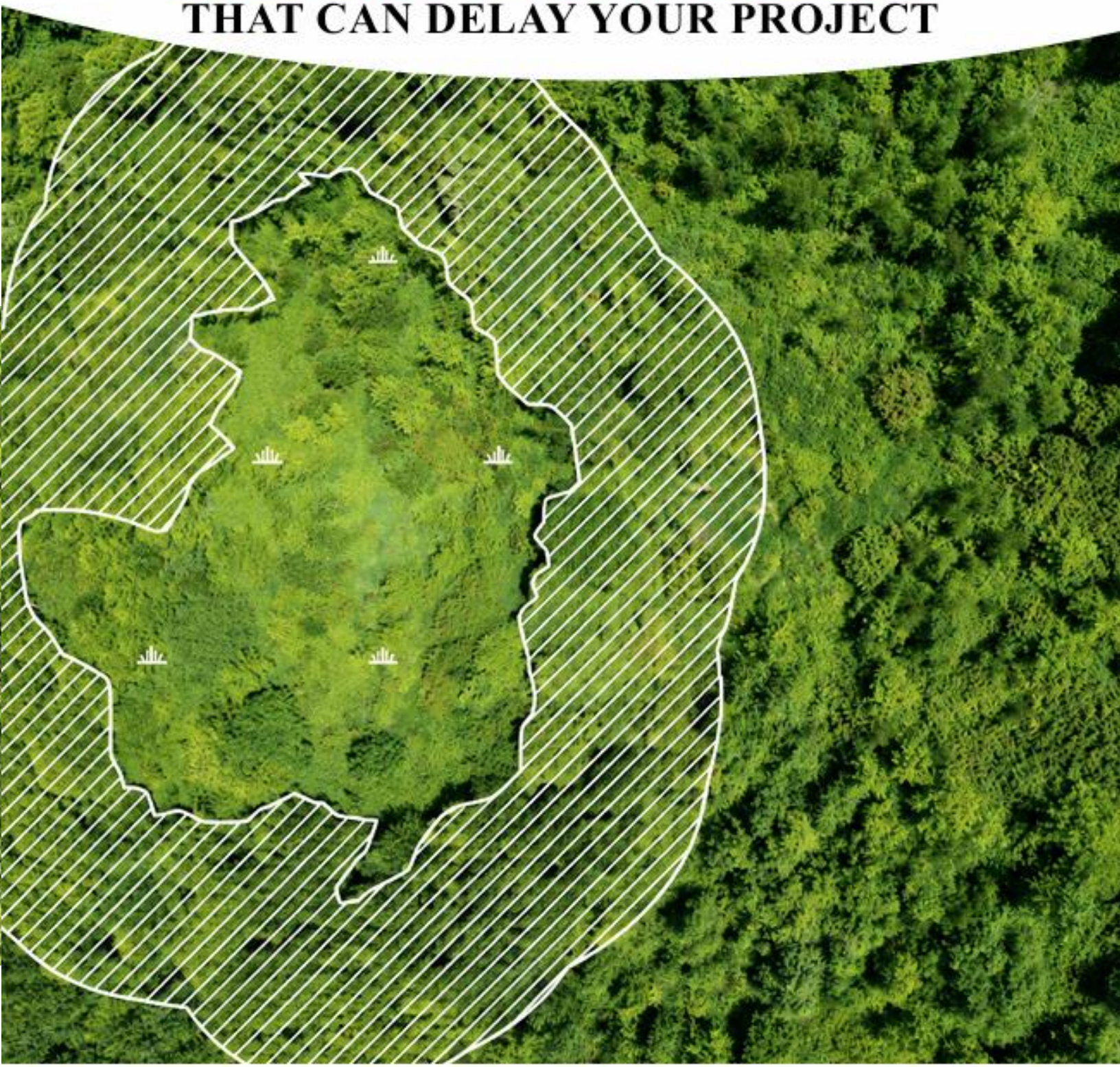
THREE WETLAND PERMITTING MISTAKES THAT CAN DELAY YOUR PROJECT



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 build on schedule, you must comply with wetland permitting regulations. This small book demonstrates how to avoid three common mistakes that make your project unpredictable and blow budgets—and what to do instead. It's built for tribal organization staff who want predictable permit timelines without surprises.

