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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

RAPID ORDINARY HIGH WATER MARK (OHWM) FIELD IDENTIFICATION DATA SHEET

The proponent agency is Headquarters USACE CECW-COR.

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Project ID #:	Site Name:	Date and Time:
Location (lat/long):	Investigator(s):	

Step 1 Site overview from remote and online resources.
Check boxes for online resources used to evaluate site:

- ☐ gage data
- ☐ LiDAR
- ☐ geologic maps
- ☐ climatic data
- ☐ satellite imagery
- ☐ land use maps
- ☐ aerial photos
- ☐ topographic maps
- ☐ Other: _____

Describe land use and flow conditions from online resources.
Were there any recent extreme events (floods or drought)?

Step 2 Site conditions during field assessment. First look for changes in channel shape, depositional and erosional features, and changes in vegetation and sediment type, size, density, and distribution. Make note of natural or human-made disturbances that would affect flow and channel form, such as bridges, riprap, landslides, rockfalls, etc.

Step 3 Mark the boxes next to the indicators used to help identify the location of the OHWM.
OHWM is at a transition point, therefore some indicators used to identify the location of the OHWM may be just below or above the OHWM. Make a slash in boxes next to indicators that are helpful in identifying the OHWM. After the initial assessment, those indicators identified at the OHWM elevation should be changed from slashes to x's. Note, it is not necessary to mark indicators that are present but do not help inform identification of the OHWM.
Go to page 2 to describe overall rationale for location of OHWM, write any additional observations, and attach a photo log.

Geomorphic indicators

- ☐ **Break in slope**
  - ☐ *on the bank*
  - ☐ *undercut bank*
  - ☐ *valley bottom*
  - ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ **Shelving**
  - ☐ *shelf at top of bank*
  - ☐ *natural levee*
  - ☐ *human-made berms or levees*
  - ☐ *other berms:* _____
- ☐ **Secondary channels**
- ☐ **Channel bar**
  - ☐ *shelving (berms) on bar*
  - ☐ *unvegetated*
  - ☐ *vegetation transition (go to veg. indicators)*
  - ☐ *sediment transition (go to sed. indicators)*
  - ☐ *upper limit of deposition on bar*
- ☐ **Instream bedforms and other bedload transport evidence**
  - ☐ *deposition bedload indicators (e.g., imbricated clasts, gravel sheets, etc.)*
  - ☐ *bedforms (e.g., pools, riffles, steps, etc.)*
  - ☐ *Weathered clasts or bedrock*
  - ☐ *erosional bedload indicators (e.g., obstacle marks, scour, smoothing, etc.)*

Sediment indicators

- ☐ **Soil development**
- ☐ **Changes in character of soil**
- ☐ **Mudcracks**
- ☐ **Changes in particle-sized distribution**
  - ☐ *transition from* _____ to _____
  - ☐ *upper limit of sand-sized particles*
  - ☐ *silt deposits*

Vegetation indicators (*Consider the vegetation transition looking from the middle of the channel, up the banks, and into the floodplain*)

- ☐ **Change in vegetation type from** _____ **to** _____
- ☐ **Change in density of vegetation**
- ☐ **Exposed roots below intact soil layer**
- ☐ **Vegetation matted down and/or bent**
- ☐ **Other vegetation observations**

_____

Other physical indicators

- ☐ **Sediment deposited on vegetation or structures**
- ☐ **Wracking/presence of organic litter**
- ☐ **Presence of large wood**
- ☐ **Leaf litter disturbed or washed away**
- ☐ **Water staining**

Other observed indicators? Describe:

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Project ID #: _____

Step 4 Was additional information used to support identification of the OHWM? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, describe and attach information to data sheet:

Step 5 Is an OHWM present at this site? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Describe rationale for location of OHWM or lack thereof by describing any observed indicators (at, above, and/or below the OHWM location).

Additional observations or notes

Attach an imagery log of the site.

Imagery log attached? ☐ Yes ☐ No If no, explain why not: _____

List photographs, or other imagery/sketches, and include descriptions in the table below.

Number photographs in the order that they are taken. Attach imagery and include annotations of features.

