memo

To: Agricultural Committee Members and Farm Owners/Operators

From: Jerry Hoover, Code Enforcement Officer

Project: Ag Uses and Wetlands

Date: December 21, 2012

Committee members have discussed ongoing questions relative to working near or in wetlands that are portions of active farm operations. In an attempt to clarify some of these questions the NYS DEC, Army Corp of Engineers, and USDA/NRCS were contacted. It is imperative to understand that each of these entities regulates wetlands differently. When working in or around wetland areas research much be conducted to determine the regulatory jurisdiction and associated restrictions.

Outlined below are the highlights for each regulatory body. Attached are documents from each regulatory body with additional details.

Freshwater (DEC) Wetlands:

Minimum of 12.4 acres to be a DEC wetland
All are labeled and maps are available through me, DEC, NRCS, or Soil and Water District
Cannot clear cut in DEC wetlands. A minimum of 30sqft of basil area per acre must remain. Should consult DEC if you want to harvest this heavily
May clean and maintain ditches/tiles through wetland but must remove excavated material from the wetlands
May clear growth and farm anything that is less than 6" caliper at breast height. This is not considered standing timber by DEC.
Timber harvest is allowed.

Federal (Army Corp)Wetlands:

Can be as small as .10acres to be a wetland
Maps are available through Army Corp, Soil and Water and me. NRCS may not have these maps.
May clean and maintain ditches/tiles to original working depth through wetland but must remove excavated material from the wetlands.
May clear and farm anything that can be mowed with a bushog.
Cannot clear cut timber by pulling stumps and trees. Timber harvest is allowed.
If you have wooded areas with any drainage feature running into, out of, or through the woods, assume it is a federally protected wetland.

NRCS/USDA/FSA:

Rules apply to any farm receiving federal funding
Cannot drain or clear land in an NRCS wetlands unless marked as prior converted
NRCS houses information for Prior Converted (land cleared, drained, farmed before 1985 SwampBuster Act)
NRCS uses different criteria than DEC and Army Corp.
What may be ok for work according to NRCs must still be checked with DEC and Army Corp.
Unlike the Army Corp, NRCS determines wetlands by hydric soils. You should always check with NRCS before completing work around a wooded/brushy area if you are trying to clear an area to be farmed.

Regulatory Body Contact List

Army Corp of Engineers:
Auburn Field Office
Judy Robinson
315-255-8090

NYS DEC
Avon Office
Scott Jones
Bureau of Habitat
585-226-2466

NRCS
Canandaigua Office
Dave Moyer
585-394-0525

Ontario County Soil and Water
Canandaigua
P.J. Emmerick
585-396-1450

Town of Seneca
Jerry Hoover
585-526-5251

Exempt Activities Do Not Require a Permit

Following are the most common activities exempted from regulation. No DEC permit is required for:

1. Normal agricultural practices, except filling, clear cutting of trees, or construction of non-agricultural structures;
2. The harvesting of natural products and recreational activities (fishing, hunting, trapping, hiking, swimming, picnicking, or firewood collection);
3. Continuance of lawfully existing land uses;
4. Routine maintenance of existing functional structures such as repairing broken docks, repainting structures, or resurfacing paved areas; and
5. Selective cutting of trees and harvesting of fuel wood (not clear cutting).

the provisions of subdivision four of section 24-0501, subdivisions two and three of section 24-0503, or section 24-0505, but shall be subject to judicial review under subdivision two of section 24-1105 of this article.

§24-0509. Relationship to other laws.

No provision of this article shall be deemed to remove from any local government any authority pertaining to the regulation of freshwater wetlands, whether such wetlands are under the jurisdiction of the department or a county pursuant to subdivision 4 of section 24-0501 of this title, under the county, general city, general municipal, municipal home rule, town, village, or any other law, provided, however, that any such regulation by a local government shall be at least as protective of freshwater wetlands as the regulations in effect pursuant to the provisions of this chapter or any rule or regulation promulgated pursuant to the provisions of this article or pursuant to a local freshwater wetlands protection law or ordinance adopted by a county pursuant to the provisions of section 24-0501 of this title.

§24-0511. Local freshwater wetlands protection procedures in the Adirondack park.

Except for section 24-0509, this title shall not apply to freshwater wetlands protection laws or ordinances adopted by towns or villages with respect to their territories within the Adirondack park. Such laws or ordinances are governed by title eight of this article.