What you'll get:

- Three errors that add weeks and shrink yield—and the exact corrections.
- Simple scripts and checklists you can use.
- Raw proof from real projects.

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 collect real data so delineations stick.

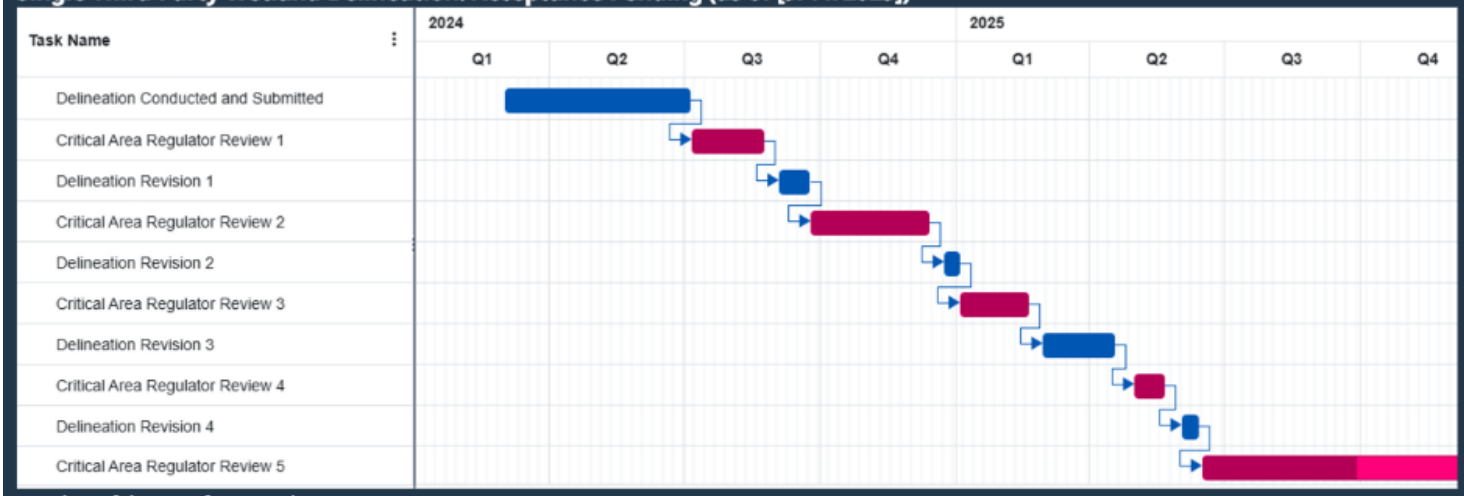
-Anthony
CEO

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).

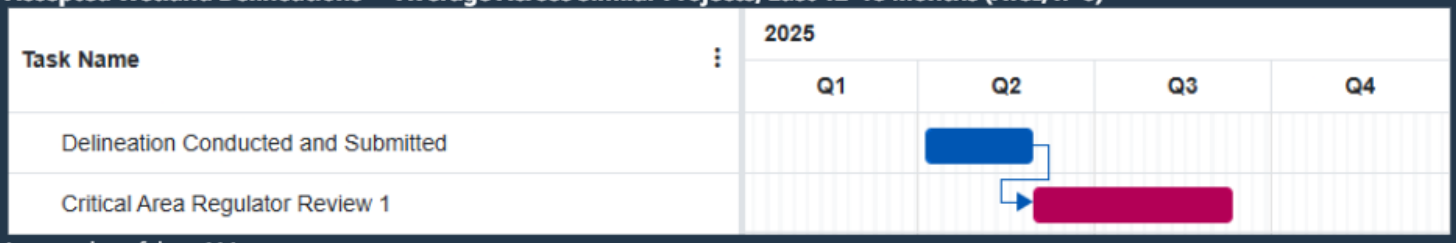
ATSI path (on average) = 4 fewer cycles, 437+ days faster, & 97.78% less idle time.

