



SAN JUAN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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POLICIES/PROCEDURES/INTERPRETATIONS

Habitat assessment not required to replace wood decking on docks with grating

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ISSUE: Is a Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Area (FWHCA) habitat assessment required to determine no net loss for a proposal to do normal dock maintenance and repair by replacing a dock's wood decking with grating?

BACKGROUND:

1. Multiple sections of San Juan County Code (SJCC) including SJCC 18.50.120 and 18.35.130(G)(2)(b) require a habitat assessment report prepared by a qualified biological professional for proposed maintenance and repairs to docks. The report must identify aquatic FWHCAs, evaluate conformance of the proposal with the code including no net loss requirements and Best Available Science (BAS), and describe potential adverse impacts to the ecological function of aquatic FWHCAs.
2. Chapter 3 Marine Fish and Wildlife of the County's Best Available Science (BAS) page 53) discusses the impact of docks on light availability and the aquatic habitats upon which sensitive species depend. The BAS establishes that dock shading reduces the ambient daytime aquatic light available to light levels below the light levels required for aquatic plant photosynthesis and fish feeding and movement.

POLICY: Based on the County's BAS, normal maintenance and repairs of docks that only involve the replacement of deck wood with grating would result in a net habitat improvement because grating allows greater ambient daytime aquatic light and supports greater levels of aquatic plant photosynthesis, fish feeding and movement. Therefore, there is no net loss of ecological function resulting from the replacement of deck wood with grating and a habitat assessment report from a qualified professional is not required.