minimization guidance; aligning funding priorities with acquisition and conservation efforts; and developing and piloting a menu of market-based mitigation techniques.

### SUCCESSFUL MITIGATION, HEALTHY ECONOMY

Streams, wetlands, and other key habitats are essential to maintain and restore Washington’s waters, including Puget Sound. They help keep our economy vibrant by filtering drinking water, holding flood waters, recharging groundwater, and providing fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation. It costs less to maintain existing wetlands than investing in human-engineered solutions to purify our water and protect us from floods.

According to a 2008 study, fresh water wetlands in the Puget Sound area alone could be worth more than \$10 billion to Washington’s economy. For a copy of the report, go to: [www.eartheconomics.org](http://www.eartheconomics.org)

To read the Forum Report, go to: [www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0806018.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0806018.html)

Mitigation That Works web page: [www.ecy.wa.gov/mitigation](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/mitigation)

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- **Establishing a watershed-based approach to mitigation.** This includes articulating policy priorities and clarifying expectations; compiling and expanding characterization information in Puget Sound and using it to inform land use planning decisions; creating and maintaining a statewide wetlands status and trends inventory; and expanding and improving characterization tools and guidance.
- **Developing and implementing a variety of compensatory mitigation tools.** This includes crafting guidance for off-site as well as advance mitigation; improving wetland banking through training and rules; establishing habitat, conservation, and multi-resource conservation banks; piloting an in-lieu fee program in select watersheds; and supporting local governments in establishing policies, regulations, and processes for using the full suite of mitigation tools.
- **Developing more coordinated, predictable approaches to reviewing development projects and associated mitigation plans.** This includes expanding use of the multi-agency concept; developing programmatic agreements and general permits; and completing and expanding state Office of Regulatory Assistance's initiatives.
- **Supporting making mitigation work.** This includes standardizing measuring and tracking site performance; dedicating enough resources for monitoring and adaptive management programs at all levels of government; and assisting and training local governments.

## Implementing Mitigation that Works

Since the Forum and its report, Ecology and other agencies are implementing several of the recommendations. Activities include:

- Checking on 100 percent of wetland mitigation projects within two years of a permit and visiting sites within 18 months of implementation.
- Issued guidance on selecting wetland mitigation sites using a watershed approach in December 2009.
- Completing water flow process characterizations for the Puget Sound basin by June 2010.
- Providing technical assistance to local governments as they use watershed characterizations to design land use plans and shoreline master programs.
- Developing policies on advance and consolidated mitigation.
- Reviewing several in-lieu fee projects including work with the Puget Sound Partnership on a Puget Sound in-lieu fee program.
- Assessing a joint wetland/conservation bank.
- Conducting ongoing trainings on watershed characterization, wetland mitigation banking, wetland mitigation site selection guidance, and wetland policies.