TITLE 7
FRESHWATER WETLANDS REGULATIONS

Section

24-0701. Permits.
24-0703. Applications for permits.
24-0705. Granting permits.

§24-0701. Permits.

1. After issuance of the official freshwater wetlands map of the state, or of any selected section or region thereof, any person desiring to conduct on freshwater wetlands as so designated thereon any of the regulated activities set forth in subdivision two of this section must obtain a permit as provided in this title.

2. Activities subject to regulation shall include any form of draining, dredging, excavation, removal of soil, mud, sand, shells, gravel or other aggregate from any freshwater wetland, either directly or indirectly; and any form of dumping, filling, or depositing of any soil, stones, sand, gravel, mud, rubbish or fill of any kind, either directly or indirectly; erecting any structures, roads, the driving of pilings, or placing of any other obstructions whether or not changing the ebb and flow of the water; any form of pollution, including but not limited to, installing a septic tank, running a sewer outfall, discharging sewage treatment effluent or other liquid wastes into or so as to drain into a freshwater wetland; and any other activity which substantially impairs any of the several functions served by freshwater wetlands or the benefits derived therefrom which are set forth in section 24-0105 of this article. These activities are subject to regulation whether or not they occur upon the wetland itself, if they impinge upon or otherwise substantially effect the wetlands and are located not more than one hundred feet from the boundary of such wetland. Provided, that a greater distance from

any such wetland may be regulated pursuant to this article by the appropriate local government or by the department, whichever has jurisdiction over such wetland, where necessary to protect and preserve the wetland.

3. The depositing or removal of the natural products of the freshwater wetlands by recreational or commercial fishing, shell-fishing, aquaculture, hunting or trapping shall be excluded from regulated activities, where otherwise legally permitted and regulated.

4. The activities of farmers and other landowners in grazing and watering livestock, making reasonable use of water resources, harvesting natural products of the wetlands, selectively cutting timber, draining land or wetlands for growing agricultural products and otherwise engaging in the use of wetlands or other land for growing agricultural products shall be excluded from regulated activities and shall not require a permit under subdivision one hereof, except that structures not required for enhancement or maintenance of the agricultural productivity of the land and any filling activities shall not be excluded hereunder, and provided that the use of land designated as a freshwater wetland upon the freshwater wetlands map at the effective date thereof for uses other than those referred to in this subdivision shall be subject to the provisions of this article.

5. Public health activities, orders, and regulations of the department of health shall be excluded from regulated activities. Copies of all such public health orders and regulations affecting wetlands shall be filed with the department of environmental conservation. The commissioner may request modification of such orders or regulations if he deems such necessary to implement the policy of this article.

6. The commissioner shall review all current mosquito control projects to determine whether they are having any adverse impact on freshwater wetlands. Where any adverse impact is found, the commissioner may require modification of such projects if he deems such necessary for the implementation of the policies of this article.

7. Where dredging or filling is in navigable waters of the state or is for the reconstruction or repair of certain dams and docks, and where such activity also affects freshwater wetlands, any person undertaking such activity must seek permission under this, article as well as under any other applicable law.

8. On any land that is being developed pursuant to a planned unit development ordinance or local law where freshwater wetlands are to remain as open space, development activities shall be permitted in areas contiguous to such wetlands if the local government affirms that such activities will not despoil said wetland.

§24-0703. Applications for permits.

1. Any person proposing to conduct or cause to be conducted a regulated activity upon any freshwater wetland shall file an application for a permit with the clerk of the local government having jurisdiction or the department, as the case may be. Review of the application shall be made by the local government or the commissioner, as the case may be, in accordance with applicable law and such rules hereunder as may be adopted by the

REGULATORY GUIDANCE LETTER

US Army Corps of Engineers

No. 07-02 **Date: July 4, 2007**

SUBJECT: Exemptions for Construction or Maintenance of Irrigation Ditches and Maintenance of Drainage Ditches Under Section 404 of Clean Water Act

1. Purpose and Applicability.

The purpose of this Regulatory Guidance Letter ("RGL" or "guidance") is to provide a reasonable and predictable national approach for conducting exemption determinations for the construction and maintenance of irrigation ditches and the maintenance of drainage ditches consistent with Section 404(f) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) (also known as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act or FWPCA) Pub. L. 92-500, as amended by Pub. L. 95-217, Pub. L. 100-4, Pub. L. 104-66, 33 U.S.C. § 1251, et seq., and with associated regulations (33 C.F.R. 320-330, 40 C.F.R. Part 232). This guidance is intended to clarify when 404(f) exempts from permitting requirements discharges of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S. associated with the construction and maintenance of irrigation ditches and maintenance of drainage ditches. This RGL was developed and is endorsed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). EPA has the ultimate authority for interpreting the scope of exemptions under CWA Section 404(f).

