

# DNR creates simplified General Permit process

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENTS** will see a simpler approval process for wetland and waterway permits with the authorization of *Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Wetland and Waterway General Permit for Municipalities to Construct, Reconstruct or Maintain Highways, Bridges, Arches and Culverts in Waters and Wetlands* (WDNR-GP2-2012). Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Transportation Liaisons will now review General Permit requests for small road and bridge projects that have little adverse impact on waterways and wetlands.

The General Permit replaces TRANS 207 rules for many local projects and outlines clear criteria, conditions and timelines so reviews and outcomes are more predictable and consistent with federal requirements. Maureen Millmann, who works in the DNR’s Office of Energy and Environmental Analysis, says the department’s goal is a better application and review process for local road officials and one that effectively protects aquatic resources.

“We wanted a process that is less complex so municipalities don’t have to do more than is necessary for projects that cover a small area,” she explains. “On the other side, the DNR gets only what we need to evaluate each application. It’s better for everyone.”

## Streamlined process

Historically, the Wisconsin DNR approved local road projects near vulnerable water resources under TRANS 207, despite the fact it is a Wisconsin Department of Transportation administrative code. Introducing the DNR-administered General Permit for projects under the jurisdiction of counties, cities, villages or towns shortens the steps between application and approval of eligible projects.

Millmann says the streamlined process starts with DNR Transportation Liaisons located in 16 offices across the state. Local road officials should contact the liaison in their region while a project is in the planning stage to determine if it meets eligibility standards under the new General Permit. Contact information for the liaisons is online at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Sectors/Transportation.html>.

According to Millmann, the DNR conferred with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about the information they request on transportation permits so Wisconsin’s updated general permit was similar and applicants could gather the same information for both agencies. The Wisconsin DNR will forward General Permit applications it receives to the Army Corps of Engineers at the same time they go the department’s regional liaison.

## Eligible projects

The new process specifies that highway projects affecting 10,000 square feet or less of wetland or waterway may be eligible. The same goes for projects that involve solely replacing a bridge, arch or culvert if it affects a wetland area no larger than 4,356 square feet.

Millmann notes that an important provision of the new General Permit requires the county highway commissioner or a professional engineer working with a local government on transportation projects to approve and sign the plans for a project that involves a bridge or a culvert greater than 36-inches in diameter.

## Early coordination

The DNR is training the liaisons and other staff members in details of the WDNR-GP2-2012 General Permit process and is making presentations around the state to introduce it to local road officials.

Millmann says the DNR will continue to emphasize the importance of establishing strong relationships with local governments. “With this permit, we concentrate on roadway projects municipalities initiate and implement. It’s an opportunity to work closely with local agencies on early coordination of the requirements that will help ensure road safety and protect the quality of local resources.” ■

## Contact

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## Resources

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Sectors/documents/Liaisons.pdf>

Link on the DNR website to map of Transportation Liaison contacts in 16 offices across Wisconsin.

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Sectors/Transportation.html>

Click on the Permits tab on this webpage to access WDNR-GP2-2012 and application materials.



*These photographs illustrate projects where the DNR will work with local governments to improve roads and culverts under the new general permit. The deteriorating culvert at left is a barrier to fish while the replacement on the right creates a good waterway passage.*