
Memorandum

WRE Committees Technical Support



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Department of Ecology

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Subject: Proposed Screening Criteria for Initial Evaluation of Projects -Draft

1.0 Introduction

HDR is providing technical support to the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the Watershed Restoration and Enhancement (WRE) committees for Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15. This technical memorandum (memo) describes the proposed screening criteria for candidate water offset projects. The intent of the screening criteria is to provide a tool that can evaluate relevant attributes of candidate projects and prioritize the most valuable projects for further evaluation and potential inclusion in the WRE plan for each respective WRIA. In this context, the value of a project refers to its ability to offset, in perpetuity, the anticipated impact of permit-exempt domestic wells on streamflow and improve aquatic species habitat. This approach can be used to generate a preliminary ranking of projects for individual WRIAs, which could then potentially be re-ordered if planning groups decide that is appropriate.

This memo was developed to support WRIAs 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 and is intended to be reviewed by each WRIA committee to elicit feedback for initial project screening criteria. The draft screening criteria builds on requirements from the NEB guidance and best professional judgement from the consultant team. It is anticipated that each WRE committee will review and possibly tailor the criteria to their needs.

The screening process is composed of a fatal flaw screening and subsequent scoring for consideration in the plan and possible prioritization (should committees choose to use prioritization in their project list). A subset of projects, identified by the committee, will be brought forward for further evaluation, as necessary for inclusion into the WRE plans. Additional criteria may be developed in conjunction with Ecology and WRIA committees at that time to aid in further evaluation of projects. Initially, committee project lists will be working documents, so criteria may be applied as new projects are added and projects can be revisited as new information is available.

2.0 Fatal Flaw Screening

Each project will be evaluated with the following fatal flaw screening criteria on a binary (yes or no) basis. Any “yes” answer will disqualify a project:

- No reliable benefits to streamflow or habitat
- Already required by regulatory obligation (i.e. double counting)
- Inconsistent with existing law or policy
- Substantive conflict with another watershed plan
- Implemented prior to January 2018

Table 1. Fatal Flaw Screening Criteria Example.

Project Number	Project Name	Fatal Flaw Criteria (Enter 1 = Yes, 0 = No)			
		No reliable benefits to streamflow or habitat	Already required by regulatory obligation	Inconsistent with existing law or policy	Substantive conflict with another watershed plan
1	Xxx1	0	0	0	0
2	Xxx2	1	0	0	0
3	Xxx3	0	0	0	0
4	Xxx4	0	0	0	0

The project must have foreseeable benefits that are reliable. If the project is only projected to benefit streamflow or habitat on a short-term basis, or if project benefits may cease to occur because of other uncontrollable factors, the project should not be considered for further evaluation.

The project cannot be required by an existing regulatory obligation that will be implemented regardless of the WRE Plan. Therefore, claiming the project and counting it towards water offset or NEB will not be allowed.¹

The project must be consistent with existing law or policy and be able to be permitted. Examples of Washington revised code and administrative code that should be considered include the following:

- Chapter 90.03 RCW, Water Code (e.g. project proposes to change a water right in an unlawful way)
- Chapter 173-201A WAC Surface Water Quality Standards (e.g. project proposes a surface discharge with contaminants that will cause the receiving waterbody to exceed standards)
- Chapter 173-200-040 WAC, Water Quality Standards (e.g. project proposes a groundwater discharge with contaminants exceeding water quality standards).

¹ See Section 7 of the [Streamflow Restoration Policy and Interpretive Statement](#) (POL-2094) for under “Acceptable projects and actions.”

- Chapter 220-660 WAC, Hydraulic code rules (e.g. project proposes to fill an excessive quantity of wetland or stream channel)

Finally, the project cannot be in substantive conflict with another watershed plan. For example, the project may not harm sensitive salmonid stocks or priority species.

3.0 Prioritization Screening Attributes

Screening criteria include the evaluation of project attributes that are relevant to 1) water offsets, 2) habitat benefits, 3) project feasibility, and 4) project implementation. Within each category, project attributes are scored on an ordinal scale, where five is the most beneficial, three is moderate, and one is the least beneficial. These criteria are summarized in Table 2 and detailed in Appendix A.

