

**Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
Department of Environmental Conservation**

Vermont Wetland General Permit #3-9026

I. Purpose

The Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources is issuing this general permit pursuant to 10 V.S.A. §905b and §9.8 of the Vermont Wetland Rules, effective February 10, 2023, for certain specified activities within certain wetlands and buffers in order to more effectively and efficiently regulate and protect Vermont's wetlands. The Secretary reserves the right in Section IX.J of this general permit to require an individual permit if deemed necessary to protect wetlands or buffers.

II. Definitions

Unless otherwise defined herein, all terms used in this general permit shall have the meanings set forth in the Vermont Wetland Rules, the Wetlands statute, 10 V.S.A. Chapter 37, or if not defined in the Vermont Wetland Rules or Wetlands statute, shall have their common meaning.

III. Limitations on Coverage

The following activities are not eligible for coverage under this general permit:

- A. Activities that are allowed uses under §6 of the Vermont Wetland Rules.
- B. Activities that the Secretary finds will have an undue adverse impact on protected wetland functions and values, or that need additional conditions beyond those in this general permit in order to protect functions and values.
- C. Activities within a Class I wetland or buffer zone.
- D. Activities affecting wetlands significant for Rare, Threatened or Endangered (RTE) Species Habitat function pursuant to §5.6 of the Vermont Wetland Rules. This limitation may be waived if the applicant has received approval from the Department of Fish and Wildlife NHIP.
- E. Activities located in or adjacent (within 50 feet) to bogs, fens, or vernal pools.
- F. Activities in or adjacent (within 50 feet) to wetlands that are significant for the Exemplary Wetland Natural Community function pursuant to §5.5 of the Vermont Wetland Rules. This limitation may be waived if the applicant has received approval from the Department of Fish and Wildlife NHIP.
- G. Activities in or adjacent (within 50 feet) to wetlands at or above 2,500' in elevation (headwaters wetland).
- H. Activities that have not demonstrated sufficient avoidance and minimization of impacts to the wetland and buffer zone, in accordance with § 9.5 of the Vermont Wetland Rules.

- I. Activities that are components of a single project and/or planned phases of a multi-phased project, where the entire project exceeds the eligibility thresholds in Section IV of this general permit.
- J. Activities within perennial streams subject to state jurisdiction under 10 V.S.A. Chapter 41, Stream Alterations.

IV. Activities Eligible for Coverage

A. The Secretary has determined that activities eligible for authorization under this general permit will comply with the Vermont Wetland Rules and will have no undue adverse effect on protected functions and values. In making this determination, the Secretary has evaluated the potential direct and immediate effects of eligible activities as well as the potential cumulative or ongoing effects on wetland function and value. This determination is achieved by limiting the impact threshold of eligible activities based on the condition and use of the wetland and buffer zone, and the nature of the activity. Furthermore, activity-specific Best Management Practices required by this permit for eligible activities will limit the potential impacts to wetlands, buffer zones and associated waters.

B. Eligible Activity Thresholds: To qualify for this general permit, the proposed activity must not exceed the threshold limit (in square feet) for each category of wetland and buffer, and each category of project. In calculating the areal extent of impact, an applicant shall include filling, dredging, cutting woody vegetation, and temporary and permanent impacts. Indirect impacts such as draining shall also be included in the threshold calculation. Eligible activity thresholds for the different project categories are listed in Table 1. If a project impacts different wetland and buffer types as identified in Table 1 below, the total project impacts shall not exceed either the threshold for individual threshold types or the total project impact threshold. Categories of projects are described below:

1. **Linear Projects** are projects associated with linear facilities, including but not limited to roads, highways, bike paths, railroads, overhead utility lines, underground utility lines, and/or pipelines.
2. **Non-linear Projects** are any projects that are not Linear Projects.
3. **Managed Areas** are wetland and buffer areas where the land use results in diminished function, including mowed lawns, mowed road shoulders, parking areas, roads, managed pasture, hay fields, and/or croplands.
4. **Natural Areas** are wetland and buffer areas that are naturally vegetated or minimally managed areas where the land use does not result in diminished function, including but not limited to natural areas, areas used for silviculture, and/or old fields.
5. **Surface Water Margins** are wetlands located along waters of the state (e.g. lakes, rivers, streams). The associated threshold applies to the 10 feet of wetland margin as measured from the ordinary high water mark for lakes and ponds, or top of bank for streams. No more than 150 square feet of combined wetland and buffer zone impact is allowed in surface water margins in order to be eligible for coverage under this general permit unless the activity is part of an existing stream crossing structure. If the activity is part of an existing stream crossing, it may be

eligible for coverage if the square footage threshold for either a managed or natural area is met.

