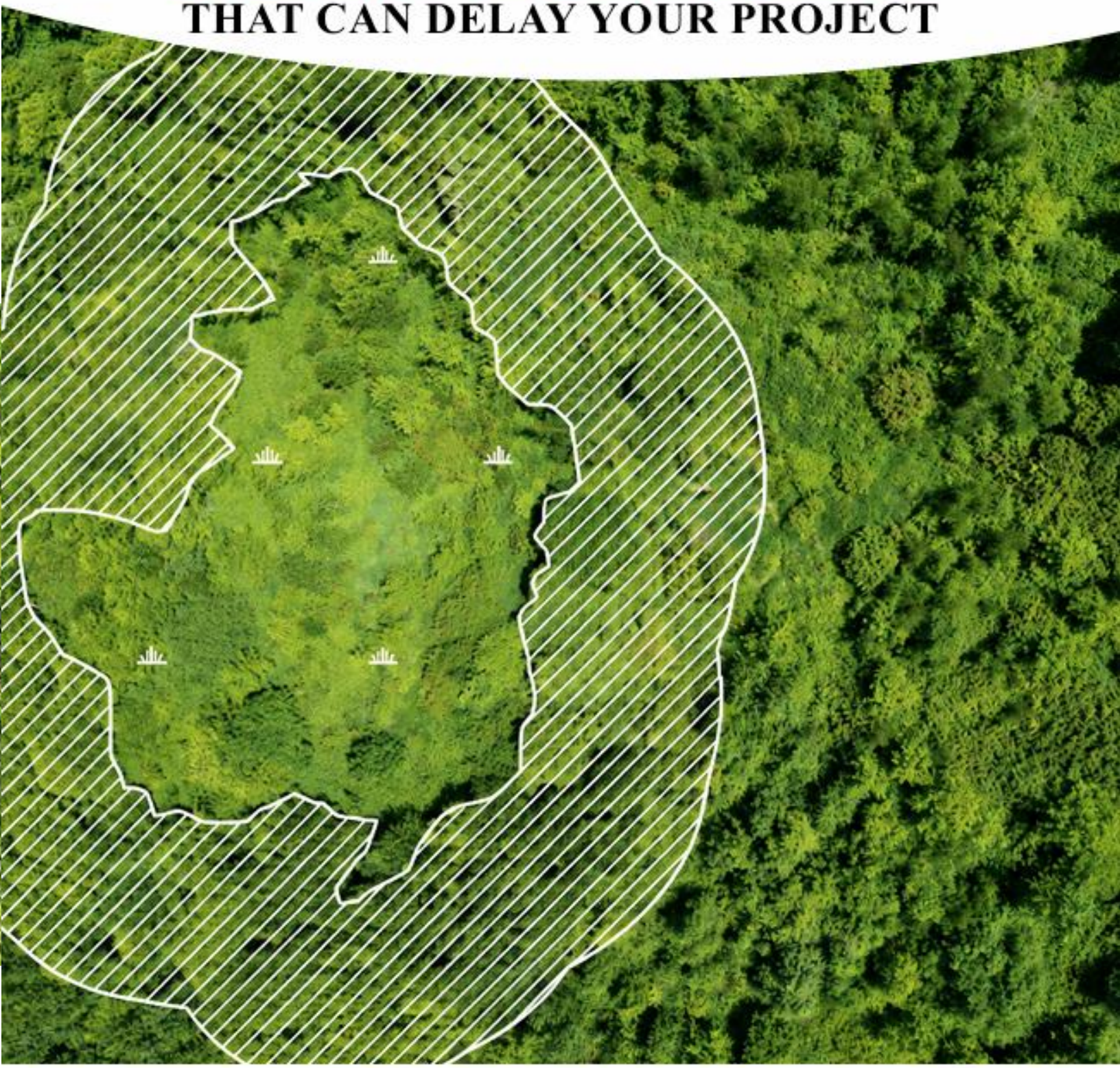
THREE WETLAND PERMITTING MISTAKES THAT CAN DELAY YOUR PROJECT



ATSI
Aqua-Terr Systems, Inc.
End to End Wetland Permitting Since 1992

15-Minute Field Guide

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Read this first

Dear Reader,

In order to obey wetland permitting, you must know the pitfalls. This guide shows you how to avoid three mistakes that stall approvals and blow budgets—and what to do instead. It's built for municipal staff who want faster, defensible permits without surprises.

