

SPECIAL PUBLIC NOTICE

Date: August 21, 2023

ANNOUNCEMENT OF RELEASE OF WISCONSIN STREAM ASSESSMENT TOOLS

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District Regulatory Division (Corps) is announcing the release of the beta version of the Wisconsin Stream Quantification Tool (WISQT) and Debit Calculator. We are requesting comments on these tools prior to finalizing them and releasing Version 1.0. We expect to collect comments for 60 days and then publish Version 1.0 in late 2023 or early 2024.

The SQT is a functional assessment method that provides a science-based, efficient, and repeatable approach to assess functional stream loss (debits incurred) at impact sites and functional stream lift (credits generated) at restoration sites. The tool consolidates established stream assessment monitoring protocols covering hydrology, hydraulic, geomorphology, physicochemical and biological components in an Excel workbook to characterize stream ecosystem functions at a specific project reach. The Debit Calculator is a companion tool to the SQT and provides a rapid and streamlined evaluation of stream impacts to determine the functional loss at an impact site and credit (mitigation) needs.

The Wisconsin SQT, Debit Calculator, and supporting materials have been adapted for Wisconsin from the Minnesota SQT (MNSQT) and other state SQTs, including North Carolina, Tennessee, Wyoming, Georgia, Colorado, Michigan, South Carolina, and Alaska. The Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Office of Great Waters provided funding to regionalize these tools for Wisconsin, through a contract with Ecosystem Planning and Restoration, Inc. Stream Mechanics and McCarthy Ecology were sub-consultants. Staff from the Corps, United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, United States Geological Survey, and Dane County collaborated on the WISQT Steering and Technical Committees to develop the beta version of the WISQT and Debit Calculator.

The Corps collaborated with the USEPA, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources to finalize and release the MNSQT and Debit Calculator in 2019. Since then, project proponents have used the MNSQT to calculate stream credits for compensatory mitigation in both MN and WI. The development of the WISQT will allow for a more regionalized approach to calculate stream credits for projects in Wisconsin.

The Corps released the St. Paul District Stream Mitigation Procedures (Stream Procedures) in April 2023. The Stream Procedures describe how permit applicants or third-party compensatory mitigation providers (e.g., mitigation bankers or in lieu fee program providers) should use the SQT and Debit Calculator to quantify functional loss at impacts sites and functional gain at mitigation sites. We have posted the Stream Procedures and the beta WISQT resources on the RIBITS website (https://ribits.ops.usace.army.mil/ords/f?p=107:2::::::) To access the documents, filter for the State of Wisconsin and then click on "Assessment Tools" in the Menu options.

The Corps welcomes any public, tribal and agency comments, or questions about the WISQT, Debit Calculator, User Manual, and field forms. We also welcome any comments or suggested updates related to Version 2.0 of the MNSQT, Debit Calculator, User Manual, and field forms. You may submit written comments to stpaulsqt@usace.army.mil. In the absence of email, you may mail comments to: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District Regulatory Division, c/o April Marcangeli, 250 N. Sunnyslope Road, Suite 296, Brookfield, WI 53005. The Corps will review comments received during the 60-day comment period and make necessary updates before finalizing and releasing Version 1.0 of the Wisconsin tools. The Corps will continue to refine the Stream Procedures and stream assessment tools in both Wisconsin and Minnesota over time based on feedback and lessons learned.