

LEAN Project Charter

Project Name: Fish Habitat Permit Streamlining

Date Chartered: January 1, 2013

Expected Completion Date: July 15, 2013

Team Leader: Kate Strom Hiorns

Team Goal/Mission:

The primary goal is to streamline the process for permitting of fish habitat projects, in particular large woody habitat projects in lakes (e.g. fish sticks). The Fisheries Management Bureau (FM) often works with volunteer partner groups and individuals who want to undertake woody habitat projects to improve the fisheries in their lakes. These groups have had concerns about cost of permits, the time it takes to go through the permitting process, and inconsistencies in the permitting pathways (manual code, exemptions, general permits, individual permits) among different parts of the State. Although permit costs are set in statute and cannot be changed by the Department, complaints are expected to increase due to increased permit fees put in place in 2012.

Habitat projects are intended to improve fish habitat and lake condition in cooperation with riparian land owners. The goal of this Lean project is to improve the permitting process and encourage implementation of woody fish habitat projects.

Measures to be used to determine success:

1. The average number of completed projects increases annually over the next five years (which also depends on customer interest and funding available)
2. The time for customers to receive project approvals is reduced by 50 percent
3. Improved customer satisfaction

Issues to be addressed:

1. Individual permits are currently the only option for the public to use for many types of woody habitat projects
2. Permitting cost is perceived as a barrier to implementing good projects
3. Lack of coordination between FM and Watershed programs
4. Lack of customer understanding of the permitting process
5. Lack of clear guidance for FM staff to determine when to lead a project

Expected Results:

1. A consistent statewide permitting process for woody habitat projects
2. Appropriate outreach to staff and stakeholders
3. Guidance for staff
4. Manual code application criteria (FM) and review process (WT) consistency
5. Permit application criteria (non-DNR) and review process (WT) consistency

Responsibilities and Boundaries:

The primary focus will be on the permitting process. The team may propose changes to administrative code or statutes.

Team Members:

Alyssa Core, Water Management Specialist
Paul Cunningham, FM Lake Habitat Specialist
Martye Griffin, Waterway Science & Policy Leader
Kate Strom Hiorns, FM Policy Specialist
Scott Toshner, Fisheries Biologist

Support/Resource People:

1. Lake association representatives
2. Angling group representatives
3. Additional fisheries biologists and water management specialists, as well as lakes specialists who often work with lake associations
4. Legal counsel to ensure compliance with existing laws

Support people will be valuable resources for completing the project and will be consulted frequently. They will be determined after the team initially meets.



DNR Lean Project Final Report

Project Name: Fish Habitat Permit Streamlining

Project Team Leader: Kate Strom Hiorns

Project Purpose: To streamline the process for permitting of fish habitat projects in lakes, in particular fish sticks large woody habitat projects

Project Team Members: Alyssa Core, Paul Cunningham, Martye Griffin, Scott Toshner

Project Sponsor: Mike Staggs

Associate Team Members: Bryce Ottman, Dave Kafura, Pamela Toshner, Carroll Schaal, Scott Koehnke, Steve LaValley, Travis Holte, all Fish Biologists and Technicians and Water Management Specialists who participated in our surveys, Mike Arrowood – Walleyes for Tomorrow Statewide, Bill Wilcox – Nelson Lake Association Sawyer County, Tyler Gruetzmacher - Barron County Land and Water Conservation Dept., Bob Wenzel – Walleyes for Tomorrow Polk County, Greg Martin - Eau Claire Lakes Conservation Club, Bill Ruff – Phillips Chain of Lakes Association Sawyer County

Summary of Improvements: See Project Narrative, below, and attached Project Implementation Plan

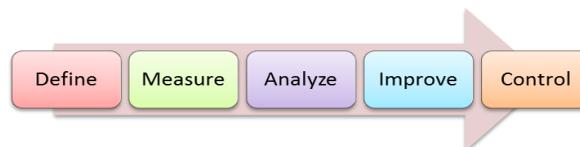
Project Results - Moving from an individual permit to a general permit process for fish sticks habitat projects:

