

# AQUATIC ORGANISM PASSAGE

(No.)  
Code 396

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Conservation Practice Standard

## I. Definition

Modification or removal of barriers that restrict or impede movement of aquatic organisms.

## II. Purpose

Improve or provide passage for aquatic organisms.

## III. Conditions Where Practice Applies

All aquatic habitats where barriers impede passage of aquatic organisms.

## IV. Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Laws

Users of this standard shall comply with applicable federal, tribal, state and local laws, rules, regulations or permit requirements governing aquatic organism passage. This standard does not contain the text of federal, tribal, state, or local laws.

## V. Criteria

### A. Criteria Applicable to Planning and Evaluation

Evaluate sites for variations in stage and discharge, tidal influence, hydraulics, geomorphic impacts, sediment transport and continuity, and organic debris movement. Design passage features to account for the known range of variation resulting from this evaluation.

Mitigate undesirable channel plan or profile shifts resulting from the modification or removal of a passage barrier.

Plan and locate passage for compatibility with local site conditions and stream geomorphology, to the extent possible.

Avoid locating fishway entrances and exits in areas that will obstruct function, increase harassment or predation, or result in excessive operation and maintenance requirements.

### B. Criteria Applicable to Design Requirements

Design passage to accommodate present and reasonably anticipated changes in watershed conditions.

Design passage structures according to known swimming and leaping capabilities of target species or a similar species with comparable swimming abilities. Utilize hydraulic computations to document how designs satisfy the physiological requirements of target organisms.

Design passage structures to mimic channel geometry and morphology referenced from an adjacent reach or analog stream when the swimming and leaping abilities of target species are unknown, or when a project will benefit multiple aquatic organisms.

Design and evaluate passage structures for hydraulic performance and structural integrity at the bankfull and 25-year peak flow events (at a minimum).

Design passage features to minimize or avoid energy deficits, physical stress, and harm to migratory organisms.

Design passage features to minimize or avoid excessive delays during migration periods.

Provide adequate attraction flow into a passage facility across the full range of discharge during which target species will move.

Use trash racks on culverts only if required or necessary. Ensure that trash racks are self-cleaning and/or easily maintained.

Select construction materials and methods that are non-toxic and are resistant to degradation.

Plan construction logistics, methods, and sequencing to minimize adverse effects to

aquatic organisms, riparian areas, and instream habitat.

Dam removal projects will include a plan to stabilize and manage the downstream movement of accumulated sediment and identify bank stabilization measures where needed. The plan will include reestablishing the upstream channel and reconnecting it to the downstream channel using sound geomorphological principles.

## VI. Considerations

Considerations include additional design recommendations that are not required criteria, but may be used to enhance or avoid problems with the design and function of this practice.

Develop or adopt a quantitative method to identify and evaluate passage barriers (see References). Information derived from this method can assist planning and budgeting activities.

Consider removing a passage barrier before installing or retrofitting a new facility or structure. Complete or partial barrier removal usually provides better passage conditions, and is more economical than designing, constructing, operating, and maintaining many passage structures.

Culverts or bottomless arches designed using the stream simulation approach (USFS 2008) that incorporate natural streambed substrates throughout their length are preferred over other culvert configurations for passage purposes. Natural streambeds provide numerous passage and habitat benefits to many life stage requirements for fish and other aquatic organisms compared to man-made surfaces.

Design and locate features to improve or provide passage for as many different aquatic species and age classes as possible.

Retain as much riparian and streambank vegetation as possible during project access and construction activities to maintain shade, riparian continuity, and sources of nutrient and structural inputs for aquatic ecosystems. Where appropriate, consider removing access roads or trails and restoring native vegetation representative of the site.

Replacing or removing an existing instream structure may trigger channel adjustments (e.g., aggradation and/or degradation) upstream and/or downstream of the work site. Install grade controls or other slope modifications to mitigate adverse physical or

ecological consequences (see WI NRCS FOTG Section IV, Standards 584, Channel Stabilization, and 410, Grade Stabilization Structure).

Analyze any potentially negative interactions, including hybridization, disease, competition, or predation, between target and aquatic nuisance species when passage is provided above a barrier. If serious consequences are likely, take steps to minimize adverse effects.

Consider the habitat requirements of other aquatic or terrestrial species that may be affected by a passage project. Some passage facilities may improve survival for terrestrial vertebrates by providing safe migration routes under roadways through the use of additional floodplain relief culverts.

Assess the amount of habitat upstream and downstream of a barrier to evaluate into project feasibility, cost effectiveness, and/or potential for connecting fragmented habitats. Using a watershed approach whenever possible provides a framework for project planning.

Fish passage facilities are often associated with water diversions or intakes that injure or kill aquatic species. Prevent fish entrainment, particularly juveniles, into diversions, penstocks, or pumps by installing screens.

Passage projects can affect water management practices such as diversion, power generation, or storage. Strive to balance aquatic organism passage with other water management objectives.

Consider upstream and larger watershed issues that may affect passage. Common solutions may include maintaining or restoring adequate instream flow and/or other water quality parameters (e.g., temperature, dissolved oxygen).

Barrier removal, especially dams and road crossings, can significantly affect wetlands, flooding potential, existing infrastructure, and social and cultural practices. Evaluate and address the full range of impacts when planning or designing barrier removal projects.

Floodplain and water development often alter historic river channel pattern and location. Consider bypassing a barrier by restoring streamflow to former, stable natural channels.

Passage facilities can assist population recovery and management. Where applicable, consider local, state, or federal brood stock collection and species

management initiatives when planning passage features.

In the case of low-water crossings, water quality impacts from vehicular pollutants and erosion caused by tire action can be severe. Where possible, reroute roadways or install hardened instream crossings (see Wisconsin NRCS FOTG, Section IV, Standard 578, Stream Crossing).

## VII. Plans and Specifications

Provide site-specific plans for this practice. Plans will specify passage structure design, layout, and overall objectives, and include (at a minimum):

- Location map and plan view of site, description of design flows, and a short summary of operating criteria;
- Detailed construction drawings showing site existing and planned site conditions including elevations, typical profiles, and cross-sections of planned structures;
- Construction specifications describing materials, logistics (including erosion control), and timing.
- Guidance for post-construction evaluation and monitoring to assess structural integrity and compliance with design criteria.

## VIII. Operation and Maintenance

Develop an operation and maintenance plan for all applications of this standard. Within the plan, provide for periodic inspection and corrective action should passage conditions become impaired because a structure is damaged or inoperable. Operation and maintenance items should include:

- Specifying what entity is responsible for the daily operation and maintenance of a passage structure.
- Annual, seasonal, and/or daily operating activities necessary to ensure proper function of the structure
- Checking a passage structure at regular intervals to ensure it is operating within design criteria.
- Cleaning trash racks and debris collectors or remove debris accumulations regularly.
- Adjusting gates, orifices, valves, or other control devices as needed to regulate flow and maintain a passage structure within operating criteria.
- Periodically checking staff gages or other flow metering devices for accuracy.
- Annually inspecting passage structures for structural integrity and disrepair.
- Inspecting gate and valve seals for damage.

- Replacing worn or broken stoplogs, baffles, fins, or other structural components.
- Removing sediment accumulations from within passage structure where applicable.

## IX. References

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), Section IV, Practice Standards and Specifications.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Information. 2006. (per Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 [16 U.S.C. 4701]).

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USFS. 2008. Stream Simulation: An ecological approach to providing passage for aquatic organisms at road-stream crossings. 0877 1801P, NTDP, San Dimas, CA.

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