What you'll get:

- Three high-leverage errors that add weeks and shrink yield—and the exact counter-moves.
- Simple scripts and checklists you can copy into your next submittal.
- Raw proof from real projects: comment letters to "APPROVED" with timelines and zero-redesign examples.

How to use it:

- Skim all three mistakes once.
- Flag the 1–2 you're facing now.
- Apply the checklist and scripts on your next consultant touchpoint.

No politics. No fluff. Just field-tested tactics: treat regulators like allies, be efficient, and wrap defensible data so approvals glide.

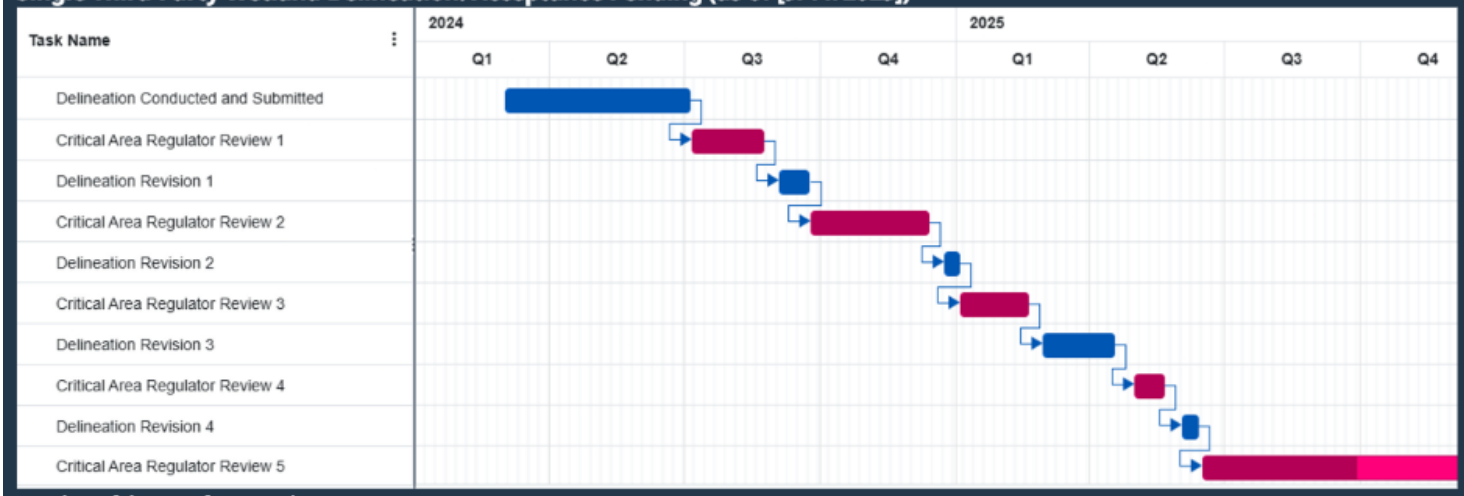
-Anthony

Mistake No. 1:
Treating Regulators as Enemies, Not Partners

Wetland Delineation Review Timeline comparison: Single Third-Party Delineation (acceptance pending) vs average similar ATSI delineations (as of 09/16/2025).