Table 1: Eligible Activity Thresholds: The project must not result in impacts greater than the thresholds listed for each category of wetland and activity.

Wetland or Buffer Type	Linear Projects – Total Area Impacted	Non-Linear Projects – Total Area Impacted
Managed Areas	<5,000 square feet	<3,000 square feet
Natural Areas	<3,000 square feet	<1,000 square feet
Surface Water Margins	<150 square feet – included in above totals*	<150 square feet – included in above totals*
Total Project Impacts	5,000 square feet	3,000 square feet

* Excluding activities that are part of an existing stream crossing structure, in which case the square footage thresholds for managed or natural areas would apply.

C. Authorizations under this general permit shall not be issued for piecemeal projects and shall be applied to single and complete projects. All components of a single project shall be considered together as constituting one single and complete project for purposes of determining eligibility. All planned phases of multi-phased projects shall be considered together as constituting one single and complete project for purposes of determining eligibility. Authorizations under this general permit shall not be issued for any activity that is part of an overall project for which an individual permit is required.

V. Required Best Management Practices

A. Best Management Practices Applicable to All Eligible Projects:

1. Steps shall be taken to prevent the transport of sediment into any wetland or other surface water and to promote re-vegetation following the completion of work:
 - a) If a construction stormwater permit is required (i.e. over an acre of soil disturbance), the permittee shall follow the terms and conditions of that permit. Otherwise, the permittee shall utilize other recommended sediment and erosion controls as needed and as described in the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Low Risk Handbook for Erosion Prevention and Sediment Control, or other equivalent controls as approved by the Agency.
 - b) All sediment controls and construction fencing shall be installed prior to beginning any earthwork for the project and removed following the successful establishment of vegetation.
 - c) Disturbed soils shall be seeded and mulched within 48 hours of final

grading. Appropriate wetland seed mixes shall be used within wetlands. Appropriate erosion control/conservation seed mixes shall be used within buffers. All areas shall be stabilized within wetland and mulched with straw or weed-free hay to limit the spread of invasive species.

2. If the impact is temporary in nature, stockpiling of material shall be done on filter fabric or equivalent in the wetland and buffer zone. Temporarily removed wetland soils shall be put back in place in the reverse order that they were removed and restored to their prior condition to match the original soil profile.

3. Removed and stockpiled materials shall be located outside of the wetlands and buffer zones and at least 50 feet from surface waters, and appropriate erosion controls measures as described above shall be used.

4. Impacts from equipment access to the project site shall be limited by utilizing existing or low impact routes using the following sequence of options listed in order of preference:

a) Access should be limited to upland areas or existing maintained roads to the extent practicable;

b) Access on other existing primitive roads or existing managed areas (as defined in Section IV.B.3) in wetlands or buffer zones;

c) Where existing roads are not an option for access, minimize rutting and earth disturbing activities by:

(1) Accessing wetland areas with mats or under frozen or dry conditions. Winter construction under frozen conditions may minimize ground disturbance and reduce impacts to wildlife;

(2) Delineating the limits of disturbance using a combination of silt fence, flagging, and/or snow fence;

(3) Using low-ground pressure or track vehicles in wetlands to minimize compaction and rutting;

(4) Minimizing equipment use in wetlands and limiting vehicle trips; and,

(5) Restoring the project site in order to reverse soil compaction and stabilize the soil on the site and replanting the site if vegetation has been destroyed.

5. Waste disposal and equipment refueling shall be limited to areas outside wetlands and buffer zones and at least 50 feet from surface waters.

6. Final earthwork shall return wetlands and buffer zones to the original grade.

7. The potential for the introduction and spread of invasive species in wetlands and buffer zones shall be decreased by using the following methods:

a) All equipment shall be cleaned so as to contain no observable soil or vegetation prior to work in wetlands and buffer zones to prevent the spread of invasive species;

b) If removed material contains invasive species, care should be taken to dispose of the material in a manner that does not spread the invasive

species to new areas.

