17 JUL 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR CO-R

SUBJECT: Determination of Growing Season For Regulatory Purposes in Alaska

1. Background: The 1987 Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual (the Manual) produced by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, Mississippi, describes the criteria for identifying wetlands and delineating their upper boundaries. The Manual also defines several terms important to this task. The definition of "Growing Season" in the Manual refers to "the portion of the year when soil temperatures at 19.7 inches below the soil surface are higher than biologic zero (5°C)(U.S. Department of Agriculture - Soil Conservation Service 1985)." More recent versions of this definition published by the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service) no longer refer to a specific depth or soil temperature.

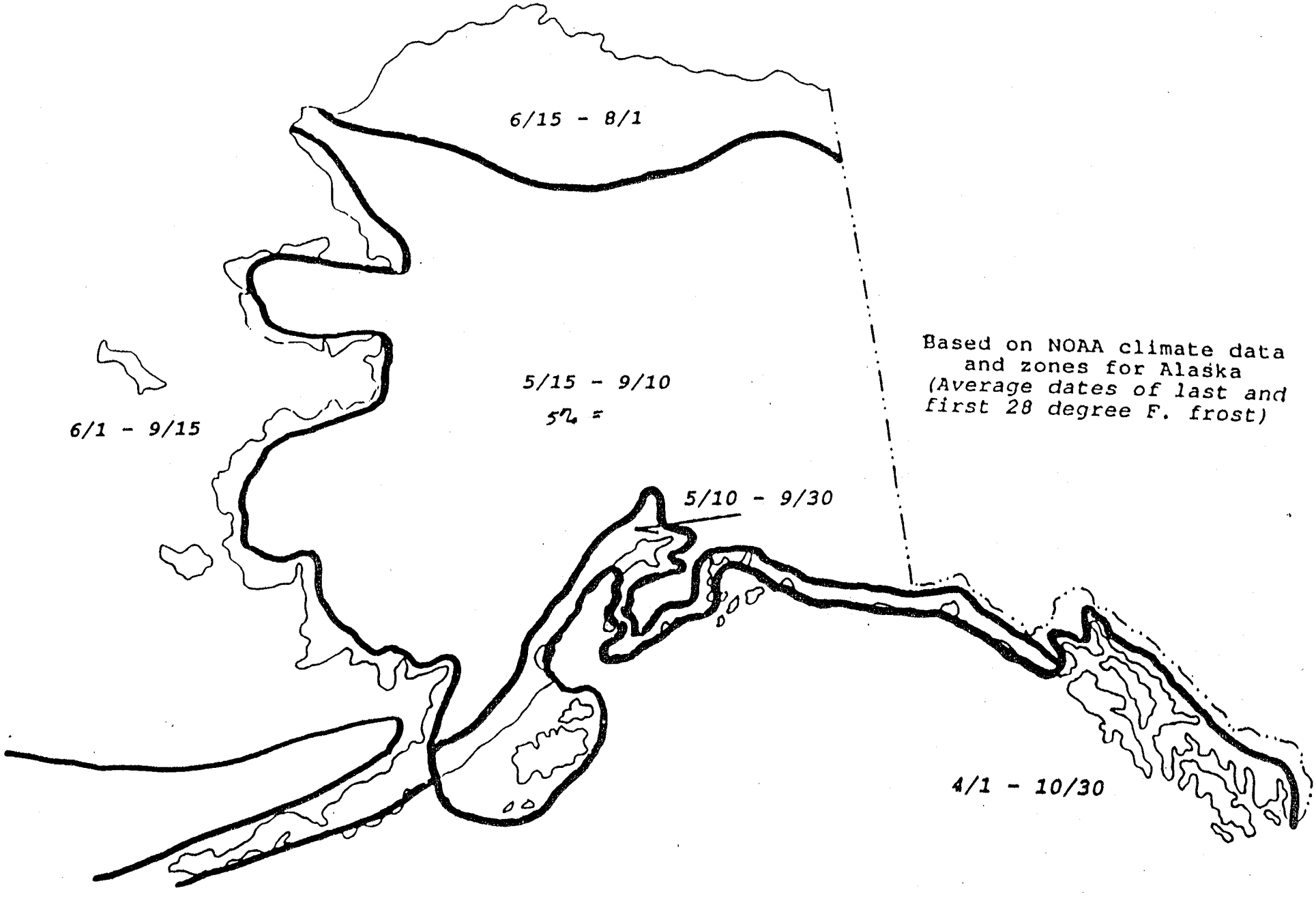
2. The Questions and Answers on [the] 1987 Corps of Engineers Manual (dated October 7, 1991, issued by Regulatory HQ and signed by John Studt) were published as part of the "Modifications and Clarifications" guidance concerning implementation of the Manual for Corps Regulatory purposes. The first question and answer addresses the "definition and practical interpretation of the growing season". The answer to that question discusses the aforementioned definition and includes a description of approximating this period using the number of frost-free days. The last sentence of this answer addresses special circumstances pertinent to Alaska: "In certain parts of the country where plant communities in general have become more adapted to regional conditions, local means of determining growing season may be more appropriate and can be used."

3. Alaska and, in particular, areas with permafrost soils have been determined to fit this special case where the plant communities have adapted to regional conditions (e.g., arctic and sub-arctic regions with cold or frozen soils). In 1991, the NRCS first published the "Assumptions on Hydric Soils" which included a map in Appendix I that was based on NOAA climate data and zones for Alaska (Average dates of last and first 28 degree F. frost). This information was updated as "Hydric Soil Assumptions" and reprinted on 7 July 2002. The Alaska District has adopted the map entitled "Growing Seasons For Wetland Hydrology" for use as the primary method of determining the growing season for both wetland hydrology and hydric soils within the District. The latest version is attached for ease of reference.

Larry L. Reeder
Chief, CO-R

Attachment

GROWING SEASONS FOR WETLAND HYDROLOGY



Based on NOAA climate data and zones for Alaska (Average dates of last and first 28 degree F. frost)