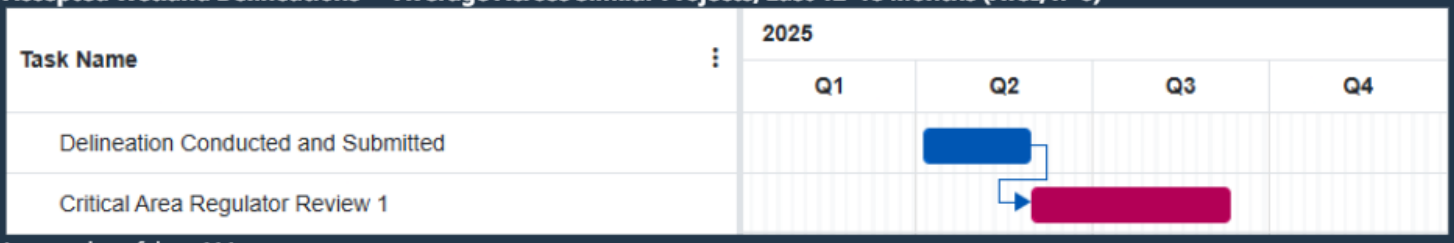
ATSI path (on average) = 4 fewer cycles, 437+ days faster, & 97.78% less idle time.

Single Third-Party Wetland Delineation: Acceptance Pending (as of [9/11/2025])



Number of days (so far): 551 days
Regulator review cycles/iterations count: 5
Meetings/touchpoints held: approx. 48
Avg Idle days (waiting between comments/submissions): between one and three months

Accepted Wetland Delineations — Average Across Similar Projects, Last 12–18 Months (ATSI, n=6)



Avg. number of days: 114
Avg. review cycles/iterations count. 1