8. Notwithstanding 1-7 above, if there is an existing management plan in place that is more protective of the wetland resources, it may supersede these best management practices.

B. Activity-Specific Best Management Practices:

a) Placement, relocation, removal or upgrade of overhead utility lines in wetland or buffer zone:

(1) Poles and wires shall be located in such a way as to minimize the clearing of vegetation to the extent practicable;

(2) Removal of woody vegetation in the wetland and buffer zone shall occur only within an existing or designated ROW for the utility, or for removal of danger trees outside of the maintained ROW:

(a) Vegetation management shall be limited to clearing necessary to maintain the line in a safe and efficient manner;

(b) If cutting of wetland vegetation cannot be avoided, the work shall be completed by hand (chain or hand saw) instead of using large equipment to preserve wetland soils; and,

(c) Vegetation shall be cut at ground level, leaving root systems intact.

b) Installation of underground facilities in the wetlands or buffer zones including but not limited to utilities, dry hydrants, foundation drains, directional bore, and wells:

(1) Trenches shall be filled, mulched, and seeded immediately or upon final inspection of the line;

(2) If a directional bore is required, the depth of the bore beneath the wetland shall not puncture a confining layer essential to maintain wetland hydrology;

(3) If drilling or boring is required, drilling fluid shall be composed of bentonite clay, clean water, and Agency approved additives (e.g., "environmentally safe" drill soap or polymers).

c) Activities in surface water body margins:

(1) Soil and vegetation disturbance shall be minimized to avoid unnecessary impacts to waterbodies:

(a) Avoid removing vegetation until just before beginning construction that disturbs the soil;

(b) Minimize the area of bare soil within the approved work zone as much as possible;

- (c) Maintain as much of a naturally vegetated buffer as possible around wetlands and surface waters to slow runoff and trap sediments;
 - (d) Phase construction to minimize the extent of soils disturbed simultaneously; and
 - (e) Dredged material shall be properly disposed of and dewatering of dredged material must take place such that a turbid discharge to waters of the State does not occur;
- (2) Minimize the alteration of natural hydrology:
- (a) Maintain historic water level unless otherwise permitted; and
 - (b) Any change to hydrology that will obstruct fish passage shall get prior approval from the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

d) For residential projects, commercial areas, parking areas, and industrial lots within 25ft of the wetland buffer: the project design shall include permanent markers at regular intervals (30 feet or less) along the 50 foot buffer zone of the adjacent wetland where work is proposed. The project design shall include permanent markers at the edge of the building envelope where wetland/buffer impacts are proposed. Permanent markers may include split-rail fence, large boulders, or an alternative permanent marker. The permanent markers shall be installed prior to occupancy of any building lots.

VI. Findings

A. Under 10 V.S.A. §905b and §9 of the Vermont Wetland Rules, activity in a Class II wetland or its associated buffer zone is prohibited unless it is an allowed use or authorized by a permit, conditional use determination or order issued by the Secretary. Section 9.8 of the Vermont Wetland Rules provides that activities eligible for authorization under a general permit must have no undue adverse impact on protected functions and values. In evaluating whether any wetland is a Class II or a Class I wetland, the Secretary or Panel shall evaluate the functions that the wetland serves both as a discrete wetland and in conjunction with other wetlands by considering the following functional criteria. Consideration shall be given to the number of and/or extent to which protected functions and values are provided by a wetland or wetland complex including the following: water storage for flood water and storm runoff (§5.1), surface and groundwater protection (§5.2), fisheries habitat (§5.3), wildlife and migratory bird habitat (§5.4), exemplary wetland natural communities (§5.5), threatened and endangered species habitat (§5.6), education and research in natural science (§5.7), recreational value and economic benefits (§5.8), open space and aesthetics (§5.9), and erosion control through binding and stabilizing the soil (§5.10).