Imagery Number	Imagery description

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OHWM Field Identification Data Sheet Instructions and Field Procedure

Step 1 Site overview from remote and online resources (Chapter 5) **Complete Step 1 prior to site visit.**

Online Resources: Identify what information is available for the site. Check boxes on data sheet next to the resources used to assess this site.

a. gage data
b. aerial photos
c. satellite imagery
d. LiDAR
e. topographic maps
f. geologic maps
g. land use maps
h. climatic data (precipitation and temperature)

Landscape context: Use the online resources to put the site in the context of the surrounding landscape. (Chapter 4)

a. **Note on the data sheet under Step 1:**
   i. Overall land use and change if known
   ii. Recent extreme events if known (e.g., flood, drought, landslides, debris flows, wildfires)
   iii. Erosional and depositional environments
b. Consider the following to inform weighting of evidence observed during field visit.
   i. What physical characteristics are likely to be observed in specific environments?
   ii. Was there a recent flood or drought? Are you expecting to see recently formed or obscured indicators?
   iii. How will land use affect specific stream characteristics? How natural is the hydrologic regime? How stable has the landscape been over the last year, decade, century?

Step 2 Site conditions during the field assessment (assemble evidence) (Chapter 1 and 3)

a. Identify the assessment area.
b. Walk up and down the assessment area noting all the potential OHWM indicators.
c. Note broad trends in channel shape, vegetation, and sediment characteristics.
   i. Is this a single thread or multi-thread system? Is this a stream-wetland complex?
   ii. Are there any secondary and/or floodplain channels?
   iii. Are there obvious human-made alterations to the system?
   iv. Are there man-made (e.g., bridges, dams, culverts) or natural structures (e.g., bedrock outcrops, Large Wood jams) that will influence or control flow?
d. Look for signs of recurring fluvial action.
   i. Where does the flow converge on the landscape?
   ii. Are there signs of fluvial action (sediment sorting, bedforms, etc.) at the convergence zone?
e. Look for indicators on both banks. If the opposite bank is not accessible, then look across the channel at the bank.
f. **In Step 2 of the data sheet,** describe any adjacent land use or flow conditions that may influence interpretation of each line of evidence.
   i. What land use and flow conditions may be affecting your ability to observe indicators at the site?
   ii. What recent extreme events may have caused changes to the site and affected your ability to observe indicators?

Step 3a List evidence (Chapter 2 and 3)

Assemble evidence by marking each box with a slash next to each line of evidence.

If using fillable form, then follow the instructions for filling in the fillable form.

Context is important when assembling evidence. For instance, pool development may be an indicator of interest on the bed of a dry stream, but may not be a useful indicator to take note of in a flowing stream. On the other hand, if the pool is found in a secondary channel adjacent to the main channel, it could provide a line of evidence for a minimum elevation of high flows. Therefore, consider the site context when deciding which indicators provide evidence for identifying the OHWM. Explain reasoning in Step 5.

Questions to consider while making observations and listing evidence at a site:

Geomorphic indicators	**Sediment and soil indicators**	**Vegetation indicators**	**Other physical indicators**
Where are the breaks in slope?	Where does evidence of soil formation appear?	Where are the significant transitions in vegetation species, density, and age?	Is there organic litter present?
Are there identifiable banks?			
Is there an easily identifiable top of bank?	Are there mudcracks present?	Is there vegetation growing on the channel bed?	Is there any leaf litter disturbed or washed away?
Are the banks actively eroding?		If no, how long does it take for the non-tolerant vegetation to establish relative to how often flows occur in the channel?	
Are the banks undercut?	Is there evidence of sediment sorting by grain size?		
Are the banks armored?		Where are the significant transitions in vegetation?	Is there large wood deposition?
Is the channel confined by the surrounding hillslopes?			
Are there natural or man-made berms and levees?		Is the vegetation tolerant of flowing water?	
Are there fluvial terraces?		Has any vegetation been flattened by flowing water?	Is there evidence of water staining?
Are there channel bars?			

Are the following features of fluvial transport present?