This document supercedes RGL 87-07, which addresses the Section 404(f)(1)(C) Statutory Exemption for Drainage Ditch Maintenance. Other documents, such as the 1989 MOA addressing 404(f) coordination, are unaffected. As indicated above, this RGL addresses statutory exemptions for both irrigation and drainage ditches. In this effort to provide greater clarity, the following terms are defined for purposes of Subsection 404(f): irrigation ditch, drainage ditch, construction, and maintenance. This document also provides a framework for determining the applicability of the exemptions and the recapture provision. (See Figure 1). While providing greater clarity, both the framework and the definitions are consistent with the agencies' current practice in interpreting the Section 404(f) exemption.

2. Background.

a. Under Section 404(f)(1)(C) of the CWA (see also 33 CFR 323.4(a)(3) and 40 CFR 232.3(c)(3)), discharges of dredged or fill material associated with construction or maintenance of irrigation ditches, or the maintenance (but not construction) of drainage ditches, are not prohibited by or otherwise subject to regulation under Section 404 of the CWA (i.e., these activities are exempt from the need to obtain a Section 404 permit from the Department of the

Army (DA)). Discharges of dredged or fill material associated with siphons, pumps, headgates, wingwalls, weirs, diversion structures, and such other facilities as are appurtenant to and functionally related to irrigation ditches are included in the exemption for irrigation ditches.

b. Section 404(f)(2) of the CWA states that "[a]ny discharge of dredged or fill material into the navigable waters incidental to any activity having as its purpose bringing an area of navigable waters into a use to which it was not previously subject, where the flow or circulation of navigable waters may be impaired or the reach of such waters be reduced, shall be required to have a permit under this section." This is commonly referred to as the "recapture provision." See Section c, below.

c. Under 33 CFR 323.4(c) and 40 CFR 232.3(b), exemptions under 33 CFR 323.4(a)(1-6) and 40 CFR 232.3(c)(1-6) do not apply if the discharge into a water of the U.S. "is part of an activity whose purpose is to convert an area of the waters of the U.S. into a use to which it was not previously subject, where the flow or circulation of waters of the U.S. may be impaired or the reach of such waters reduced. Where the proposed discharge will result in significant discernable alterations to flow or circulation, the presumption is that flow or circulation may be impaired by such alteration."

d. Under 33 CFR 323.4(a)(1)(iii)(C)*(1))(i)*, "[c]onstruction and maintenance of upland (dryland) facilities such as ditching and tiling, incidental to the planting, cultivating, protecting, or harvesting of crops, involve no discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S., and as such never require a section 404 permit."

The CWA Subsection 404(f)(1)(A) exemption for "minor drainage" covers "(t)he discharge of dredged or fill material incidental to connecting upland drainage facilities to waters of the U.S., adequate to effect the removal of excess soil moisture from upland crops." (See 33 CFR 323.4(a)(1)(iii)(C) *(1)(i))*

e. The construction and maintenance of irrigation ditches and maintenance of drainage ditches may require the construction and/or maintenance of a farm road. In those circumstances, the Subsection 404(f)(1)(E) exemption for discharges of dredged or fill material associated with the construction or maintenance of farm roads applies where such related farm roads are constructed and maintained in accordance with best management practices (BMPs), 33 CFR 323.4(a)(6) and 40 CFR 232.3(c)(6), to assure that flow and circulation patterns and chemical and biological characteristics of waters of the U.S. are not impaired, that the reach of the waters of the U.S. is not reduced, and that any adverse effect on the aquatic environment will be otherwise minimized. All of the limitations and conditions mandated by the current Section 404(f) regulations relating to farm roads apply.