B. Activities eligible for coverage under this permit are limited by activity type, square footage thresholds and existing wetland and buffer zone condition. Linear projects are generally limited to areas adjacent to existing facilities with impacts to the protected wetland functions limited by the required best management practices and the square

footage limits for both managed and natural wetland and buffer zone areas. Non-linear projects are generally more limited in scope; with impacts to the protected wetland functions minimized by the required best management practices and the square footage limits, for both managed and natural wetland and buffer zone areas. If eligible projects are conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this permit, there will be minimal or no alteration of the physical and vegetative characteristics that provide the following functions: water storage for flood water and storm runoff (§5.1), surface and groundwater protection (§5.2), fisheries habitat (§5.3), wildlife and migratory bird habitat (§5.4), and erosion control through binding and stabilizing the soil (§5.10). Minimization of impacts is in part due to the 150-foot threshold for impacts to wetlands adjacent to surface waters. The presence of emergent and woody vegetation in wetlands directly adjacent to streams, rivers, ponds and lakes provides an important means of slowing and storing flood water; providing a filter by retaining water and associated chemical action; and preventing erosion from flood events and adjacent runoff. Wetlands adjacent to aquatic resources also have the potential to contribute to fisheries and provide important wildlife habitat. Potential impacts to exemplary wetland natural communities (§5.5), and threatened and endangered species habitat (§5.6), are limited through the Limitations on Coverage in Sections III.D, III.E and III.F of this general permit. Given the limited nature of the activities eligible for coverage under this general permit, no potential impacts are predicted for education and research in natural science (§5.7), recreational value and economic benefits (§5.8), open space and aesthetics (§5.9). Based on the factors described above, if an eligible project is conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this general permit, it will comply with the Vermont Wetland Rules and will not result in undue adverse impacts to wetland functions and values. In determining whether coverage under this general permit should be granted, the Secretary has evaluated the potential effect of the eligible activities on the basis of both their direct and immediate effects as well as on the basis of any cumulative or on-going effects.

VII. Relation to Other Permits

Activities eligible for coverage under this general permit may also require a permit pursuant to other local, state, and federal laws, including but not limited to a federal wetlands permit pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, 33 FWPCA §1344. Applicants are responsible for determining if any such permits apply to their proposed activities and obtaining any such permits.

VIII. Application for Authorization

A. Application.

1. An applicant for authorization under this general permit shall submit a completed Vermont Wetland Permit Application, General Permit NOI Sections, with all necessary attachments and fees, if any, and all other application information required by the Secretary.
2. The Secretary may require an applicant to submit any additional information that the Secretary considers necessary in order to make a decision on the issuance or denial of an authorization under this general permit. The Secretary may deny coverage if the requested information is not provided within sixty (60) days of the Secretary's request.

B. Public Notice of Application

1. Once the Secretary determines that an application for authorization under this general permit is complete, the Secretary shall provide public notice to the clerk of the municipality in which the proposed activity and affected wetland area and buffer are located, shall post notice on the Environmental Notice Bulletin, and shall provide notice to a list of interested persons, if any. The Secretary shall request that the notice be posted by the municipality for no less than fourteen (14) days.

C. Public Comment

1. For a period of fourteen (14) days following the Secretary's completion of the public notice requirements above, the Secretary shall provide an opportunity to the public to provide written comment regarding whether the application complies with the terms and conditions of this general permit. The Secretary shall maintain an interested persons list for those individuals/groups that wish to receive copies of notices of all general permit applications within the State or within a certain geographic area. Such notices may be distributed electronically instead of via mail.

2. The period for public comment may be extended at the sole discretion of the Secretary.

D. Issuance or Denial of Authorization

1. Following the fourteen day public notice period, and upon a determination by the Secretary that the proposed activity meets the terms and conditions of this general permit, the Secretary shall issue an authorization unless the Secretary determines that an individual permit is required pursuant to IX.J. of this general permit.

2. Denials of an authorization shall be issued in writing, stating the reasons for the denial. If an application is denied for lack of technical or other information, the Secretary will provide appropriate information to help the applicant correct the deficiencies and re-apply for an authorization.

3. Authorizations issued by the Secretary pursuant to this general permit shall be valid for a specified period of time not to exceed five (5) years.

