



Southeastern
Wisconsin
Regional
Planning
Commission

FACT SHEET

ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS: IDENTIFYING AREAS INELIGIBLE FOR PUBLIC SANITARY SEWER SERVICE IN LOCAL SEWER SERVICE AREA PLANS

Local sanitary sewer service area plan reports prepared by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission as part of the Regional Water Quality Management Plan over the past 40 years have identified primary environmental corridors, secondary environmental corridors, and isolated natural resource areas.¹ Prior to 1997, these plans, and the regional land use and water quality management plans, had recommended preserving the primary environmental corridors in essentially natural, open uses, and had recommended that county and local units of government consider protecting and preserving secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas.

However, in 1997, at the request of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and as part of the sewer service area plan update process, the mapped information was expanded to include identifying environmentally significant areas. These are areas where the extension of sewers to serve new “urban” development is generally not permitted. Within such areas, sewer development is confined to limited recreational and institutional uses and rural-density residential development (maximum of one dwelling unit per five acres) in upland areas.

More specifically, the following are identified as areas where the extension of sewers to serve new intensive urban development is not permitted except as noted above:

- All primary environmental corridors
- Those portions of secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas comprised of the following:
 - Wetlands
 - 1-percent annual probability (100-year recurrence interval) floodplains
 - Riparian buffer areas (defined for this purpose as follows: a band 50 feet wide along both sides of an intermittent stream; a band 75 feet wide along both sides of a perennial stream; and a band 75 feet wide around lake shorelines)
 - Areas of steep slope (slopes of 12 percent or greater) adjacent to wetlands, floodplains, and riparian buffers (more details can be found [here](#))

In addition to protecting the Region’s most important remaining natural resource areas and protecting the quality of the Region’s surface and groundwater resources, preserving these environmentally significant areas also helps protect the significant development-related investments that local units of government have made, and are continuing to make, within their communities. This includes protection of development not only from flooding and poor drainage, but also from structural failure of roadways and buildings, excessive infiltration of water into sanitary sewerage systems, and other similar impacts.

¹The methodology used in the mapping of environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas is described in SEWRPC Technical Record Volume 4, No. 2, available from Commission staff.

Good planning practice suggests that areas of steep slope, wetlands, woodlands, natural areas, critical species habitat sites, and outdoor recreation and open space sites located outside environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas should also be considered for maintenance as permanent open space. However, the Commission's regional plans, and the local sewer service area plans, do not preclude the development or other alteration of such areas. County and local units of government may permit development or alteration of such areas pursuant to all other pertinent rules and regulations. Where such areas are developed or otherwise altered, it is essential that the street, block, and lot pattern be carefully fitted to the topography; that the site design minimize runoff and erosion; that proper construction erosion control practices be adhered to; and that the site be properly stabilized.

Information on environmentally significant areas presented in sewer service area plan reports is based on the most current aerial photographs available, soil survey maps, and natural resource base inventories conducted by the Commission and the WDNR. Importantly, every updated sewer service area plan report includes text that recognizes that the precise delineation of environmentally significant areas can only be determined through field investigation.

Contact Commission staff for more information:

Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
W239 N1812 Rockwood Drive
P.O. Box 1607
Waukesha, WI 53187-1607
Phone: 262.547.6721
Email: sewrpc@sewrpc.org