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.

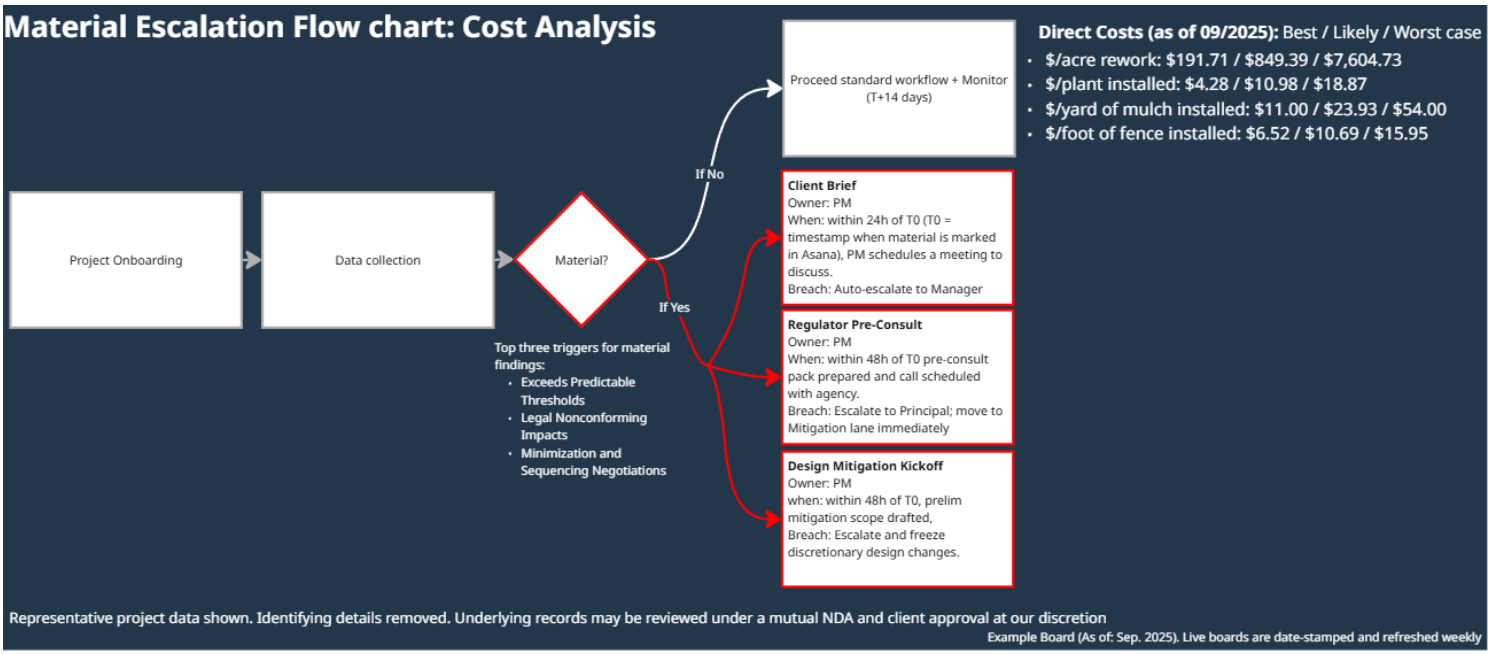
Regulators are people, like everyone else (Surprising, I know). Make them foes and we build our own walls. If we ally with them, we move faster.