Avg. meetings/touchpoints held. 1
Avg. Idle days (waiting between comments/submissions). 74
Legend: consultant • regulator review (completed) • regulator (review pending)
Representative project data shown. Identifying details removed. Underlying records may be reviewed under a mutual NDA and client approval at our discretion.
Example Board (As of: Sep. 2025). Live boards are date-stamped and refreshed weekly.

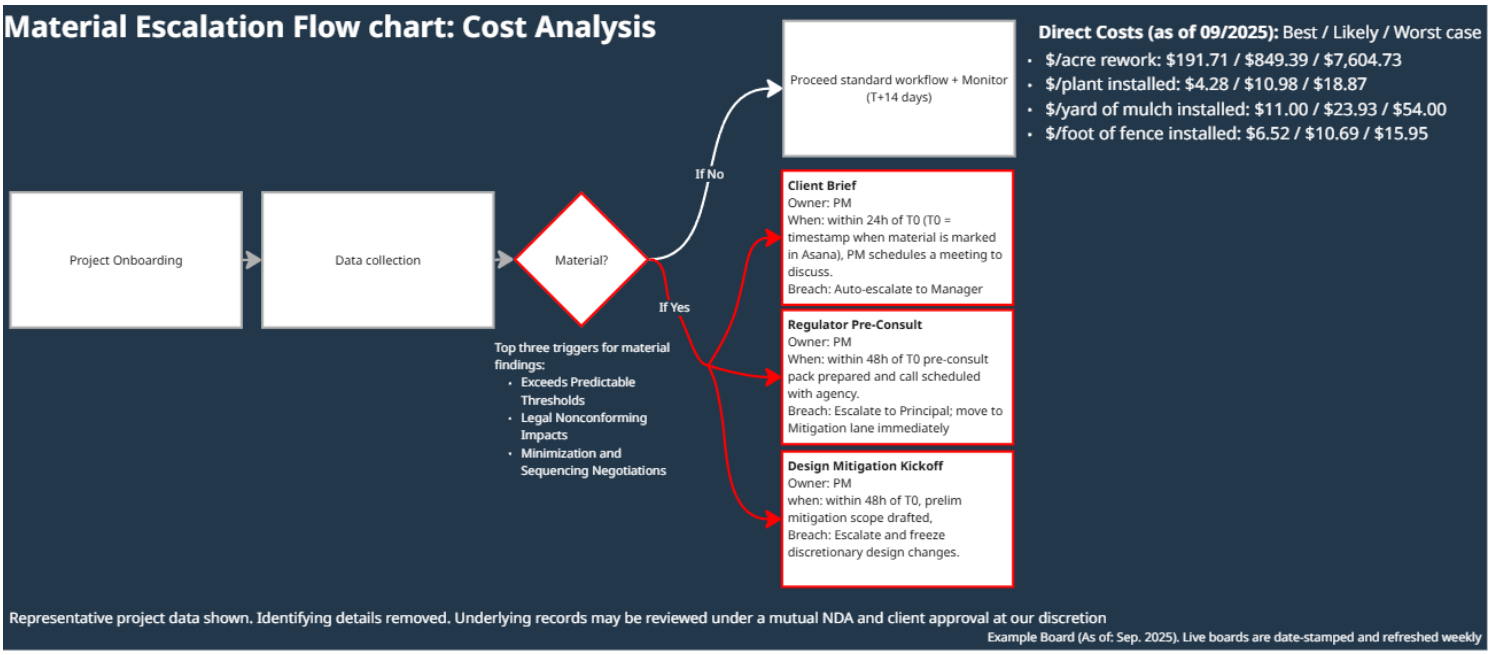
Regulators aren't gatekeepers to fight—they're co-pilots to align with. Make them foes and you build your own walls. Align early, move faster.