Goal	Baseline	Target	Expected After Improvements	Goal Met?
Reduce DNR staff workload (task time/application)	12 hours	6 hours	3.5 hours	Yes
Reduce Lead (total, delivery time/application)	62 days	31 days	<30 days	Yes
Improve Customer Satisfaction	Mixed	Satisfied customers	Satisfied customers, more options available	Yes

Amount of staff time saved per year in hours:

10 WMS currently doing fish sticks approvals * 8.5 hrs saved * ~2 gp/yr = 170 hrs/yr statewide; Expect additional general permits over time and time saved to increase

In addition, FM biologist time saved with new GP option → (80 hrs down to 16 hrs prep) 64 hrs saved * 7 projects/yr = 658 hrs/yr



How will that time be reinvested? Reduced lead time for review of other permits submitted to Water Management Specialists – they can focus on projects with higher environmental impacts

Fisheries will have more time available for technical consultation and promotion of additional habitat projects by the public – more projects will get done

Project Cost:

	Hours	Dollars
Project Team Leader	218.5	\$260.50
Project Team Members	335	\$991.50
Meeting Costs		\$1,252
Improvement Costs		future staff time and travel costs to be determined
Total	553.5 hours	\$1,252

Recommendations for Future Code/Statute Changes: See attached Opportunity Chart

Lessons Learned

Fish sticks lessons:

- Information sharing, how-to suggestions, and DNR technical consultation are desired by customers
- Customers want a straightforward, easy way to conduct beneficial habitat projects
- The State should be more lenient on permitted projects that are beneficial to fish and wildlife habitat, or make them exempt from needing a permit
- Among regions in the State, there were inconsistent permit approval and public notice procedures for manual code approvals
- Fish biologist consultation with Water Management Specialists prior to submitting manual code approval requests are advantageous to both parties
- Improved coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers and Native American tribes on permit consultation will benefit staff and public permit applicants
- It is beneficial to have good cooperation and workplanning between Fish Management and Watershed Management staff

Lean lessons:

- Set up a meeting schedule at the beginning of the project so the team can plan for travel and time expectations
- Take the time to do a very detailed SIPOC and flow chart of all process steps at the beginning so the entire team understands specifics of each step

Project Narrative:

State statutes, which are controlled by the Legislature, require that permits be issued when material is placed on the bed of a navigable water. That includes natural materials, such as trees used for fish habitat projects. Certain activities listed in statute may be exempted from needing a permit.

30.12 Structures and deposits in navigable waters.

(1) Permits required. Unless an individual or a general permit has been issued under this section or authorization has been granted by the legislature, no person may do any of the following:

(a) Deposit any material or place any structure upon the bed of any navigable water where no bulkhead line has been established.

(b) Deposit any material or place any structure upon the bed of any navigable water beyond a lawfully established bulkhead line.

Fish habitat projects that partially or fully submerge a group of trees near the shoreline of a lake currently do not qualify for a permit exemption. Also, the DNR has not created a general permit for those types of projects, called “fish sticks” projects. Therefore, people interested in doing a fish sticks project are required to apply for an individual permit from the DNR. Individual permits require extensive information submittals, a 30-day public comment period on the project, and a fee that recently increased to \$600.

In recent years, fish sticks projects have become more popular among staff and non-DNR groups wishing to add large woody fish habitat to lakes and rivers. These groups have had concerns about the cost of permits, the time it takes to go through the permitting process, and inconsistencies in the permit approvals among different parts of the State.

In January 2013, the DNR created a Lean Six Sigma Fish Sticks Team to streamline the process for permitting large woody fish habitat projects in lakes.

PROBLEM:

The Fish Sticks Team surveyed fish biologists, water management specialists, and private permit holders to better understand the issues associated with permitting fish sticks projects and to pinpoint where improvements in customer service could be made.