3. <u>Guidance for Ditches.</u>

General Guidance: Before carrying out ditch maintenance or construction activities, the following issues should be analyzed:

a. Is there a discharge of dredged or fill material into a water of the U.S.? To make that determination, the statute, regulations, and guidance provided by the Corps and EPA regarding what areas constitute "waters of the United States" subject to CWA jurisdiction must be consulted and followed. Corps and EPA guidance on the extent of CWA geographic jurisdiction define certain categories of "upland ditches" and "upland swales" that generally are not subject to CWA jurisdiction. Discharges of dredged or fill material into those defined categories of upland ditches and upland swales are not subject to either CWA permitting requirements or the subsection 404(f) exemptions.

b. Identify the type of ditch and activity, and whether the activity is eligible for the exemptions at Subsection 404(f)(1). An analysis of the CWA statute and existing EPA and Corps regulations indicates that there are differences between irrigation ditches and drainage ditches for purposes of applying the Subsection 404(f)(1)(C) exemption. The Subsection 404(f)(1)(C) exemption applies to the *construction* and *maintenance* of irrigation ditches, but it applies only to the *maintenance* of drainage ditches.

For purposes of this RGL, wetlands include all wetlands that meet the definition in 33 CFR 328.3. Guidance for applying the regulation is contained in the 1987 Wetland Delineation Manual, and the regional supplements and supplemental guidance, as appropriate, except where the wetland plants were established as a result of the irrigation process. Wetlands established solely due to the presence of irrigation water, irrigated fields, or irrigation ditches do not qualify as wetlands for purposes of applying the 404(f) exemption for construction and maintenance of irrigation ditches and for maintenance of drainage ditches.[1] Where sufficient information is not available to determine the hydrological contribution of irrigation waters to a particular wetlands (i.e., whether the wetland existed at the location prior to the presence of irrigation activities), such wetlands are not removed from consideration as wetlands or waters of the U.S.

For purposes of this RGL, the following definitions apply:

Definition of "Irrigation Ditch:" For purposes of this RGL, an irrigation ditch is a man-made feature and/or an upland swale that either conveys water to an ultimate irrigation use or place of use, or that moves and/or conveys irrigation water (e.g., "run-off" from irrigation) away from irrigated lands. Irrigation ditches may include the distribution system or parts thereof, consisting of manmade canals, laterals, ditches, siphons, and/or pipes, or pump systems. If a ditch carries only irrigation water, irrigation return flows, and overland flow (precipitation and/or snowmelt) that moves from an irrigated field either to or away from an area subject to irrigated agriculture (e.g., an irrigated field), that ditch would be considered an irrigation ditch, not a drainage ditch.

Where a natural or man-altered water body is used as part of an irrigation ditch system, such as where the water body is used to transport irrigation water between manmade ditches, that segment generally is not considered an irrigation ditch for purposes of this exemption, except

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[1]As stated in the preamble to the Corps' Final Rule of November 13, 1986: ". . .we generally do not consider the following waters to be 'Waters of the United States' . . . (b) Artificially irrigated areas which would revert to upland if the irrigation ceased." 51 Federal Register 41217, November 13, 1986. Thus, waters, including wetlands, created as a result of irrigation would not be considered waters of the US even when augmented on occasion by precipitation.

where the Section 404(f)(1) exemption has been determined to apply based on a case-by-case evaluation. Following a case-by-case evaluation, such a natural or man-altered water body may be considered an irrigation ditch eligible for this exemption if it has characteristics suggesting a limited functional role in the broader aquatic ecosystem, such as infrequent or low volume flow, minimal habitat value, or small channel size.

Definition of "Drainage Ditch:" For purposes of this RGL, a drainage ditch is a ditch that conveys water (other than irrigation related flows) from one place to another. Where a ditch would have the effect of more than minor drainage[2] of wetlands (other than wetlands established due to the presence of irrigation water), the ditch would be considered a drainage ditch, not an irrigation ditch, even if used for irrigation. However, a ditch that diverts water from an open body of water (e.g., stream, lake, or reservoir) for irrigation purposes is an irrigation ditch, even if a substantial portion of the flow or volume is diverted.

A ditch determined to be either an irrigation ditch or a drainage ditch would then need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if the recapture provision of Section 404(f)(2) applies (see below).