What this mistake looks like

- Code-flexing and condescension with new reviewers.
- Heated emails, slow replies, and burying bad news.
- "Us vs. them" standoffs that poison winnable talks.

Do this instead

- Pre-brief new regulators: “What does a clean submittal look like to you? How do you prefer we work together?”
- Co-author the solution: Offer A/B options with tradeoffs, not demands. Use “we/us” language.
- Stay defensible: Facts > opinions. Clean notes, citations, maps, plots, photos, flags, GPS.
- Praise in public: recap in writing.
- Escalate early: Surface hard findings with data, implications, and options; invite quick review; document decisions. If uncertain, say so—and propose the next test.



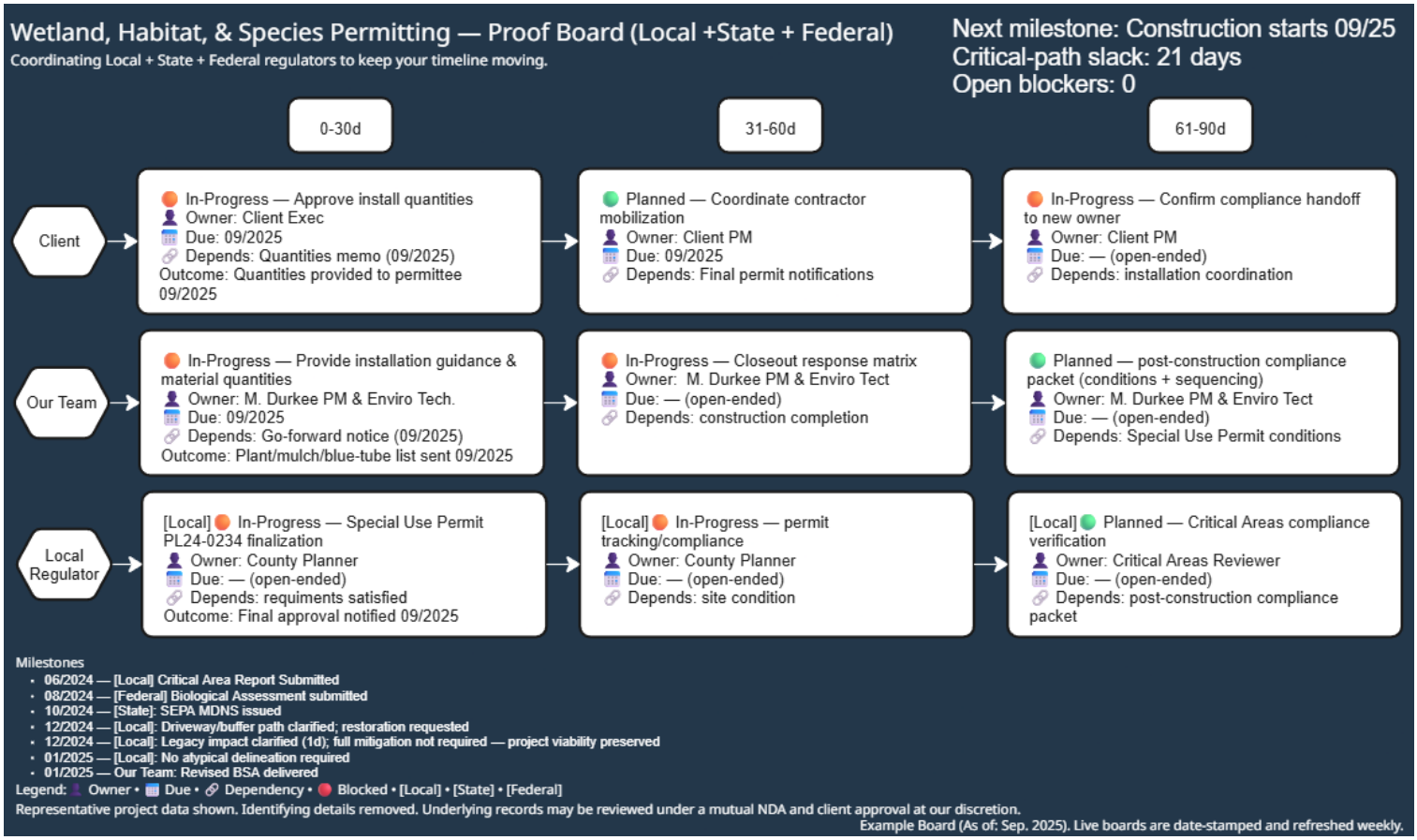
Field-tested scripts

- First in person meeting with regs: “You have a lot to manage. What is it like working in a public position?”
- Disagreement: “You have a responsibility to protect the public good. Are you against talking more about this?”
- Bad news early: “We found X. Two compliant paths with timelines/impacts—your preference?”

Track

- Submittal-to-approval cycle time by jurisdiction.
- Regulator response time and tone.
- Number of redesigns per submittal. Goal: -5-7% in 90 days.

Mistake No. 2:
Passive, Client-Driven Project Management



Obvious but ignored: efficiency wins

A business creates more value if it's efficient. Do the required steps. No extras. No misses. That's it.

What great looks like:

