

## BALD EAGLE WETLAND MITIGATION SITE CENTRE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Few issues have polarized the business community and environmentalists more than the balance between development and protecting wetlands. WHM has developed a highly innovative approach that creates new wetlands while allowing projects to move ahead. An example is the Bald Eagle Wetland Mitigation Site, the first of its kind in Pennsylvania.



Although avoidance of wetland damage is a goal in highway construction, some impact is unavoidable. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation hired WHM to provide mitigation for such situations. We utilize a non-traditional methodology, assembling a team to handle everything at no risk to the client. We find a site, purchase the property, acquire the permits, deal with regulatory agencies and construct replacement wetlands – all at a per-acre fixed cost.

Through careful field and desktop evaluations, followed by numerous discussions with property owners, WHM located several potential properties in the Bald Eagle Valley in Centre County, Pa. These properties were selected based on their ability to create wetlands as determined by an examination of hydrology and soils, as well as other environmental and non-environmental factors. Larger contiguous properties create a more diverse habitat than smaller unwanted parcels. Properties that retained a high possibility of success were ranked for acquisition.

After clearances were issued and sites were selected, WHM began to create a design for the Bald Eagle project based on the overall shape of the landscape and the development of a hydrologic water budget. The concept was presented to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, and other state and local agencies. The final design was based on input from each of these agencies, and then used to obtain regulatory approvals necessary for the construction of wetlands.

As the project progressed, a series of construction drawings was developed, resulting in a final, detailed design illustrating phased construction activities, erosion control practices and a complete planting and re-vegetation schedule. As part of the regulatory permits and approvals, WHM developed a monitoring plan to ensure long-term site maintenance and success. Funding for the project includes provisions for ongoing and long-term management of the wetlands by a non-profit organization.

In 2010, a search ensued for a suitable not-for-profit organization for the perpetual care and use of the property. WHM began discussions with the Wildlife for Everyone Endowment Foundation (WFEEF) and determined their goals to support to enhance wildlife habitat, scientific research and education; land preservation; and the development of youth programs would be a great fit as a steward of the property and the habitat into the future. In 2011, WHM donated more than 135 acres of land along Bald Eagle Creek, and a \$50,000 maintenance fund for the property to WFEEF. Upon acquisition of the recreational property, WFEEF dedicated the land to an honorary board member and former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge.

The Tom Ridge Wetland Preserve has provided PennDOT with 50 acres of wetland mitigation credits. In addition, wetland preservation, restoration and upland habitat are part of this project. Based on past wetland construction costs for highway projects, the client stands to save considerable money. Rather than utilizing traditional methods of contracting with multiple entities and managing multiple contracts without guarantee of success, WHM provides a single “family” to ensure success.