Definition of "Construction:" For purposes of this RGL, construction includes new work or work that results in an extension or expansion of an existing structure. Ditch construction generally includes, but is not limited to, activities such as:

- Ditch relocation.
- Ditch conversion into pipe.
- Lining, which means placing impervious material such as concrete, clay, or geotextile within the flow perimeter of an open canal, lateral, or ditch with the intent of reducing seepage losses and improving conveyance efficiency. All new lining of ditches, where the ditch had not previously been lined, is considered construction.
- Placement of new control structures.

Definition of "Maintenance:" For purposes of this RGL, maintenance includes a repair to an existing structure or feature to keep the ditch in its existing state or proper condition, or to preserve it from failure or decline.[3] Maintenance generally includes, but is not limited to, activities such as:

- Excavation of accumulated sediments back to original contours.
- Re-shaping of the side-slopes.

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[2]See 33 CFR 323.4(a)(1)(iii)(C)(1) and (C)(2).

[3]Maintenance means the physical preservation of the original, as-built configuration of the ditch and appurtenant structures, to restore the original function and the approximate capacity of the ditch. In many cases, accurate historical records are not available to determine the exact "as-built" specifications of the original ditch. In these cases, districts should work closely with the project proponent to establish an appropriate maintenance depth to restore the ditch's original function and approximate capacity, while meeting the spirit of the exemption and ensuring adequate protection of aquatic resources. Districts should allow maintenance of ditches to be performed to the level of current engineering standards where more graduated side-slopes result in greater stability, so long as those modifications of the ditch will not result in the drainage, degradation, or destruction of additional natural wetlands or other waters of the U.S., as referenced above. Removal of material and re-contouring of the ditch should be in accordance with the historical design and function of that ditch (i.e., the ditch must not be substantially deepened so as to drain additional areas).

- Bank stabilization to prevent erosion where reasonably necessary using best management practices. For maintenance of drainage ditches as defined in this guidance, materials used for stabilization should be compatible with existing bank materials.
- Armoring, lining and/or piping. These activities qualify as maintenance only where a previously armored, lined, or piped section is being repaired and all work occurs within the footprint of the previous work.
- Replacement of existing control structures, where the original function is not changed and original approximate capacity is not increased.

Maintenance is generally viewed as involving activities that keep something in its existing state or proper condition or preserve it from failure or decline. If a drainage ditch has not been serving a drainage function for an extended period of time, drainage ditch re-establishment would be considered construction, not maintenance, and would thus be ineligible for the exemption. However, a ditch that has not been regularly maintained should not automatically be considered ineligible for the ditch maintenance exemption. Some ditches require little or no periodic maintenance to remain functional. Lack of periodic maintenance in these situations does not preclude the ditch from being maintained under the exemption.

c. The third step is to determine if the Recapture Provision applies:

Part 1: Is the discharge part of an activity whose purpose is to convert an area of the waters of the U.S. into a use to which it was not previously subject?

The regulations guiding implementation of CWA Section 404(f) specify that a change in use occurs when there is a "conversion of a section 404 wetland to a non-wetland" and in addition "a permit will be required for the conversion of a cypress swamp to some other use or the conversion of a wetland from silvicultural to agricultural use when there is a discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States in conjunction with construction of dikes, drainage ditches or other works or structures used to effect such conversion." 33 C.F.R. 323.4(c).

Part 1 of the test is met if there would be a change of use. For example, any time an irrigation ditch would cut through (or across) a natural or man-altered water body, including wetlands, this would qualify as a change in use and Part 1 of the Section 404(f)(2) test is met.

Part 2: If Part 1 of the test is met, may the activity also impair the flow or circulation of waters of the U.S. or reduce the reach of such waters?

The regulations guiding implementation of the CWA Section 404(f) specify that "(w)here the proposed discharge will result in significant discernible alterations to flow or circulation, the presumption is that flow or circulation may be impaired by such alteration." "A discharge which elevates the bottom of waters of the United States without converting it to dry land does not thereby reduce the reach of, but may alter the flow or circulation of, waters of the United States." 33 C.F.R. 323.4(c).