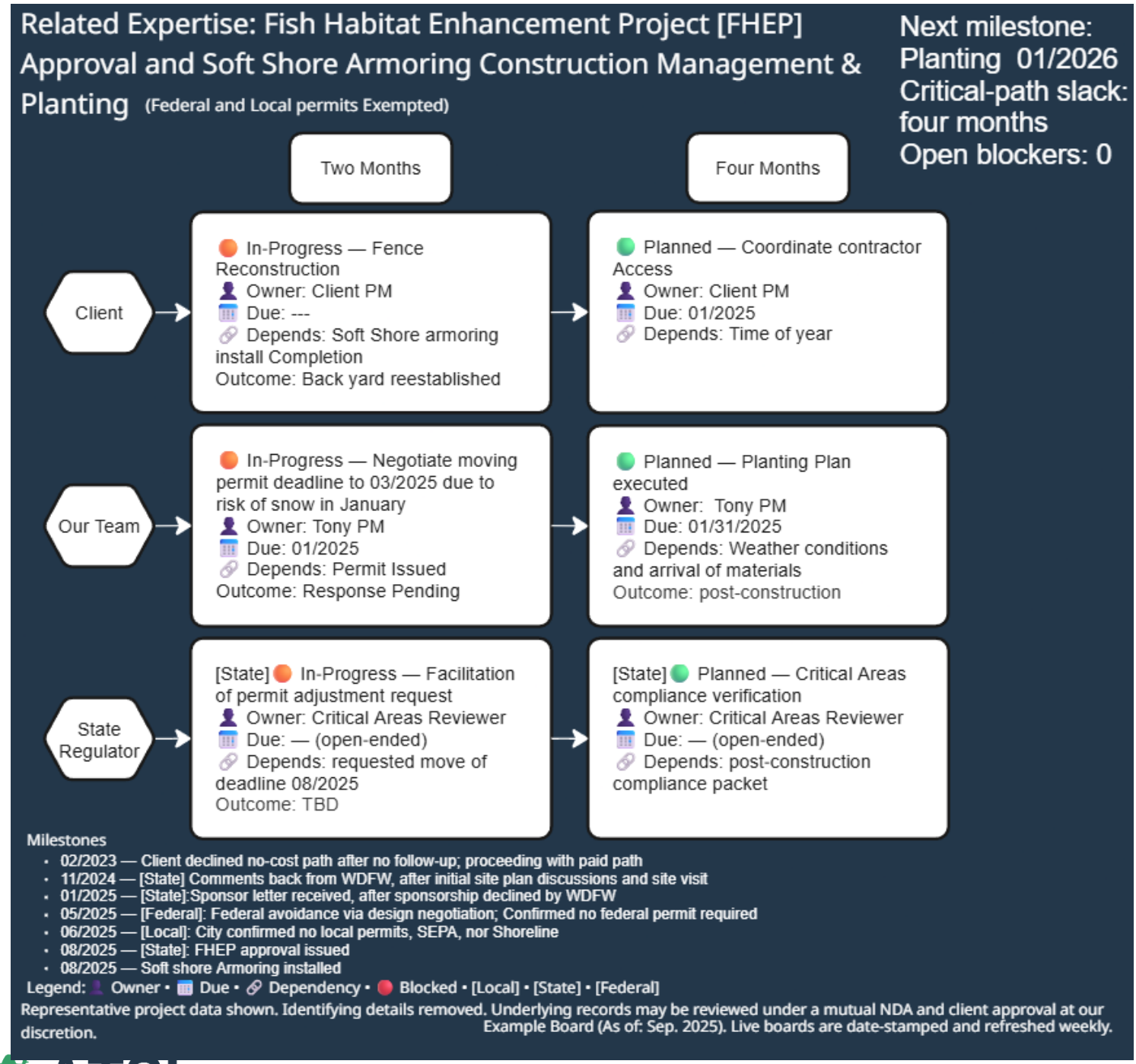
- Do what you promise. Stay fair. Communicate like clockwork.
- Clean invoices—no surprises.
- Align with client wins while honoring code; solutions-first even when "wetland-free" fantasies surface.

Reality check: this work is hard

Not whining—just facts. Wetland science is complex, nuanced, and tedious.

Here's the real process:

- Qualifications: Supervisors with environmental degrees (or equivalent); accepted delineations under senior review; PWS where required.
- Research before field: Databases, maps, historicals—hours before boots.
- Fieldwork grind: Long drives, thorns, rain, mud; 10–20 soil pits/site (1' x 18–24").
- Three indicators per plot—or bust: hydric soils, hydrology, vegetation.
- Paper reality: data forms, ratings, maps; 100+ page reports; scrutiny from all sides.



Consultant vetting checklist:

- Tip #1: ask “What does a successful regulator–consultant relationship look like?” Green: “Collaborate for fast, defensible approvals.” Red: “We push until they fold.”
- Tip #2: Ask local regulators who cruises vs. who causes rewrites.
- Tip #3: Validate with market proof—referrals, Google, Yelp—patterns over hype.
- Tip #4: ask “Show examples where you tightened or eased a call for accuracy.”
- Tip #5: Ask to see the data: field notes, pits, forms, seasons, hours, citations. Stonewalls = smoke.

