

WSDOT GUIDANCE ON CUT SLOPES AND WETLANDS

Updated December 2012

WSDOT may need to cut away part of a hillside for new roads or to widen existing roads. A cut slope is the soil surface that remains above the road after material is removed (Figure 1). A cut slope wetland can form if a cut intersects a perched water table and groundwater reaches the slope surface. Other names for cut slope wetlands include hillside seeps or groundwater-discharge wetlands.

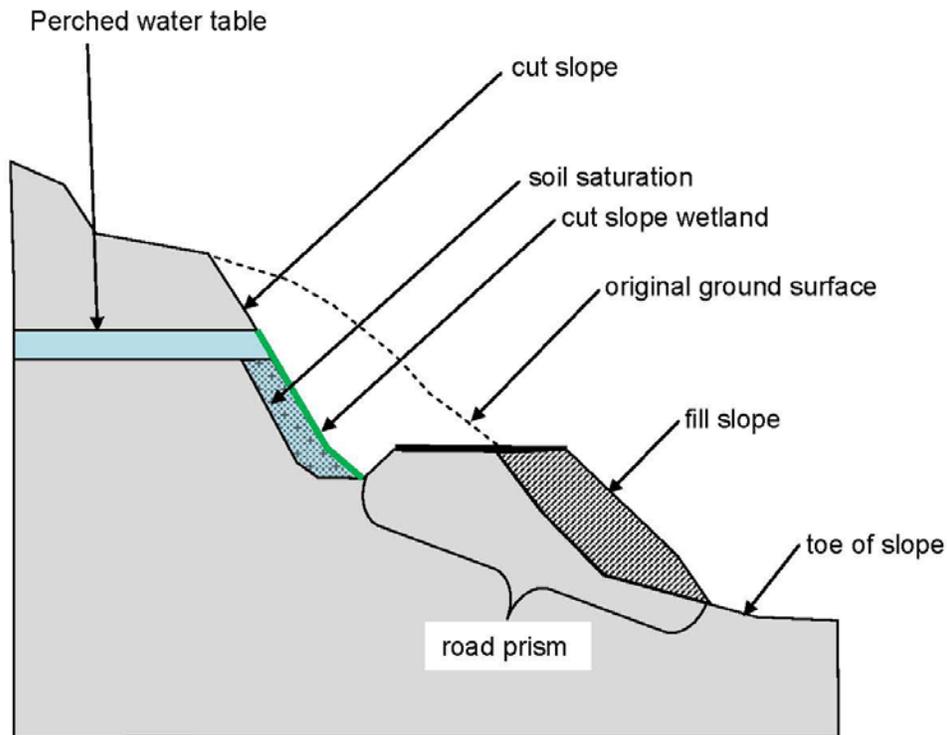


Figure 1. Cross-section of roadway on a cut slope.

Protecting Cut Slope Wetlands

Projects should avoid and minimize impacts to cut slope wetlands. When impacts are unavoidable, appropriate permits and mitigation are required. Cut slope wetlands are generally regulated by federal, state, and local governments.

Cut Slope Wetlands May Be Isolated

Cut slope wetlands may be isolated from other waters. Follow [WSDOT Guidance on Isolated Wetlands](#) if you think the wetland may not have a connection to other wetlands or waters.

Cut Slope Wetlands and Ditches

Figure 2 shows a cut slope wetland adjacent to a road. If the three factors are present, jurisdictional wetlands include:

- The cut slope wetland (green section A).
- Any portion of the ditch immediately below a cut slope wetland (purple section B) down to the toe of the slope.

The road prism (blue section C) is generally not treated as jurisdictional wetland.

For further information on road prisms and ditches, see [WSDOT Guidance on Delineating Wetlands and Buffers Adjacent to Roads and Road Prisms](#) and [Rapanos Case](#).

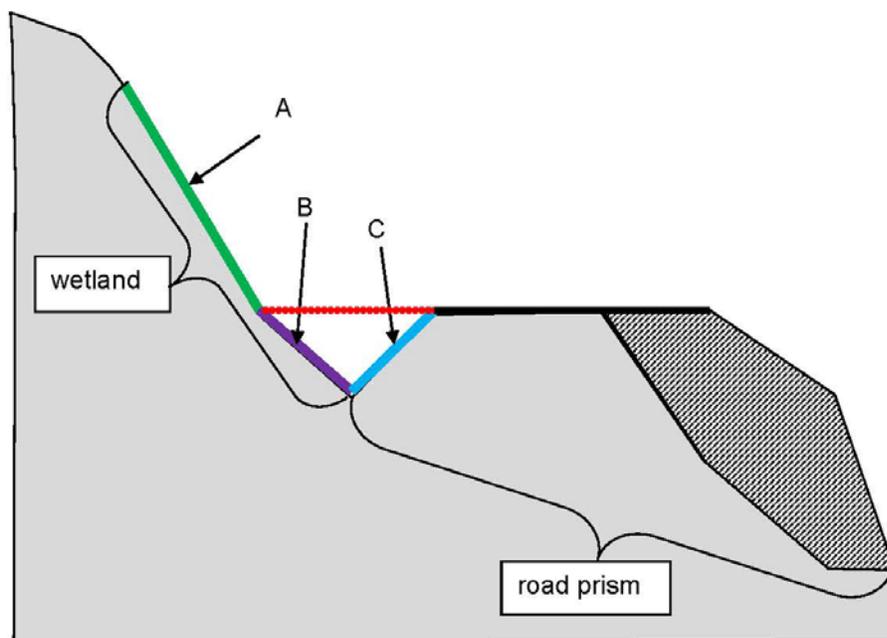


Figure 2. Cross-section of cut slope wetland and roadside ditch.

Cut Slope Wetlands and Hydrology Indicators

Soil saturation is generally the primary source of hydrology in slope and cut slope wetlands. Hydrology Indicator A3: Saturation, from Regional Supplements to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual¹, is often the best indicator to document wetland hydrology in slope and cut slope wetlands.

Indicator A3 requires soil saturation be directly above a water table. However, in slope wetlands, the source of water is often above the saturated slope (Figure 1). In this case, add a remark in the hydrology section of the Wetland Determination Data Form indicating the source of the saturation in the slope wetland.

¹ [Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Arid West Region \(Version 2.0\)](#) and [Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region \(Version 2.0\)](#)