

**ECOSYSTEM ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM
STREAM PRESERVATION GUIDANCE
NOVEMBER 7, 2011**

This document was developed in cooperation with the United States Army Corps of Engineers to provide guidance on the use of stream preservation to provide compensatory mitigation credit for stream mitigation projects contracted through the Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP).

Mitigation sites should not contain a significant amount of stream preservation contributing to the credits for the site. However, stream preservation will be accepted where it can be demonstrated that the preservation contributes to the overall functional uplift of the proposed project or is essential to maintaining the aquatic functions associated with the overall project. For example, stream preservation may be appropriate on zero- or first-order stream segments that do not need any physical manipulation or buffer revegetation, and where the preservation component contains the headwaters of the project to the stream origin.

Preservation may also be appropriate where small sections of intact stream and buffer corridors connect larger reaches of a stream restoration or enhancement project, and would result in a much larger, contiguous protected stream corridor. In these instances, the ratio of stream length preserved to credit generated should be 5:1. If possible, wider buffers are preferred, and may be justification for higher preservation ratios. If the reaches are particularly high-quality, as described on page 16 of the SMGs (2003), or provide riparian buffers at least twice as wide as the 50-foot minimum buffer width in coastal plain and piedmont counties and 30-foot minimum buffer width in the mountain counties, ratios of up to 2.5:1 may be acceptable.

Preservation should generally be proposed only along stream segments that have buffers comprised primarily of mature forest with an appropriately stratified vegetative structure comprised of large canopy trees, a sub-canopy of smaller trees, and an understory, where appropriate. If a project is located along a stream reach that is already subject to state buffer laws (e.g., Neuse or Tar-Pamlico Buffer Rules), preservation may be considered at a lower ratio.

In cases where a stream segment is stable, a forested buffer is present, and additional in-stream work will not result in substantial functional uplift, some functional uplift may still be achieved by supplemental planting within the buffer and/or fencing out an existing livestock operations in a mature buffer. In these cases, it may be appropriate to treat these segments as Enhancement II, rather than preservation. Generally, these stream reaches would not be of particularly high quality because of the degraded buffer or livestock access, but since no in-stream work is needed, a ratio of up to 2.5:1 may be appropriate depending on the level of degradation within the buffer and the amount of functional uplift provided by replanting and/or eliminating livestock access to the stream.

In all cases, the logic for preserving a stream segments as part of a stream mitigation project must be thoroughly documented in the mitigation plan, with emphasis given to the manner in which the preservation will add to the functional improvements of the overall project.