Mistake No. 3:
Non-Defensible or Inaccurate Data, Reports, Fieldwork, and Mapping



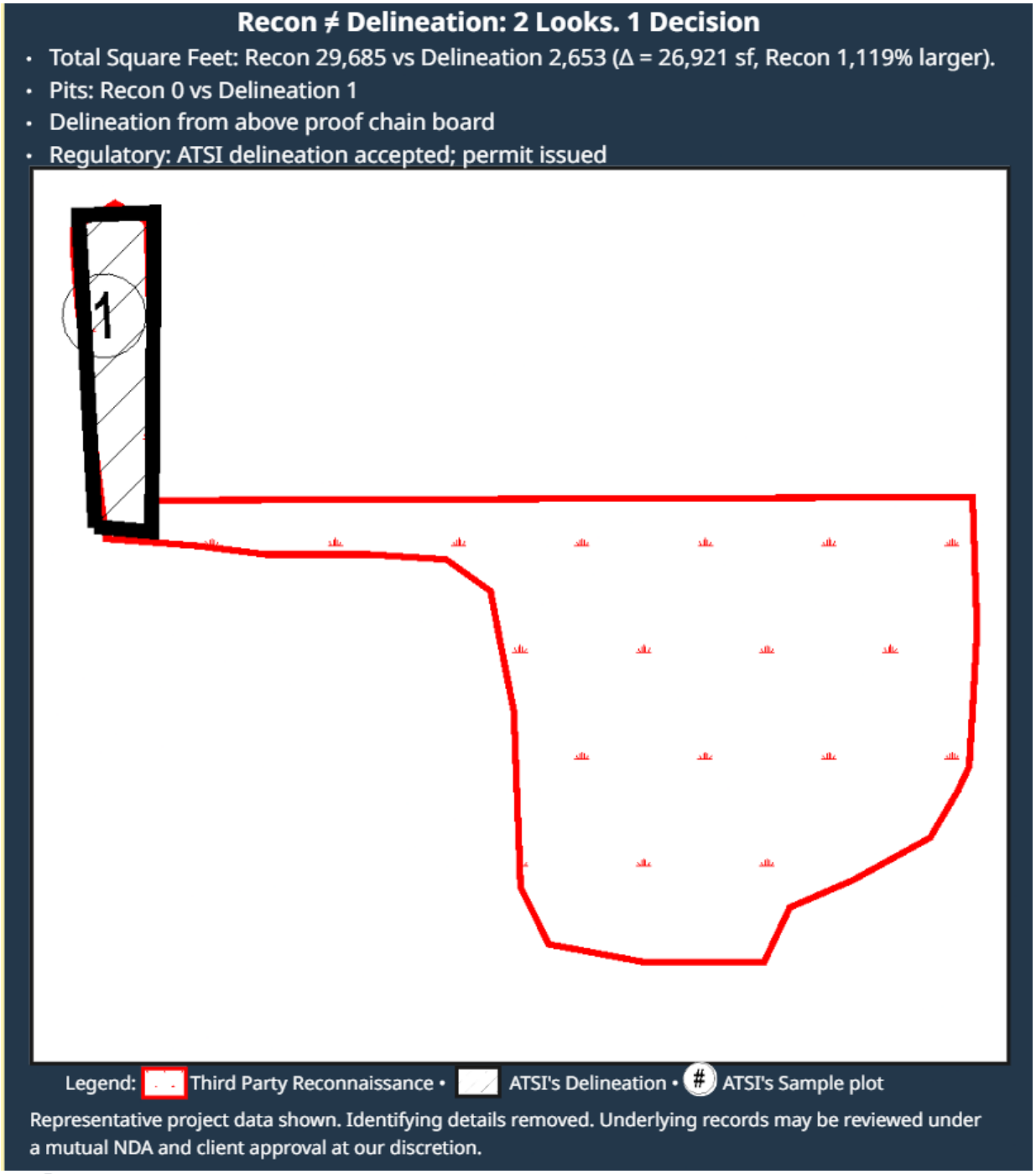
Shortcuts today become year-long freezes tomorrow. Fudged lines, sloppy methods, or "more buildable than reality" patterns trigger rewrites, audits, and rejections. The antidote: rigorous honesty and spotless proof. Your promise won't win; your proof will.
Third-party verification and raw, recent, numerical evidence multiply credibility.