The determination as to whether construction or maintenance of an irrigation ditch, or maintenance of a drainage ditch, would result in a significant discernible alteration in flow or circulation, or a reduction in reach, of waters of the U.S. should be made on a case-by-case basis using the factors such as the following: (1) whether the proposed construction or maintenance of the ditch would harmfully sever or fragment the wetland or water body; (2) whether the proposed construction or maintenance of the ditch would significantly and discernibly alter flow or circulation or reduce reach through sidecasting into the wetland or waterbody; (3) whether the proposed construction or maintenance of the ditch would harm the wetland or water body by substantially increasing or decreasing water levels; (4) the relative size of the ditch compared to the wetland or water body; and (5) whether the proposed construction or maintenance employs techniques and best management practices designed to minimize impacts and ensure that there is not significant discernible alteration of flow or circulation or reduction of reach.

Because the Section 404(f)(1) exemption for maintenance of irrigation or drainage ditches applies only to maintenance activities that would maintain existing capacity and functionality (not to construction activities), it is unlikely that the recapture provision in Section 404(f)(2) would apply to ditch maintenance activities as defined above. However, if a question arises as to whether ditch maintenance activities would trigger the Section 404(f)(2) recapture provision (e.g., if the maintenance is "incidental" to a larger activity that triggers the provision – see footnote 4 below), this should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis using the factors such as those listed above.

This recapture provision is a two-part test. If the answers to both parts are "yes," a (DA) permit is required for the activity. If one part of the test is not satisfied and that activity qualifies for an exemption under 404(f)(1), it is not "recaptured" under 404(f)(2).[4]

In situations where the potential eligibility of a proposed discharge of dredged or fill material for an exemption under Section 404(f)(1)(C) has been raised to the district, and where the district cannot make a determination due to a lack of pertinent factual information, it is incumbent on those seeking exemption to provide the documentation necessary to establish the facts on a case-by-case basis.

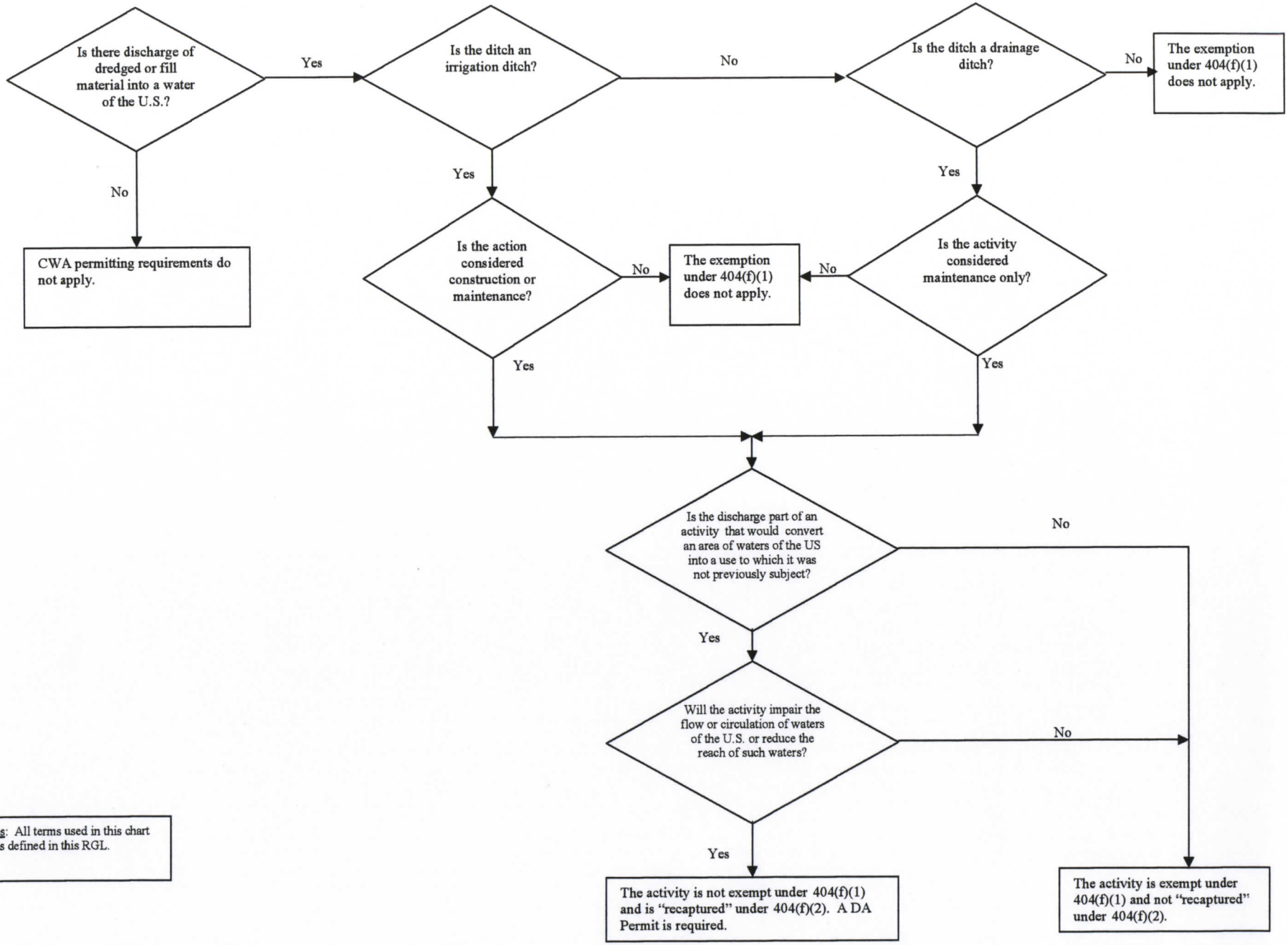
If the proposed activity is not exempt under Section 404(f)(1), the work may be authorized under one or more Nationwide General Permits (NWPs), or under a Regional General Permit (RGP), or pursuant to a Standard Individual Permit. The NWPs can be found at: http://www.usace.army.mil/cw/cecwo/reg/ and the RGPs can be found on the local Corps District regulatory web pages. Additional guidance on the NWPs/RGPs may be obtained from the local Corps District office.