Water offset attributes include the volume of the water offset benefit, whether the offset addresses impacts that occur in high priority subbasins, and the reliability of the offset (Table 1; Appendix A).

Habitat criteria characterize streamflow and aquatic species habitat benefits, and how important those benefits are in spatial context. Criteria include whether or not the project is in a subbasin that contains high priority aquatic habitat, the magnitude of aquatic habitat benefit, and species and life history stages addressed (Table 1; Appendix A). These habitat benefits will contribute to the NEB evaluation, in terms of both streamflow and habitat benefits.

Feasibility criteria include constructability, cost to benefit ratio, operations and maintenance (O&M) considerations, and resilience to climate change (Table 1; Appendix A). The intent of these criteria is to characterize project feasibility and certainty.

Implementation criteria include consistency with existing law or policy, consistency with watershed plans and projects, and sponsor commitment (Table 1; Appendix A). The intent of the implementation criteria is to identify potential (generally non-technical) issues that could complicate implementation of a project that may appear to be beneficial.

Table 2. Screening criteria descriptions.

Criteria	Description of Criteria
Water Offset Criteria	
Water offset volume	How much water will the project offset compared to the total required offset for the WRIA?
Offset addresses a high priority subbasin	Does the offset project address impacts in a high priority subbasin (areas where rural growth is anticipated?)?
Reliability	Will the project provide benefits on a reliable basis?
Habitat Criteria	
High Priority Subbasin- Aquatic Habitat	Will the offset project improve streamflow and aquatic species habitat in a basin (including downstream reaches) where improving streamflow and habitat is a high priority for aquatic species?
Magnitude of Benefit	Is the magnitude of the streamflow benefit significant relative to existing flows or is the habitat benefit significant relative to habitat needs?
Species and life stages addressed	Does the project address priority species ¹ ? Does it address multiple species and life stages?
Feasibility Criteria	
Cost to benefit ratio	Is the cost of offset water benefit (in terms of \$/acre-feet/year) low or is the cost to streamflow or habitat benefit low relative to other projects in the watershed?
Operations & Maintenance	Are the long-term O&M requirements and costs reasonable? Has a mechanism to pay for O&M been identified?
Resilience	Will the project be resilient to climate change and provide the same benefits under a changing climate?
Implementation Criteria	
Consistency with existing law or policy	Is the project consistent with existing law or policy?
Consistency with watershed plans and projects	Is the project consistent with existing watershed plans?
Sponsor commitment	Is the sponsor committed to constructing and operating the project?

¹Committee can define priority species or they could be defined as “threatened and endangered salmonids or other native fish and aquatic species of concern”.

4.0 Prioritization Scoring

Within each category, each criterion is scored on an ordinal scale, summed, and divided by the full potential score, equaling a normalized percentage of the full potential score (Table 3 shows an example for the water offset criteria). This is the subtotal score. Any criteria not applicable or not able to be scored will receive a medium score of three.

Each subtotal score is weighted in terms of the relative importance of each category (Table 4; in this example, we have equal weighting among categories). Each category subtotal score is weighted, and then the weighted subtotal scores are summed to equal a total score on a scale of 20 (i.e. all criteria were scored as “low”, or 1) to 100 (i.e. all criteria were scored as “high”, or 5). See spreadsheet named “Project_screening.xlsx” for a complete set of scoring tables.

Table 3. Example of criteria scoring and subtotals.

Project #	Project Name	Water Offset Criteria			Subtotal Score
		Offset Volume of Water	Offset impacts address a high-priority subbasin	Reliability	
1	xxx1	5	5	5	100
2	xxx2	1	1	1	20
3	xxx3	3	3	3	60
4	xxx4	3	1	3	47
5	xxx5	3	3	3	60

Table 4. Example of screening criteria category weighting.

Criteria Weighting	
Water Offset	25%
Habitat	25%
Feasibility	25%
Implementation	25%
Sum (always =100%)	100%

Weighting is user-defined and therefore could be changed by WRIA committee or workgroup. See spreadsheet named “Project_Screening.xlsx” where the weightings can be modified and applied to criteria.

