



## **COORDINATION PROCESS UPDATE: JOINT COORDINATION MEMORANDA TO THE FIELD BETWEEN THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (CORPS) AND THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)**

### **Background**

The final "Revised Definition of 'Waters of the United States'" rule was [published in the \*Federal Register\*](#) on January 18, 2023, and took effect on March 20, 2023 (2023 rule). In light of the May 25, 2023 decision in *Sackett v. EPA*, the 2023 rule was amended by the [conforming rule, and the amendments](#) took effect on September 8, 2023. However, the 2023 Rule, as amended, is not currently operative in certain states [due to litigation](#). Where the 2023 rule, as amended, is not operative, the pre-2015 regulatory regime<sup>1</sup> is in effect. Under both regimes, the EPA and the Corps ("the agencies") are interpreting "waters of the United States" consistent with the [Supreme Court's decision in \*Sackett\*](#).

### **Coordination Memoranda for Approved Jurisdictional Determinations**

An approved jurisdictional determination (JD) is a document provided by the Corps stating the presence or absence of "waters of the United States" on a parcel or a written statement and map identifying the limits of "waters of the United States" on a parcel.<sup>2</sup> Under existing Corps' policy, approved JDs are generally valid for five years unless new information warrants revision prior to the expiration date.<sup>3</sup>

For both regulatory regimes (the 2023 Rule, as amended, and the pre-2015 regime) under which the Corps is issuing approved JDs, the agencies entered into joint coordination memoranda to establish a process by which the Corps and EPA will coordinate on Clean Water Act geographic jurisdictional matters to ensure accurate and consistent implementation of the regimes where each regulatory regime is operative. These coordination memoranda were

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<sup>1</sup> The "pre-2015 regulatory regime" refers to the agencies' pre-2015 definition of "waters of the United States," implemented consistent with relevant case law and longstanding practice, as informed by applicable guidance, training, and experience. The pre-2015 definition of "waters of the United States" is also referred to as the Corps' 1986 regulations and EPA's 1988 regulations, inclusive of the exclusion for prior converted cropland, which both agencies added in 1993. See 33 CFR 328.3 (2014) and 40 CFR 230.3(s) (2014).

<sup>2</sup> See [33 C.F.R. § 331.2](#).

<sup>3</sup> See U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, [Regulatory Guidance Letter No. 05-02](#), § 1(a), p. 1 (June 2005).

signed on September 27, 2023, and on June 25, 2024, the agencies mutually agreed to extend the coordination process for an additional nine months. **The purpose of this document is to provide an update in response to requests from the public for more information about the coordination process. Information in this update document is current as of January 16, 2025.**

**Amended 2023 Rule Memorandum:** This memorandum addresses U.S. Department of the Army, Corps, and EPA coordination of draft approved JDs under the “Revised Definition of ‘Waters of the United States,’” as amended by the final rule “Revised Definition of ‘Waters of the United States’; Conforming” (the 2023 rule, as amended, 33 CFR § 328.3; 40 CFR §120.2).

- **Categories of Waters that Require Coordination:** All draft approved JDs assessing wetlands under paragraph (a)(4) and additional waters under paragraph (a)(5) of the 2023 rule, as amended, are being coordinated at the local level in accordance with the procedures in this memorandum. Such draft approved JDs may be elevated to the headquarters level of the agencies. Draft approved JDs are being coordinated for the specified categories of waters, regardless of their jurisdictional status.

**Pre-2015 Regulatory Regime Memorandum:** This memorandum addresses U.S. Department of the Army, Corps, and EPA coordination of draft approved JDs under the pre-2015 regulatory regime.

- **Categories of Waters that Require Coordination:** All draft approved JDs assessing wetlands under paragraph (a)(7) and other waters under paragraph (a)(3) of the 1986 regulations are being coordinated at the local level in accordance with the procedures in this memorandum. Such draft approved JDs may be elevated to the headquarters level of the agencies. Draft approved JDs are being coordinated for the specified categories of waters, regardless of their jurisdictional status.

In addition, under both memoranda, with respect to determinations of the geographic jurisdictional scope of “waters of the United States” for purposes of Section 404 that are not subject to the memoranda, Corps districts may choose to coordinate with EPA regions on draft approved JDs on a case-by-case basis and either the Corps districts or EPA regions may seek Headquarters-level review or guidance on draft approved JDs at any time.

Both coordination memoranda also state that approved JDs are case-specific determinations based on the record and factual questions or *Sackett* concerns may be raised in the context of a particular approved JD.