IX. General Conditions

A. All activity shall be completed, operated, and maintained in accordance with the permittee's Notice of Intent and the conditions of this general permit. Any permit noncompliance constitutes a violation of 10 V.S.A. Chapter 37 and may be cause for an enforcement action and/or revocation and reissuance, modification, or termination of the permittee's authorization under this general permit. No material or substantial changes shall be made in the project without the written approval of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Wetlands Program.

B. The permittee shall notify the Vermont Wetlands Program in writing prior to the start of this project and upon completion of the project, using the Agency's forms located at <https://anronline.vermont.gov/>. The notification of completion shall include a statement

that the project was constructed in compliance with the conditions of this general permit and the authorization issued thereunder.

C. The Required Best Management Practices in Section V must be followed to be in compliance with this general permit.

D. The permittee shall record its authorization under this general permit in the land records of the town(s) in which all affected lands are located. Any future deed for such lands shall reference the authorization. Within 30 days of the date of issuance of the authorization under this general permit, the permittee shall supply the Vermont Wetlands Program with a form certifying that the recording has been made. The form is located at <https://anronline.vermont.gov/>. The VT Department of Transportation is not required to follow this condition.

E. Authorizations issued pursuant to this permit shall be valid for a period of time not to exceed five years from the date of the authorization being signed.

F. The Agency maintains continuing jurisdiction over a project authorized under this general permit and may at any time order remedial measures if it appears likely that undue adverse impacts to protected wetland functions and values are or will occur.

G. Authorization under this general permit does not relieve the permittee of the responsibility to comply with any other applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and permits.

H. By acceptance of an authorization under this general permit, the permittee agrees to allow Agency representatives access to the property covered by the authorization, at reasonable times and upon presentation of credentials, for the purpose of ascertaining compliance with the authorization, this general permit, the Vermont Wetland Rules and the Vermont Water Quality Standards and for the purpose of reviewing and copying all records required to be prepared pursuant to this general permit.

I. The Agency, by issuing this general permit and any authorization hereunder, accepts no legal responsibility for any damage direct or indirect of whatever nature and by whomever suffered arising out of the approved project.

J. The Secretary may, after notice and opportunity for a hearing, revoke or suspend, in whole or in part, an authorization under this general permit for cause, including, but not limited to:

1. Violation of the terms or conditions of this general permit;
2. Obtaining authorization by misrepresentation or failure to fully disclose all relevant facts;
3. A change in any condition that requires either a temporary or permanent reduction or elimination of the authorized activity.

K. The Secretary may require a person applying for an authorization under this general permit to apply for an individual permit. Cases where an individual conditional permit may be required include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The applicant is not in compliance with the terms and conditions of this general permit;
2. The activity does not qualify for authorization under this general permit taking into account the location of the activity, the size of the activity, the impact

of the activity on the functions of the wetland or buffer zone in question including any cumulative or on-going effects.

L. The Secretary may require a person applying for an individual permit to apply for authorization under this general permit provided the Secretary finds that the activity complies with all conditions of this general permit and the activity is more appropriately covered under this general permit.

X. Term

This general permit shall be effective for a period of five years after signature.

XI. Appeals

Pursuant to 10 V.S.A. Chapter 220, any appeal of this decision must be filed with the clerk of the Environmental Division of the Superior Court within 30 days of the date of the decision. The Notice of Appeal must specify the parties taking the appeal and the statutory provision under which each party claims party status; must designate the act or decision appealed from; must name the Environmental Division; and must be signed by the appellant or the appellant's attorney. In addition, the appeal must give the address or location and description of the property, project, or facility with which the appeal is concerned and the name of the applicant or any permit involved in the appeal. The appellant must also serve a copy of the Notice of Appeal in accordance with Rule 5(b)(4)(B) of the Vermont Rules for Environmental Court Proceedings. For further information, see the Vermont Rules for Environmental Court Proceedings, available on line at www.vermontjudiciary.org. The address for the Environmental Division is: 32 Cherry St.; 2nd Floor, Suite 303; Burlington, VT 05401 (Tel. # 802-828-1660).

XII. Effective Date and Permit Term

This permit shall become effective upon signing and shall expire five years from the date of signing.

State of Vermont
Agency of Natural Resources

Julie S. Moore, Secretary
Agency of Natural Resources

By: _____ on November 3, 2023
Peter LaFlamme, Director
Watershed Management Division