Table 5 shows an example of the results of scoring and weighting the criteria. The highest scores are the most valuable projects for this initial evaluation. The WRE Committees and Workgroups will meet to further evaluate and discuss the projects to develop a subset of projects for the next stage of project evaluation.

Table 5. Example of Screening criteria category weighted subtotals and total scores.

Project #	Project Name	Water Offset	Habitat	Feasibility	Implementation	Totals
1	xxx1	25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	100.0
2	xxx2	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	20.0
3	xxx3	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	60.0
4	xxx4	11.7	25.0	25.0	5.0	66.7
5	xxx5	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	60.0

Appendix A
Scoring Guide for Screening Criteria

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Table A-1: Water Offset screening attributes and scoring criteria.

Rating	Rating Score	Offset Volume of Water	Offset impacts address a high-priority subbasin	Reliability
Low (Least Beneficial)	1	Does not provide water offset	Contributes to offsetting subbasin impact in a low-priority subbasin for water offsets.	Project benefits may not occur every year, depending on other factors that may change from year to year.
Medium	3	Provides some water offset or quantity is uncertain	Contributes to offsetting subbasin impact in a medium-priority subbasin for water offsets.	Magnitude of project benefits relies on other factors that may change from year to year.
High (Most Beneficial)	5	Volume offsets subbasin impact or > 10% of the WRIA offset requirement	Contributes to offsetting subbasin impact in a high-priority subbasin for water offsets.	Project benefits will be sustained year to year and during droughts.

Table A-2. Habitat attributes and scoring criteria.

Rating	Rating Score	High Priority Subbasin-Streamflow and Aquatic Habitat	Magnitude of Benefit	Species and life stages addressed
Low (Least Beneficial)	1	Project provides some flow benefit but does not improve aquatic habitat functions	Low benefit	Project only benefits one salmonid species and one life stage
Medium	3	Project improves aquatic habitat function(s) in a subbasin where improving that habitat function(s) is a medium or low priority	Medium benefit	Project benefits priority species, multiple salmonid species, but one life stage (e.g. rearing habitat)
High (Most Beneficial)	5	Project improves aquatic habitat function(s) in a subbasin where improving that habitat function(s) is a high priority	High benefit	Project benefits priority species ¹ , multiple salmonid species, or multiple life stages of priority species

¹ WDFW Priority Habitat and Species, <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/phs>.

Table A-3. Feasibility screening attributes and scoring criteria.

Rating	Rating Score	Cost to Benefit	Operations & Maintenance	Resilience
Low (Least Beneficial)	1	TBD (committee define)	Long-term O&M is frequent (i.e. daily to monthly) and project proponent will not cover O&M; High cost	The project benefits are likely to be reduced from climate change
Medium	3	TBD (committee define)	Long-term O&M is infrequent (i.e. quarterly or less frequent) and project proponent will cover O&M; medium cost	The project benefits may be reduced from climate change
High (Most Beneficial)	5	TBD (committee define)	No long-term O&M required; low cost; or project proponent has identified a funding mechanism to cover the O&M costs	The project is resilient to climate change

1 Potential criteria: Low (> \$10K/AFY) or low habitat benefit; Medium (> \$2K/AFY < \$10K/AFY) or medium habitat benefit; High (< \$2K/AFY) or high habitat benefit

Table A-4. Implementation variables and scoring criteria.

Rating	Rating Score	Consistency with existing law or policy / permitting/regulatory approval complexity	Consistent with watershed plans and projects	Sponsor commitment
Low (Least Beneficial)	1	Uncertain/Challenging; requires negotiation with one or more agencies, extensive environmental review process	Project is unrelated to other watershed/habitat restoration plan objectives	No proponent has been identified
Medium	3	Consistent/Moderate	Project identified or pursuant to a watershed/habitat restoration plan objective	NA
High (Most Beneficial)	5	Consistent / Straightforward/Would likely be supported by permitting agencies/Within existing regulatory authority	High priority project in at least one other watershed/habitat restoration plan	Proponent is committed to constructing and operating project