[4]The discharge of dredged or fill material itself does not need to be the sole cause of the destruction of the waters of the United States (e.g., wetlands) or other change in use or the sole cause of the reduction in or impairment of, reach flow, or circulation of such waters. The discharge need only be "incidental to" or "part of" an activity that is intended to or will foreseeably bring about that result.

4. Duration. This guidance rescinds and supersedes RGL 87-7. This guidance remains in effect unless revised or rescinded. Additional guidance may be issued in the near future to further define irrigation ditch, drainage ditch, construction, and maintenance.

DON T. RILEY
Major General, US Army
Director of Civil Works

FIGURE 1: FLOWCHART FOR PROCESSING EXEMPTONS UNDER404(f)(1) AND 404(f)(2)



Notes: All terms used in this chart are as defined in this RGL.

SECTION 404 OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT

A. The Secretary may issue permits, after notice and opportunity for public hearings for the discharge of dredged or fill material into the navigable waters at specified disposal sites. Not later than the fifteenth day after the date an applicant submits all the information required to complete an application for a permit under this subsection, the Secretary shall publish the notice required by this subsection.

B. Subject to subsection (c) of this section, each such disposal site shall be specified for each such permit by the Secretary
   1. through the application of guidelines developed by the Administrator, in conjunction with the Secretary, which guidelines shall be based upon criteria comparable to the criteria applicable to the territorial seas, the contiguous zone, and the ocean under section 403(c), and
   2. in any case where such guidelines under clause (1) alone would prohibit the specification of a site, through the application additionally of the economic impact of the site on navigation and anchorage.

C. The Administrator is authorized to prohibit the specification (including the withdrawal of specification) of any defined area as a disposal site, and he is authorized to deny or restrict the use of any defined area for specification (including the withdrawal of specification) as a disposal site, whenever he determines, after notice and opportunity for public hearings, that the discharge of such materials into such area will have an unacceptable adverse effect on municipal water supplies, shellfish beds and fishery areas (including spawning and breeding areas), wildlife, or recreational areas. Before making such determination, the Administrator shall consult with the Secretary. The Administrator shall set forth in writing and make public his findings and his reasons for making any determination under this subsection.

D. The term "Secretary" as used in this section means the Secretary of the Army, acting through the Chief of Engineers.

E.
   1. In carrying out his functions relating to the discharge of dredged or fill material under this section, the Secretary may, after notice of opportunity for public hearing, issue general permits on a State, regional, or nationwide basis for any category of activities involving discharges of dredged or fill material if the Secretary determines that the activities in such category are similar in nature, will cause only minimal adverse environmental effects when performed separately, and will have only minimal cumulative adverse effects on the environment. Any general permit issued under this subsection shall
      a. be based on the guidelines described in subsection (b)(l) of this section, and
      b. set forth the requirements and standards which shall apply to any activity authorized by such general permit.
   2. No general permit issued under this subsection shall be for a period of more than five years after the date of its issuance and such general permit may be revoked or modified by the Secretary if, after opportunity for

public hearing, the Secretary determines that the activities authorized by such general permit have an adverse impact on the environment or such activities are more appropriately authorized by individual permits.