Why delineations get killed:
Negligent methods, seasonality ignored, desk-mapping over field truth.
Inexperienced techs missing subtle soil/veg/hydrology indicators.

Sloppy QA/QC; inconsistent flags/lines; weak CAD handoffs.
Misreads: plant IDs, manual/supplement errors; Munsell misses.
Inconsistent mapping logic; outdated practices; no recent training.

Sub-mistake: Treating a reconnaissance as a delineation

Recon ≠ delineation. Labeling every soggy spot "wetland" feels "safe" but destroys value, invites delays, and forces redesigns. Do the work: Dig pits; log hydrology; document soils; revisit in-season if needed. Pressure-test edges; prove wetland status—or its absence. Keep "quick look" notes separate from defensible delineation data.



What "safe" actually looks like:

Clear scope: Recon = risk scoping. Delineation = boundaries.
Transparent methods: Photos, logs, pits, flags, GPS, dates—fully traceable.
Reversibility: Docs that withstand scrutiny without scramble.

Good vs. bad day:
Bad: Ghost a mirrored wetland; road through it; site visit nukes project.
Good: Hydrology/veg clear; soils borderline; Munsell nailed with forms/photos; pushback survives hearing/court; non-wetland ruled; hundreds of thousands saved.

What good looks like:
Field-first: Plots, photos, flags, GPS, duplicates, cross-checks.
Manuals: 1987 Manual + Regional Supplement, precisely applied; inline citations.
Seasonality confirmed; atypical notes flagged.
Munsell done right; plant IDs verified.
Clear line logic; tight CADs; narratives sync with data.
Fresh trainings; methods timestamped.

Conclusion

Avoid these landmines—antagonizing regulators, sloppy data/fieldwork (including recon-as-delineation), and passive management—and you reclaim months and serious money. When consultants fudge facts, overcall wetlands, bury findings, or spar with reviewers, they become anchors. Every slip costs cash and calendar.

Field checklist:

- Verify field notes and data (Tip #5).
- Call regulators early (Tip #1 scripts).
- Demand accurate maps and clean logic (Mistake 2).
- Get "how we'll get you to approval" in writing (Tip #2).

You don't have to slog this alone. ATSI has been Making Sustainability Possible since 1982—end-to-end wetlands, species, habitat: risk, surveys, permitting, mitigation design/install, monitoring, maintenance—so you reach occupancy drama-free.

About the Author



Anthony Gallina
Manager & Land Use Consultant

I help Western Washington professionals move projects through wetland permitting faster, cleaner, and more affordably—so your permit gets approved and your timeline stays intact. At ATSI, we handle the full stack: risk assessments, wetland delineations, permitting, mitigation design and installation, plus ongoing monitoring and maintenance. You get one accountable team from conception to occupancy. Proof you can trust: 60+ years of combined development experience and 30+ years of environmental consulting in-house, led by a Professional Wetland Scientist. I've lived in Bellingham since 2006 and work alongside my wife, Karla Gallina—ATSI's owner and PWS—so you get local expertise and long-term stewardship, not a fly-in contractor. I'm on your side to de-risk wetlands work, cut surprises, and keep budget and habitat protected.