

ECOLOGY TOOLKIT

Element Occurrence (EO)

ESA Management Plan



OVERVIEW

This Toolkit is intended to provide guidance on appropriate management procedures after the discovery and reporting of protected species Element Occurrences (EO) within the Environmental Survey Boundary (ESB). Projects may have existing EOs within the project boundary as notified by early coordination procedures (See: Joint Coordination Procedures) or resulting EOs during Phase 2 Protected Species Survey (PSS) (PSS, Avoidance and Minimization [A&M] Guidebook). A corresponding EO Management Plan ensures avoidance and minimization measures crafted for the EO are followed by GDOT Districts during routine in-house and contracted vegetation management activities, as well as other maintenance activities by GDOT or third parties (i.e., utility companies) that occur along GDOT Rights-of-Way (ROW). The major federal law governing these requirements is the Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531-1544), and the major state laws governing these requirements are the Georgia Wildflower Preservation Act (OCGA 12-6-170) and the Georgia Endangered Wildlife Act (OCGA 27-3-130).

Coordination needs to occur between the Office of Environmental Services (OES) Ecologist and the consultant Ecologist after ESB development to determine if there are any existing EOs with management plans in the ESB. The OES Ecologist will coordinate with Districts and State Maintenance Office through MOES@dot.ga.gov, as needed. Information on existing management plans found by the OES Ecologist will be shared with the consultant Ecologist for incorporation into project restrictions, as appropriate.

Upon completion of the PSS and identification of an EO, the consultant Ecologist will follow the process outlined in the current GDOT Species Survey Methodology Manual and PSS, A&M Guidebook for reporting the EO. The OES Ecologist will update the EO Tracking Spreadsheet¹ and send shapefiles to the GDOT Interagency Office of Environmental Quality (IOEQ) State Environmental Liaison (SEL) through the GDOT IOEQ Inbox (IOEQ@dot.ga.gov) within 10 bd of receiving the consultant Ecologist's email. If an EO is discovered separately from a project, the GDOT ecologist would follow the process outlined in the current GDOT Species Methodology Manual and PSS, A&M Guidebook and develop a management plan as needed.

Once agency coordination is underway, the OES Ecologist will initiate internal discussions to develop appropriate avoidance and minimization measures to protect the EO. Depending on the species and proposed work in ROW, relocation efforts may be needed. EOs in ROW that will not be impacted and protected by OBF will not require relocations. EOs requiring relocation may or may not need a management plan. Details on the relocation coordination process is included in the PSS, A&M Guidebook. For EOs that do not require relocation efforts, a management plan will be developed using the steps below.

DEVELOPING AN EO ESA MANAGEMENT PLAN

For plant and animal species:

1. Coordination among the GDOT team (OES Ecologist, GDOT IOEQ SEL, GDOT Landscape Architect Manager, and GDOT District Maintenance Manager [or their designee]), will occur to determine the following. Agency involvement will be at the discretion of the OES Ecologist and/or GDOT IOEQ SEL as needed.

¹ All Ecology templates are located on the Ecology Section SharePoint. See instructions for accessing SharePoint on Office of Environmental Services Guidebooks website.

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- a. Proper avoidance and minimization measures for the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA)
 - i. For plants, these avoidance and minimization measures may include, but are not limited to, altered mowing schedules, restricted use of herbicides, hand clearing, seasonal restrictions, and species-specific materials lists.
 - ii. For animals, these avoidance and minimization measures may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on placement of mulch, required species-specific surveys before commencement of construction and maintenance activities, seasonal restrictions, and noise attenuation.
 - b. A buffer distance appropriate for EO protection will be developed. This buffered area will become a designated ESA for management. The EO ESA will be labeled to direct the contractor to the General Notes and/or ERIT, where applicable.
2. If EO Management Plan development occurs concurrently with an on-going project, then the OES Ecologist will provide the ESA shapefile and restrictions/project commitments to the consultant Ecologist. The consultant Ecologist will be responsible for ensuring the ESA is added to project plans and following the process outlined in the PSS, A&M Guidebook. This new EO ESA should be added to the Avoidance and Minimization Measures Meeting (A3M) tracking spreadsheet by the consultant Ecologist and be discussed during A3M. Orange barrier fence should be added around ESA on plans to ensure avoidance during construction.
 3. The GDOT IOEQ SEL will provide the final project specific Special Provision (SP) 107.23 Word document to MOES@dot.ga.gov either for revising into the MOES format SP 107.23 or already drafted as the MOES SP 107.23, as appropriate, for inclusion in the Management Plan Package (discussed below).

For insects:

1. The OES Ecologist, GDOT Landscape Architect Manager, and appropriate agencies will discuss existing GDOT vegetation management and seeding strategies to determine if new or altered measures could be incorporated for EO protection.

COMPLETING THE EO ESA MANAGEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

1. The Management Plan Template^{2,2} will be completed by the OES Ecologist. Upon completion it will be emailed to the GDOT IOEQ Inbox (IOEQ@dot.ga.gov).
2. The EO Tracking Spreadsheet¹ will be updated by the OES Ecologist to reflect the EO ESA Management Plan in place.
3. The details of the management plan will be included in the project-specific SP 107.23, and then followed during maintenance projects as environmental restrictions. The GDOT IOEQ SEL will provide the final project-specific Special Provision (SP) 107.23 Word document to MOES@dot.ga.gov for revising into the MOES format SP 107.23 for district-wide use after EO ESA Management Plan finalization.
4. The GDOT Ecologist will send the EO ESA Management Plan to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)/Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Wildlife Resources Division (GADNR-WRD) for

¹ All Ecology templates are located on the Ecology Section SharePoint. See instructions for accessing SharePoint on Office of Environmental Services Guidebooks website.

² See *Management Plan Template* on the Office of Environmental Services Guidebooks website.

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acceptance/comment. The agencies will have 15 business days (bd) to provide further comment. If correspondence is not returned in this time frame, the GDOT Ecologist considers it to be acceptance of the Plan. All comments will be addressed, and responses returned.

- 5. The GDOT IOEQ SEL will send the completed EO ESA Management Plan to the State Environmental Administrator for approval. Once approval has been granted, the signed EO ESA Management Plan and completed package will be sent to those listed on the EO ESA Management Plan Template² which includes: GDOT Maintenance Contacts, Agencies contacts, and relevant third parties.
- 6. The GDOT IOEQ SEL will notify MOES@dot.ga.gov once the OES ESA mapping database has been updated to include a new EO ESA. The OES ESA mapping database is linked into the MOES dashboard which is used by GDOT Districts and State Maintenance Office to determine where management plans are in-place. These management plans will also then be shared with third parties working within ROW.

TOOLKIT REVISION HISTORY

| Revision Description | Relevant Sections | Revision Date |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Initial Publication | All | 6/10/2022 |
| | | Choose the Date |