### **Approved JDs Coordinated with Headquarters**

With the finalization of the September 2023 conforming rule, the Corps resumed issuing jurisdictional determinations that were paused in light of the *Sackett* decision. Since the conforming rule became effective on September 8, 2023, and through January 16, 2025, the Corps has finalized 5,888 approved JDs; 2,118 approved JDs under the 2023 Rule, as amended,

and 3,770 approved JDs under the pre-2015 regulatory regime. Using the elevation process described in the coordination memoranda, 248 draft approved JDs have been elevated to Headquarters for review. As of January 16, 2025, the agencies have resolved 236 of the elevated draft approved JDs (see Figure 1) – approximately 95% of all elevations. The agencies consider an elevation resolved when it is no longer subject to joint Headquarters’ review.<sup>4</sup> These 236 elevated draft approved JDs have been resolved in a variety of ways, including: minor, site-specific comments from the EPA and Corps Headquarters staff to the relevant District; the District withdrawing the draft approved JD; a case-specific policy memorandum issued by EPA and the Army (see below); and, by reference to existing policy memoranda to address the elevated draft approved JDs where there are factual similarities with an existing policy memorandum. As of January 16, 2025, the agencies have either resolved or issued case-specific policy memoranda for all of the draft approved JDs that had been subject to review by EPA Headquarters and the Army. For elevations at the EPA and Corps Headquarters level, the agencies are actively working with the Corps Districts to resolve the remaining elevated draft approved JDs. The vast majority of approved JDs that were finalized between September 8, 2023, and January 16, 2025 were finalized without elevation.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that resolution of an elevated draft approved JD may result in the District finalizing an approved JD, the District issuing a preliminary JD, the request for an approved JD being withdrawn, or no JD being issued whatsoever.