Evidence of erosion: obstacle marks, scour, armoring
Bedforms; riffles, pools, steps, knickpoints/headcuts
Evidence of deposition: imbricated clasts, gravel sheets, etc.

In some cases, it may be helpful to explain why an indicator was NOT at the OHWM elevation, but found above or below. It can also be useful to note if specific indicators (e.g., vegetation) are NOT present. For instance, note if the site has no clear vegetation zonation.

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OHWM Field Identification Data Sheet Instructions and Field Procedure

Step 3b Weight each line of evidence (Chapter 1 and 3)

Consider importance of each indicator by assessing the following:

a. Relevance:

i. Is this indicator left by low, high, or extreme flows? Did recent extreme events and/or land use affect this indicator?

ii. Consider the elevation of the indicator relative to the channel bed. What is the current flow level based on season or nearby gages?

iii. Consider the elevation of the indicator relative to the current flow. If the stream is currently at baseflow and indicator is adjacent to that, then it is likely a low-flow indicator. The difference between high-and extreme-flow indicators can sometimes be difficult to determine.

***Landscape context from Step 1 (Chapter 4) can help determine the relevance, strength, and reliability of the indicators observed in the field.**

***In Chapter 2 of the OHWM field manual provides information on specific indicators that can assist in putting these in context and determining relevance, strength, and reliability.**

iv. Recent floods may have left many extreme-flow indicators, or temporarily altered channel form. Other resources will likely be needed to support any OHWM identification at this site. Field evidence of the OHWM may have to wait for the site to recover from the recent flood.

v. Droughts may cause field evidence of OHWM to be obscured because there has been an extended time since the last high-flow event. There can be overgrowth of vegetation or deposition of material from surrounding landscape that can obscure indicators.

vi. Both human-made (e.g., dams, construction, mining activities, urbanization, agriculture, grazing) and natural (e.g., fires, floods, debris flows, beaver dams) disturbances can alter how indicators are expected to appear at a site. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of the OHWM field manual provide specific case-studies that can help in interpreting evidence at these sites.

b. Strength:

i. Is this indicator persistent across the landscape?

1. Look up and downstream and across the channel to see if you see the same indicator at multiple locations.
2. Does the indicator occur at the same elevation as other indicators?

c. Reliability:

i. Is this indicator persistent on the landscape over time? Will this indicator still persist across seasons?

1. This can be difficult to determine for some indicators and may be specific to climatic region (in terms of persistence of vegetation) and history of land use or other natural disturbances.
2. Chapter 2, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 of the OHWM field manual describe each indicator in detail and provide examples of areas where indicators are difficult to interpret.

Step 4 Was additional information used to support identification of the OHWM? Are other resources used to support the lines of evidence observed in the field?

a. If additional resources are needed, then repeat steps 3a and 3b for the resources selected in Step 1 of assembling and weighting evidence collected from online resources. Chapter 5 of the OHWM field manual provides information on using online resources.

b. Any data collected from online tools have strengths and weaknesses. Make sure these are clear when determining relevance, strength, and reliability of the remotely collected data. Clearly describe why other resources were used to support the lines of evidence observed in the field, as well as the relevance, strength, and reliability of the supporting data and/or resources.

c. Attach any remote data and data analysis to the data sheet.

Step 5 Describe rationale for location of OHWM: (Chapter 1 and Chapter 3)

a. Weigh body of evidence:

Combine information from Step 3b: Why do the combination of indicators represent the OHWM?

i. Integrate the lines of evidence (relevance, strength, and reliability) of each indicator.

ii. Consider which indicators are high value indicators that co-occur along the stream reach. Which indicators are most relevant to identifying high flow elevations, which are most persistent across the landscape, and which are most persistent over time?

iii. Which indicators that are found above and below the location of the OHWM were helpful in identifying the elevation of the OHWM?

b. If there is more than one possible location, explain why, Include any relevant discussion on why specific indicators were not included in the final decision.

c. If needed, add additional site notes on page 2 of the data sheet under Step 5 or attach additional sketches and field observations to the data sheet.

d. Take photographs of indicators and attach an imagery log using page 2 of data sheet or another method of logging images.

i. Annotate images with descriptions of indicators.