

Potential Wetland Mitigation Sites

Summary of Technical Memorandum

State and Federal laws require the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to mitigate all wetland impacts associated with the approved and constructed Recommended Alternative for the US-131 Improvement Study. In keeping with these regulations, MDOT follows the recommended sequence of wetland mitigation. This sequence prioritizes the avoidance of wetland impacts, followed by the minimization of unavoidable impacts. Any wetland impacts that cannot be avoided are then mitigated for by the creation of new wetlands. The purpose of this Technical Memorandum is to discuss potential wetland mitigation sites identified in the study corridor which could be used to provide mitigation for unavoidable impacts.

Potential wetland mitigation sites were identified from a compilation of information obtained from U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service farmed wetland maps, U.S. Department of Interior National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps, and from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Survey of St. Joseph County soil maps. Field visits were conducted at each site identified from the compilation.

Currently, one No-Build and six Build Alternatives are being assessed for the proposed project. Conservative acreage estimates of wetland impacts for the six Build Alternative alignments range from 16 to 58 acres. Standard Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) mitigation ratios were used to estimate the acres of wetland mitigation. These include mitigation ratios of 2:1 for floodplain forest and forested wetlands, 1.5:1 for emergent, scrub-shrub, and 1:1 for open water wetlands habitats. As a result, approximately one to 114 acres of wetland mitigation will be required depending on the alternative selected. These are “worst case” scenario estimates. Wetland impacts may be reduced during the design phase of the project.

To date, 706 acres have been identified for potential mitigation. Property owners of 298 of these acres have expressed a willingness to sell their property to MDOT for wetland mitigation. Property owners of the remaining 408 acres have not yet responded to MDOT inquiries. The 706 acres are contained within five potential wetland mitigation sites that are currently being considered. The locations of these sites are illustrated in **Figure 4.8**.

Wetland Mitigation Area 1 (**Figure 4.9**) is located north of Anderson Road, west of Blue School Road. The site is adjacent to the floodplain forest associated with the White Pigeon River. The site possesses approximately 105 acres which appear to have good potential for wetland mitigation. Wetland Mitigation Area 1 is the most desirable site identified at this time. It would provide potential for in-kind mitigation of floodplain forest impacts, possesses soils that are highly desirable for wetland mitigation, and provides the opportunity to create significant wildlife habitat adjacent to the White Pigeon River.

Wetland Mitigation Area 2 is located north of Quarterline Road, west of Peck Academy Road. The site possesses 284 acres which appear to have good potential for wetland mitigation. Wetland Mitigation Site 2 ranks fourth as a choice for wetland mitigation. This site is less desirable due to the presence of better draining soils and extensive agricultural fields surrounding the site. The site is separated from the floodplain forest associated with the St. Joseph River by railroad tracks to the west of the site.

Wetland Mitigation Area 3 is located west of Constantine Road, south of Banker Street. The site is separated from floodplain forest associated with the St. Joseph River by railroad tracks to

the east. The site possesses 57 acres which appear to have good potential for wetland mitigation. Wetland Mitigation Area 3 ranks second as a choice for wetland mitigation. The site has forested wetlands located toward the south, allowing for the opportunity to create significant wildlife habitat and provide for in kind mitigation for floodplain forest impacts.

Wetland Mitigation Area 4 is located east of US-131, north of Gleason Rd. The site is separated from the floodplain forest associated with the St. Joseph River by Constantine Road to the east and within the vicinity of floodplain forest towards the south. The site possesses approximately 16 acres which appear to have good potential for wetland mitigation. Wetland Mitigation Area 4 ranks third as a choice for wetland mitigation. Although small, this site provides the potential for in kind mitigation for floodplain forest impacts, creates additional wildlife habitat to the currently existing habitat located towards the east, and possesses soils that are highly desirable for wetland mitigation.

Wetland Mitigation Area 5 is located west of Pulver Road, north of Null Road. The site possesses approximately 244 acres which appear to have potential for wetland mitigation. Wetland Mitigation Site 5 ranks fifth as a choice for wetland mitigation. This site is less desirable due to the presence of better draining soils, extensive agricultural fields surrounding the site, and the dominance of reed canary grass in an adjacent drained wetland.

These sites were identified and ranked based upon criteria that consider the potential for success, replacement values, anticipated long-term viability, feasibility, and cost. All of the sites offer potential mitigation opportunities.

Coordination with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has led to the identification of Wetland Mitigation Area 1 as a preferred location for wetland mitigation at this time. This site contains enough potential mitigation acreage for all Build Alternatives except PA-4. Additional mitigation acreage will be identified on other potential sites as needed. This site has been recommended for further analysis including: seeking permission from property owners, installing monitoring wells, obtaining sufficient hydrologic data to assist in further evaluating the property, and preparing more detailed cost estimates for potential wetland mitigation.