MONTANA RAPID ASSESSMENT METHOD

MONTANA Natural Heritage Program

LEVEL 2

RAPID ASSESSMENT

Why a Rapid Wetland Assessment?

Rapid assessments are used to evaluate the general condition of wetlands using observable field indicators. A rapid assessment is useful when funding, time, or staff is not available for intensive monitoring. The score from a rapid assessment represents where a particular wetland site falls along a condition gradient from least-disturbed condition to highly degraded.

Assumptions of Wetland Assessments:

1. Key wetland attributes vary predictably with human disturbance.
2. Observable field indicators are responsive to variation in human disturbance.
3. Field indicators act as surrogates of wetland condition.
4. Wetland condition is related to wetland function.

How Do Rapid Wetland Assessments Work?

A rapid assessment takes a team of two people generally two hours or less to complete in the field. Currently, rapid assessment methods are appropriate for any palustrine (forested, scrub-shrub, emergent, or aquatic bed) wetland.

The Montana Rapid Assessment Method assesses wetland condition based on *four major attributes*. Each attribute has associated metrics, which are scored by selecting the most appropriate statement from a list of descriptive narratives.

Ecological Attributes Assessed in Rapid Wetland Assessments:

LANDSCAPE CONTEXT - describes the area around the wetland. The adjacent landscape can provide a buffer between the wetland and surrounding stressors.
HYDROLOGY – describes hydrologic characteristics such as water source, connectivity, and hydroperiod. The hydrology of the wetland directly impacts several aspects of wetland function.
BIOTIC STRUCTURE – describes the native and non-native plant species composition as well as the patch structure.
PHYSICOCHEMICAL – describes the soil surface integrity and water quality of the wetland.

Disturbance Checklist

The Montana Rapid Assessment Method includes a checklist of potential wetland disturbances that allows for exploration of possible relationships between assessment scores and particular stressors.

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