

When is Aquatic Resource Type Conversion Appropriate: A Framework for Cleaning Sand out of the Gears and a Case Study for McInnis Marsh

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ABSTRACT

Wetland and stream restoration projects may sometimes involve converting one “type” of aquatic habitat to another “type” (e.g., managed salt ponds into tidal marshes, depression wetlands into streams, marsh into transition zone habitat). This “type conversion” may be necessary and beneficial in the context of addressing watershed plans or regional restoration goals, or in achieving resiliency to climatic changes (Goals Project 2015). Conversion can also occur through other large-scale, complex actions (e.g., mitigation banking initiatives). Whether driven by habitat restoration goals or compensatory mitigation needs or both, regulatory oversight typically governs the process. Holistically assessing such conversion through the regulatory lens is challenging for permitting programs. The challenge stems from how to accurately determine the overall value of an aquatic resource based on site-specific ecological properties and in the context of larger regional ecosystem management and goals.

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