What treating regulators as enemies looks like:

- Code-flexing and subtle-condescension with reviewers.
- Passive aggressive emails, slow replies, and burying bad news.
- Have “Us vs. them” attitude that degrades winnable talks.

Do this instead:

- Listen to them. Let them lead conversations.
- Be deferential. Deferring to their preferences for how to communicate and conduct work. Use "we/us" language.
- *Escalate problems early:* bring up hard things with data and invite quick review; document decisions. If uncertain about their comments say so—and propose the next test.
  - Co-author a solution: Offer A/B options with trade-offs, not demands.
- Stay defensible: Facts > opinions. Clean notes, citations, maps, plots, photos, flags, GPS.
- Praise in public: recap in writing.
- Seek to bring fun, they have a hard job and like anyone they will gravitate to the easier "clients".



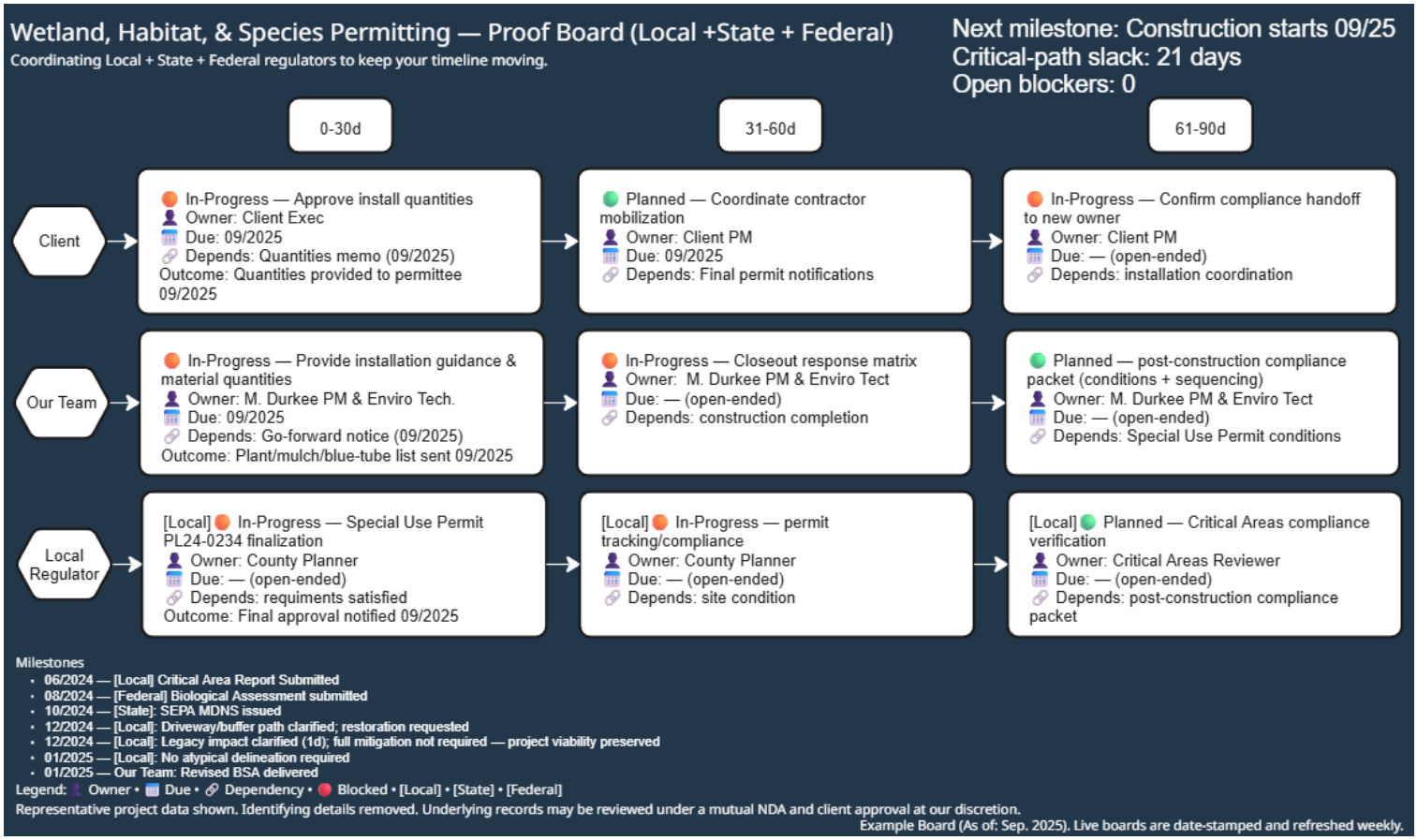
Field-tested scripts

- 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



This is going to be obvious. Efficiency wins.
A consultant needs to do the required steps. No extras. No misses. That's it.

What great looks like:

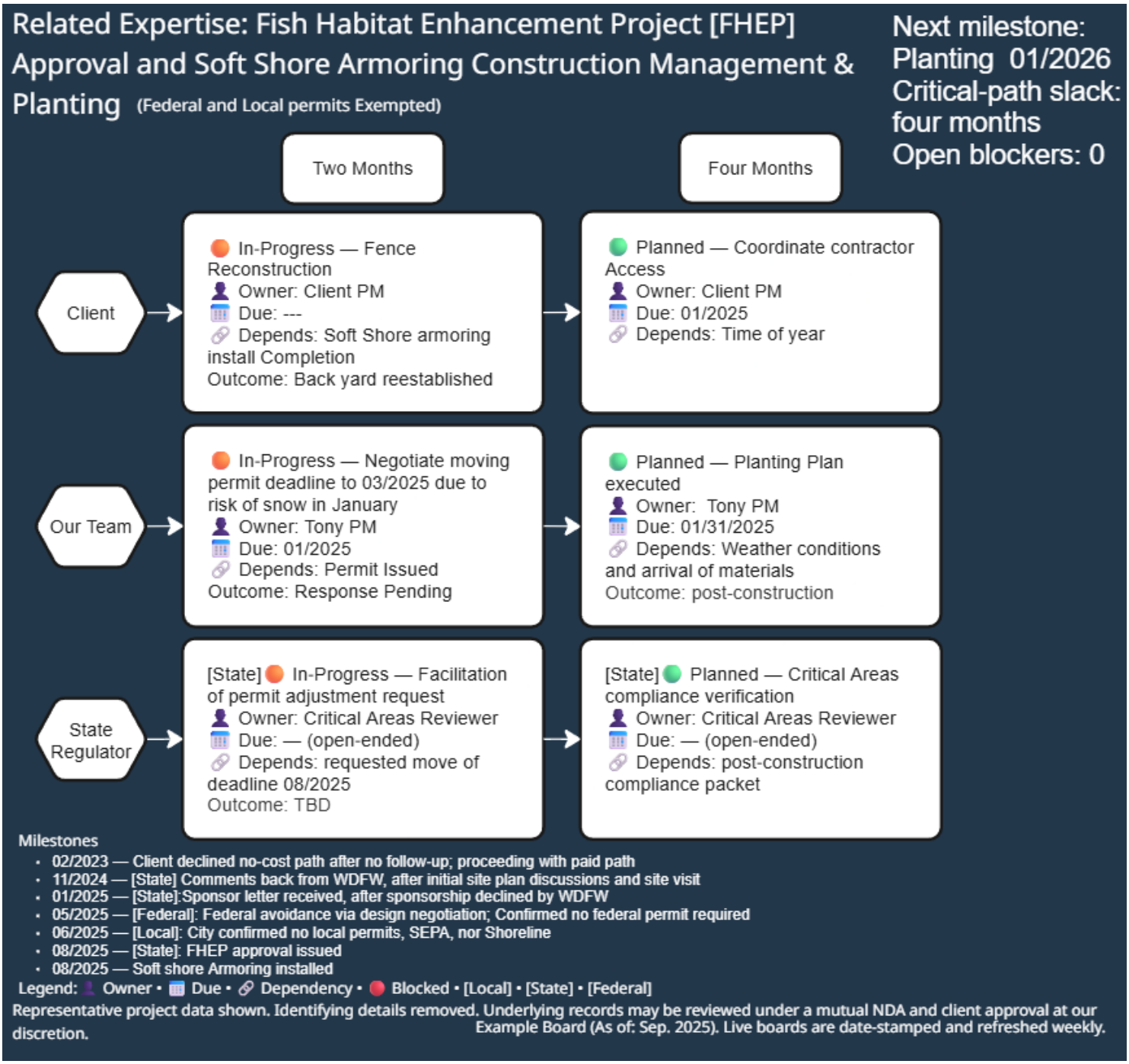
- Doing what they say they are going to do.
- Predictable invoices—no surprises.
- Flexible when you can be.