F.

1. Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the discharge of dredge or fill material -
   - **a.** from normal farming, silviculture, and ranching activities such as plowing, seeding, cultivating, minor drainage, harvesting for the production of food, fiber, and forest products, or upland soil and water conservation practices;
   - **b.** for the purpose of maintenance, including emergency reconstruction of recently damaged parts, of currently serviceable structures such as dikes, dams, levees, groins, riprap, breakwaters, causeways, and bridge abutments or approaches, and transportation structures;
   - **c.** for the purpose of construction or maintenance of farm or stock ponds or irrigation ditches, or the maintenance of drainage ditches;
   - **d.** for the purpose of construction of temporary sedimentation basins on a construction site which does not include placement of fill material into the navigable waters;
   - **e.** for the purpose of construction or maintenance or farm roads or forest roads, or temporary roads for moving mining equipment, where such roads are constructed and maintained, in accordance with best management practices, to assure that flow and circulation patterns and chemical and biological characteristics of the navigable waters are not impaired, that the reach of the navigable waters is not reduced, and that any adverse effect on the aquatic environment will be otherwise minimized;
   - f. resulting from any activity with respect to which a State has an approved program, under section 208(b)(4) which meets the requirements of subparagraphs (B) and (C) of such section, is not prohibited by or otherwise subject to regulation under this section or section 301(a) or 402 of this Act (except for effluent standards or prohibitions under section 307).

2. Any discharge of dredged or fill material into the navigable waters incidental to any activity having as its purpose bringing an area of the navigable waters into a use to which it was not previously subject, where the flow or circulation of navigable waters may be impaired or the reach of such waters be reduced, shall be required to have a permit under this section.

G.

1. The Governor of any State desiring to administer its own individual and general permit program for the discharge of dredged or fill material into the navigable waters (other than those waters which are presently used, or are susceptible to use in their natural condition or by reasonable improvement as a means to transport interstate or foreign commerce

United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS

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Wetland Fact Sheet - Prior Converted Cropland

Background

The Swampbuster provision of the 1985 Farm Bill was aimed at reducing the conversion of wetlands for agricultural purposes. If you drain, fill, level, clear stumps or otherwise alter a wetland you will lose eligibility for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program benefits.

Prior Converted Cropland Exemption

Areas that qualify as Prior Converted Cropland (PC) are exempt from the Swampbuster provision of the Farm Bill. These areas can be further drained, cropped or manipulated without loss of eligibility for USDA program benefits. Prior converted croplands that are certified by NRCS are also exempt from wetland regulations administered by the Army Corps of Engineers and EPA (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act). However, if the land changes to a non-agricultural use, or is abandoned, according to the criteria established by the Corps and EPA, it may be regulated under the CWA.

What it Takes for Farmland to Qualify as Prior Converted Cropland

Farmland must meet **all of the following criteria** for it to be designated as Prior Converted Cropland:

- Cropped prior to December 23, 1985 with an agricultural commodity (an annually tilled crop such as corn);
- The land was cleared, drained or otherwise manipulated to make it possible to plant a crop;
- The land has continued to be used for agricultural purposes (cropping, haying or grazing)
- The land does not flood or pond for more than 14 days during the growing season

Woodland, pasture and hayland without a history of annual tillage and cropping do not qualify as Prior Converted Cropland.

How to Get Your Land Designated as Prior Converted Cropland

Farmers can request a Certified Wetland Determination from their local NRCS office for areas they want to have designated as Prior Converted Cropland. This request must be in writing using Form NRCS-CPA-38, Request for Certified Determinations. Determinations should be requested for any areas where manipulations such as draining or land clearing are planned.

NRCS will use a variety of tools such as cropping history records, aerial photography, maps and an on-site evaluation to determine if the area qualifies as Prior Converted Cropland.

Please contact your local NRCS office for further information. You can also visit us on the web at: www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

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