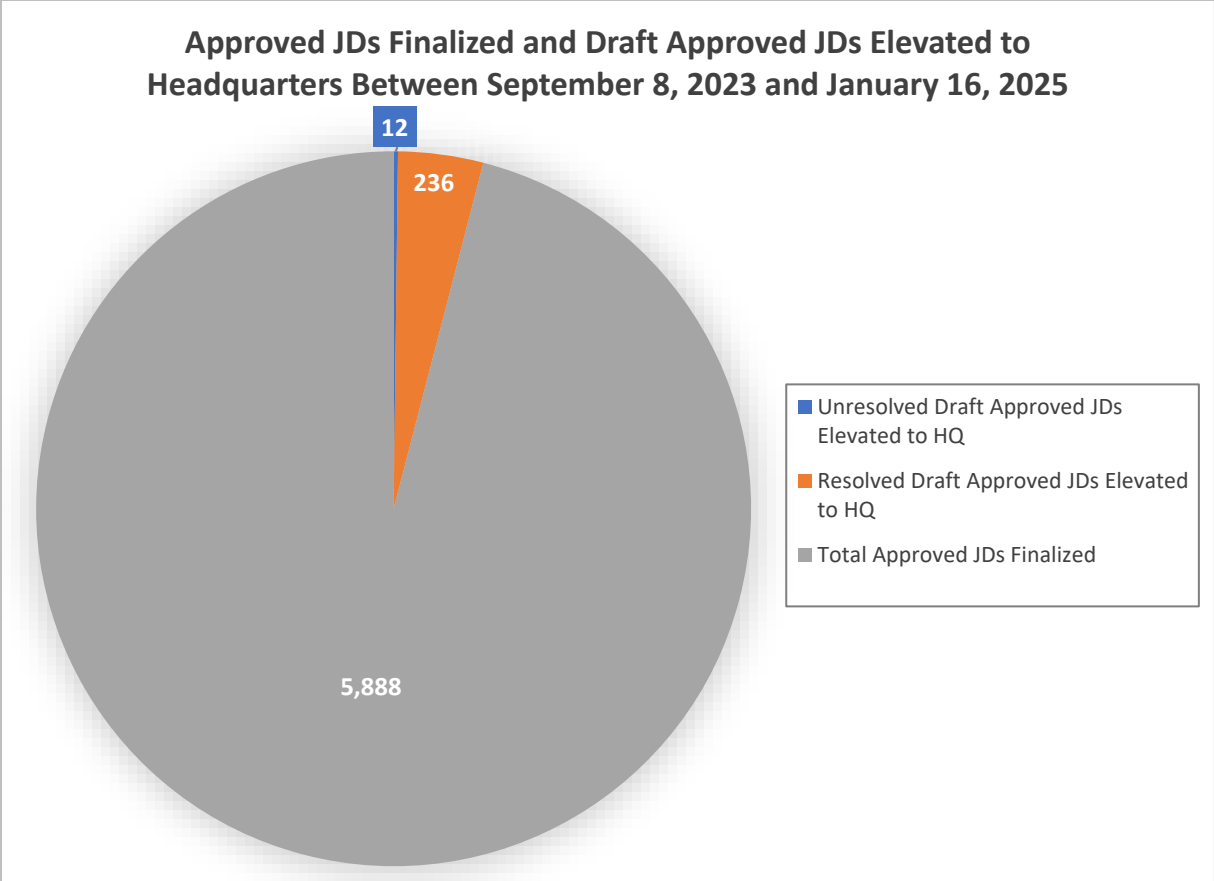


Figure 1: This figure shows approved JDs finalized by the Corps as well as draft approved JDs that have been elevated to the agencies' headquarters between September 8, 2023, and January 16, 2025. Of the 248 draft approved JDs that have been elevated to headquarters, 236 elevations have been resolved.

**Policy Memoranda**

If a draft approved JD is elevated to the Headquarters level for review, a policy memorandum may be issued by EPA and the Army providing guidance to the respective EPA regional and Corps district offices. The agencies are posting any such memoranda on the [web](#) to ensure transparency and accessibility to the public. As of January 16, 2025, EPA and the Army have issued 14 case-specific memoranda, as detailed below.

The Clean Water Act as well as EPA and Corps regulations, interpreted consistent with *Sackett*, contain legally binding requirements. The policy memoranda issued as part of the coordination process do not substitute for those provisions or regulations, nor are they regulations themselves. Thus, the memoranda do not impose legally binding requirements on EPA, the Corps, Tribes, States, or the regulated community, and may or may not apply to a particular situation based upon the circumstances.

**Memoranda for draft approved JDs completed under the 2023 Rule, as amended ([available on the web](#)).**

- [Memorandum on LRB-2021-01386](#) – This memorandum addresses the concept of how to identify the wetland area which is then assessed under the jurisdictional standard.
- [Memorandum on MVS-2023-00288](#) – This memorandum addresses the concept of how to identify tributary reaches for purposes of assessing tributaries.
- [Memorandum on NWP-2023-602](#) – This memorandum addresses whether the specific subsurface storm drain at issue can serve as a continuous surface connection for adjacent wetlands.
- [Memorandum on NAP-2023-01223](#) – This memorandum addresses whether site specific discrete features can provide a continuous surface connection for adjacent wetlands.
- [Memorandum on POH-2023-00187](#) - This memorandum addresses whether site specific discrete features can provide a continuous surface connection for adjacent wetlands.
- [Memorandum on NWS-2023-923](#) - This memorandum addresses the concept of how to apply the waste treatment system exclusion.
- [Memorandum on MVR-2023-0828](#) - This memorandum addresses whether site specific natural landforms can provide evidence of a continuous surface connection.

**Memoranda for draft approved JDs completed under the pre-2015 regulatory regime ([available on the web](#)).**

- [Memorandum on NWO-2003-60436](#) –This memorandum addresses the concept of how to identify the wetland area which is then assessed under the jurisdictional standard.
- [Memorandum on LRL-2023-00466](#) – This memorandum addresses the concept of when ponds are considered part of the tributary network.
- [Memorandum on SAS-2001-13740](#) – This memorandum addresses the concept of how to apply the waste treatment system exclusion.
- [Memorandum on NWK-2022-00809](#) – This memorandum addresses whether site specific discrete features can provide a continuous surface connection for adjacent wetlands.
- [Memorandum on SWG-2023-00284](#) – This memorandum addresses whether site specific discrete features can provide a continuous surface connection for an adjacent wetland.
- [Memorandum on LRB-2023-00451](#) - This memorandum addresses whether certain site specific features can provide a continuous surface connection for an adjacent wetland.
- [Memorandum on NWK-2024-00392](#) - This memorandum addresses whether site specific discrete features can provide a continuous surface connection for an adjacent wetland.

**Next Steps**

The coordination memoranda will remain in effect until March 27, 2025. No later than 30 calendar days prior to the termination date of each coordination memorandum, the agencies will initiate a joint Headquarters-level review to reevaluate various requirements in the

coordination memorandum, assess implementation effectiveness, and consider the need for further coordination. This joint Headquarters-level review of each coordination memorandum will be completed prior to their expiration date. Each coordination memorandum and its outlined expectations may only be modified or extended by written agreement of both signatory agencies.

Additional information about the approved JD coordination process and the agencies' memoranda to the field is available on [EPA's website](#).