Reality check: this work is hard
Facts. Wetland science is complex, nuanced, and qualitative.

Here's the real process:

- You need qualifications: Environmental degrees, several past accepted delineations, (under senior review); PWS were required.

- You need to scour the internet: Databases, maps, historical—hours before boots.
- The fieldwork can be a grind: Long drives, lots of thorns, rain, mud; 10–20 soil pits/site (1' x 18–24").
- You need to collect data on three indicators per plot—or bust: hydric soils, hydrology, vegetation.
- Documentation 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 gets the most rewrites.
- Tip #3: Look at what people are saying-referrals, Google, Yelp, etc.-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

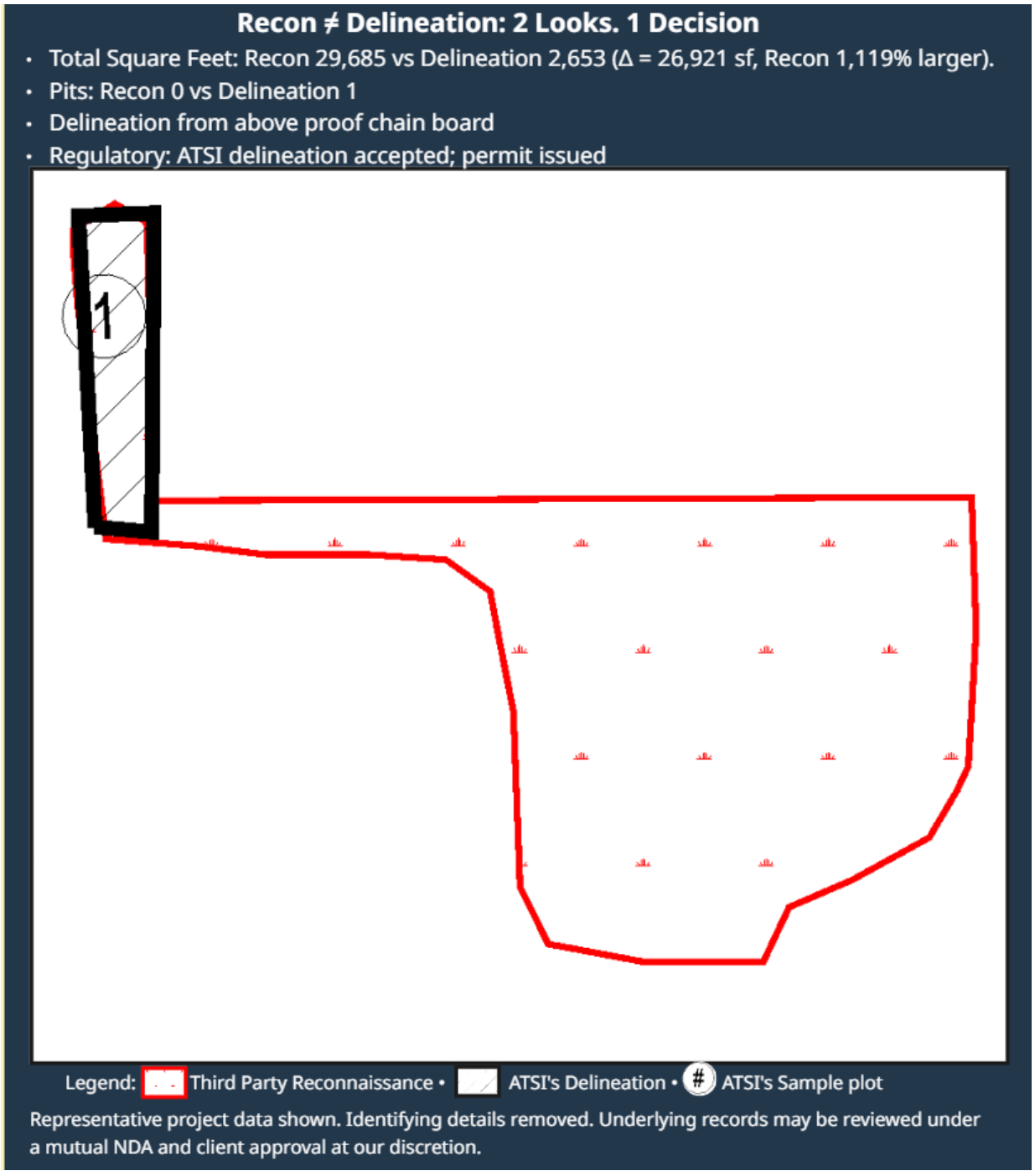


People having confidence in your work will win you permits. Consultants sometimes make quick short cuts that can lose a lot of time and money. Fudged lines, sloppy methods, or "more buildable than reality" patterns trigger rewrites, audits, and rejections from regulators. The antidote: rigorous honesty and spotless proof. It won't matter what you say; it really maters what you demonstrate. Third-party verification and raw, recent, numerical evidence multiply credibility.

Why delineations get killed:
Non-defensible soil/veg/hydrology indicator recording, sloppy QA/QC; Misreads of plant IDs, manual/supplement errors

Sub-mistake: Treating a reconnaissance as a delineation

Recon ≠ delineation. Labeling every soggy spot "wetland" feels "safe" but destroys value, invites delays, and kills projects. 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 = defensible boundaries.
