



PORT of
vancouver

Project & Environmental Review

Guidelines – Habitat Assessment

Vancouver Fraser Port Authority

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Canada

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1. OVERVIEW

These guidelines are intended to assist applicants of projects on lands and waters managed by Vancouver Fraser Port Authority in undertaking habitat assessments as part of the Project and Environmental Review process.

2. INTRODUCTION

This document provides guidance to the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority tenants in assessing potential habitat and wildlife impacts associated with works and activities (referred to herein as “projects”) proposed on Vancouver Fraser Port Authority-managed lands. These guidelines support the port authority’s Project and Environmental Review process and should be used by both tenants and environmental professionals who may be hired to assist with technical aspects of habitat assessment.

3. PRINCIPLES/OBJECTIVES

A habitat assessment is generally undertaken to assess the presence of significant biological resources, including sensitive and rare species or habitats, which may potentially be affected by a project. Where projects are found to warrant a habitat assessment, these guidelines are intended to assure that the assessment is carried out in a consistent manner and to an appropriate standard.

4. APPLICABILITY

These guidelines apply to proposed projects with the following characteristics:

- The project will result in permanent impact(s) to habitat or wildlife, such as infilling below the high water mark or clearing vegetation.
- The project footprint is located within or in close proximity to highly productive or sensitive habitat or features, such as eelgrass or eagle nesting trees.
- The project is within or in close proximity to species at risk habitat.
- Insufficient information is available to adequately characterize habitat and wildlife in the project area.

Based on these project characteristics, it is anticipated that adverse effects to habitat or wildlife may occur. The level of review of the habitat assessment should be appropriate to the scale and potential impacts of the project and be based on one or more of the following factors:

- The potential for significant adverse effects to occur
- How well the adverse effects are understood
- Whether mitigation measures and impact management techniques are proven and established or new and unique
- The potential for adverse effects to extend beyond the project site
- The potential need for follow up monitoring

Projects and activities in areas where habitat features and functions are limited due to existing conditions would generally not require a habitat assessment provided environmental impacts are mitigated through appropriate best management practices. The need for a habitat assessment will be determined by the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and communicated to the applicant during the preliminary review phase of the Project and Environmental Review process. A habitat assessment is not anticipated for Category A reviews, but may be required for Category B, C or D reviews. Further information on the Project and Environmental Review Categories is available in the Project and Environmental Review Application Guide.

The habitat assessment should be submitted as part of a complete application. For larger, more complex projects which require additional study or input from multiple technical experts to fully characterize the project and its potential impacts, the habitat assessment may form part of a broader environmental impact assessment. For Category C and D reviews, the appropriate format for presenting the habitat assessment will be determined by the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority in consultation with the applicant during the preliminary review phase.

These guidelines are limited in application to the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and its Project and Environmental Review process. The applicant is responsible for obtaining any and all required permits, authorizations and approvals from any other governmental authority having jurisdiction and for complying with any other applicable legislation, such as the *Fisheries Act*, *Migratory Birds Convention Act* and *Species at Risk Act*. While the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority will take into consideration decisions made by other agencies, such as a determination of no serious harm to fish, the port authority will make its own determination on the need for mitigation, habitat enhancement and follow up monitoring in accordance with its obligations under the *Canada Marine Act*. Any such requirements would be based on the findings of the habitat assessment and other information reviewed during the Project and Environmental Review process.

5. HABITAT ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

Projects requiring a habitat assessment have a potential for significant adverse impacts to terrestrial and/or aquatic habitat and wildlife resources proximate to the project site. When these adverse impacts cannot be adequately managed using best management practices or the potential impacts are not adequately known, further investigation is required. In such cases, the applicant is required to retain the services of a qualified environmental professional (QEP) to prepare a report that identifies and describes habitat and wildlife resources and presents mitigation measures that are proposed to be implemented to avoid, minimize and/or offset adverse impacts.

5.1 HABITAT ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS

The following components should generally be included in a habitat assessment:

5.1.1 Project Overview

This section should include the following subsections:

Project Title

- Provide a succinct title that accurately describes the project being assessed. This title should be the same as the one presented on the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority project permit application.

Project Location

- Provide a location identifier such as a civic address or legal lot description of where the project will take place.
- Provide a figure illustrating the local context of the project and a figure illustrating the proposed project footprint, including temporary construction staging areas.

Project Dates

- Include expected date of project commencement and completion. These dates usually reflect the preparation and construction period.
- Note and describe any activities that will occur outside recommended least risk work windows for the protection of fish or wildlife.

Project Rationale

- Describe the need and rationale for the project. Include a description of how the project will accomplish the stated purpose.

5.1.2 Project Description

Summarize the key details of the project. The extent of the project description material provided should be scaled to the size and complexity of the project and the potential for project activities to generate impacts of concern.

This section may include:

- Project components
- Materials
- Equipment
- Proposed work plan
- Schedule

5.1.3 Description of Existing Environment

It is important to characterize the existing environmental conditions of the project area in order to effectively assess whether the project will have habitat and/or wildlife impacts, and to be able to evaluate whether the project successfully avoided such impacts.