Private permit holders told the Team that the most common barriers to conducting a fish sticks project are:

- landowner cooperation,
- the time it takes to compile information and receive permits, and
- the cost of permits and materials.

Individuals noted there is a lack of public knowledge and therefore neighboring riparians are often skeptical of these projects. In addition, 35% of the private permit holders said they were unsatisfied with permit options available for a fish sticks project and 19% said permit approval time took longer than expected.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Private permit holders made the following recommendations for the fish sticks project permitting process:

- Reduce permit paperwork, eliminate fee
- Have DNR staff available to assist with or implement work

- Reduce involvement from Army Corps of Engineers and counties
- Shorten public notice requirements, feedback is rare and is unnecessary
- Be more liberal about the amount and spacing of trees
- Extend permit terms beyond 3 years
- Provide additional communication and clear instructions on doing a fish sticks project
- No recommendations, happy with the current process
- Provide only one point of contact and a simplified application
- Remove Areas of Special Natural Resource Interest (ASNRI) restrictions
- *Make it easy*

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:

Based on comments received from permit holders as well as surveys and conversations with DNR staff, the Fish Sticks Team is planning to implement the following:

1. Create a new general permit for fish sticks projects.

If a proposed fish sticks project meets the criteria developed for a general permit, the project could be reviewed and approved in less than 30 days rather than 62 days for an individual permit. The cost for a general permit (\$300) is also half of the cost for an individual permit (\$600). Permit criteria would be provided in advance so applicants would know project parameters. Criteria is being developed by Fisheries and Watershed Management staff to include projects with multiple sites constructed over multiple years and permission for new applicants to join an existing approved permit, saving applicants money and time.

2. Clarify policy on when DNR fisheries biologists will lead a fish sticks project.

Obtaining a “manual code approval” is when DNR staff receive the equivalent to a permit approval, but there are no permit fees. The DNR project manager accepts responsibility for proper construction of the project. Currently, projects may be conducted on DNR or non-DNR land when a private party is a joint applicant. Based on varying workloads and experience, Fisheries staff sometimes led projects and other times did not. One of the goals for the Fish Sticks Team is to clarify when Fisheries staff should take the lead on fish habitat projects and apply for a manual code approval. When a person or group interested in doing fish habitat work asks the DNR how a project can be done, there should be a consistent answer. After general permit criteria are established, the Team will propose options to the Fisheries Management policy board to determine if manual code approvals should only be allowed when DNR lands are involved.

3. Develop detailed guidance for both staff and private riparians on how to do fish sticks, tree drops, and other large woody habitat work.

The DNR will develop and advertise information to promote doing these beneficial projects. Best practice standards and step-by-step guidance should encourage more fish habitat projects.

4. Encourage state and federal grant funding opportunities.

When a fish sticks project involves state or federal funding, the permit application fee is waived. The Fish Sticks Team suggests that DNR sponsored Lake Planning and Management Grants focus on funding fish sticks projects.

5. Amend ch. NR 323, Wisconsin Administrative Code, to exempt certain fish sticks projects from needing a permit.

This is a long-term goal because it can take one to two years to make changes to administrative code. However, after criteria for a fish sticks permit exemption are created and code is updated, projects may be conducted without any review by the DNR and no permit fees would apply.

6. Promote inclusion of fish sticks projects (and possibly other general permits) along with the development and approval of lake management plans.

As lake management plans are developed, Fisheries and Watershed staff should be involved to help plan for potential habitat project sites and provide technical assistance with lake management plan development. In addition, approval of a lake management plan would include approval for planned general permit activities, eliminating the separate review time required for permits.

Additional large woody habitat permit process improvements are noted in the attached Implementation Plan. The Fish Sticks Team hopes these steps will improve the permitting process and encourage groups and individuals to undertake woody habitat projects and improve the fisheries in their lakes.