Accurate data: Photos, logs, pits, flags, GPS, dates—fully traceable.
Reversibility: Docs that withstand scrutiny without scramble.

Good vs. bad day:
Bad: inaccurately rated wetland, higher in function than should be, lost value, project becomes infeasible.
Good: Hydrology/veg clear; soils borderline; Munsell subtlety nailed with forms/photos and good collaboration with regulatory; pushback survives hearing/court; non-wetland ruled; literally millions of dollars saved.

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

Conclusion

Make sure you—collaborate with regulators, actively manage your wetland permits, and work hard to be accurate— and you can speed up by months and save serious money. When consultants fudge facts, overcall wetlands, bury findings, or spar with reviewers, they become anchors to your ship. Every slip costs you 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 helping Tribal Organizations, Municipalities, and Property Developers build on schedule, by handling wetland permitting, since 1992. so, you reach occupancy drama-free.

About the Author



Anthony Gallina
CEO

I help Western Washington builders stay on schedule by handling Natural Resources Compliance (NRC) (wetland, species, and habitat). Since 1992 ATSI, has done 1. Early Stage Risk And Feasibility, 2. End To End Permit & Compliance Management, and 3. Long Term Mitigation Stewardship. You get one accountable team from conception to occupancy. Proof you can trust: 30+ years of NRC consulting in-house, led by a Professional Wetland Scientist. You get local expertise and long-term stewardship, not a fly-in contractor.