This section should include consideration of:

- Biophysical characteristics
- Habitat features that support important fish and wildlife functions
- Aquatic, riparian and terrestrial vegetation
- Species observed or likely present (wildlife, fish, birds, invertebrates)
- Species at risk

The methods used to characterize the existing environment should also be described in this section. Describing the existing environment will likely include a combination of reviewing existing information (such as databases, mapping sources, published reports and previous studies) and new, site-specific information. A site visit should be conducted to record the existing conditions specific to the project site.

Additional studies (such as a biophysical survey), inventories or analysis may be needed to address information gaps, fully characterize existing conditions and establish a baseline against which impacts can be assessed. For example, a desktop review may indicate that the project site is within the range of a listed species at risk and the site visit determined that suitable habitat for the species is present in the project area. Additional surveys may be required to ascertain if the species is present and, therefore, potentially affected by project activities.

5.1.4 Impacts and Residual Effects

Summarize the temporary and permanent impacts to wildlife and habitats potentially affected by the project. Each affected component should be identified, followed by a description of how the project will affect it.

Example:

- *Approximately 25 m² of sand-gravel intertidal foreshore will be covered by rip rap, removing surf smelt spawning habitat.*
- *The spread of non-native species could be promoted by the clearing of native vegetation.*

5.1.5 Mitigation Measures

List mitigation measures that directly address the impacts identified.

Mitigation measures presented in the habitat assessment should be limited to the components likely to be affected by the project. For permanent habitat impacts, this may include a description of offsets, management of invasive species and replanting plans.

If a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be developed for the project and submitted as part of the application, a reference to the CEMP may be sufficient in this section, provided it is adequately detailed to address the identified impacts. If the CEMP will not be sufficiently developed at the time of application or will not include specific mitigations, such as replanting plans, these should be described in the habitat assessment.

5.1.6 Environmental Monitoring

Document the key construction periods or activities during which environmental monitoring will be required. Provide details such as:

- Responsibilities of the environmental monitor
- Proposed schedule

If a CEMP will be developed for the project and submitted as part of the application, a reference to the CEMP may be sufficient in this section, provided it is adequately detailed.

5.1.7 Summary and Conclusions

This section should summarize the key findings of the habitat assessment. The QEP preparing the report should provide a clear statement about the likelihood of the project to cause significant adverse impacts to habitat and wildlife.

The QEP must also include their name, designation, signature, contact information and date on the report.

5.1.8 Reference List

List the references and information sources used during completion of the habitat assessment.

5.1.9 Attachments List

List the supplementary items/documentation sourced in the preparation of the habitat assessment. This may include maps, figures, drawings, site photos and management plans.

5.2 ADDITIONAL COMPONENTS

Projects with larger footprints, longer timelines and/or greater potential impacts, or involving sensitive areas and complex mitigation measures, may warrant the inclusion of additional sections in the habitat assessment. Where appropriate to reflect the unique characteristics of the project, a description of the alternatives considered and a discussion of cumulative effects may be required. The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority will identify those projects that require this additional work during the preliminary review phase.

6. DEFINITIONS

Habitat means (a) in respect of aquatic species, spawning grounds and nursery, rearing, food supply, migration and any other areas on which aquatic species depend directly or indirectly in order to carry out their life processes, or areas where aquatic species formerly occurred and have the potential to be reintroduced; and (b) in respect of other wildlife species, the area or type of site where an individual or wildlife species naturally occurs or

depends on directly or indirectly in order to carry out its life processes or formerly occurred and has the potential to be reintroduced.

Qualified environmental professional (QEP) means an applied scientist or technologist who is registered and in good standing with an appropriate BC professional organization or who, through demonstrated suitable education, experience and knowledge relevant to the particular matter, may be reasonably relied on to provide advice within their area of expertise. A qualified environmental professional could be a biologist, agrologist, forester, geoscientist, engineer, or technologist.

Species at risk means species designated as extirpated, endangered, threatened or of special concern in Appendices 1 through 3 of the federal *Species at Risk Act*.

Wildlife means a species, subspecies, variety or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and (a) is native to Canada; or (b) has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

7. NOTES/LINKS TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority's Project and Environmental Review Application Guide, and Guidelines - Construction Environmental Management Plan, as well as legislation such as the *Fisheries Act*, *Migratory Birds Convention Act* and *Species at Risk Act*, may also be relevant.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you require clarification, or assistance with respect to any of these guidelines, please contact Vancouver Fraser Port Authority staff who are available to help. Environmental Programs staff can be contacted as follows:

Phone: 604-655-9082 General Environmental Programs Line

Email: EnvironmentalPrograms@portvancouver.com

9. UPDATES

These guidelines are available for viewing and downloading from our website www.portvancouver.com. To ensure that you are referring to the most up-to-date document please reference the version date clearly indicated on the front page.