

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**ACCESS ROAD**

(Feet)

**CODE 560**

**DEFINITION**

A travel-way for equipment and vehicles constructed as part of a conservation plan.

**PURPOSE**

To provide a fixed route for vehicular travel for resource activities involving the management of timber, livestock, agriculture, wildlife habitat, and other conservation enterprises while protecting the soil, water, air, fish, wildlife, and other adjacent natural resources.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

Where access is needed from a private or public road or highway to a land use enterprise or conservation measure, or where travel ways are needed in a planned land use area.

Access roads range from seasonal use roads, designed for low speed and rough driving conditions, to all-weather roads heavily used by the public and designed with safety as a high priority. Some roads are only constructed for a single purpose; i.e. control of forest fires, logging and forest management activities, access to remote recreation areas, or access for maintenance of facilities.

**CRITERIA**

Access roads shall be designed to serve the enterprise or planned use with the expected vehicular or equipment traffic. The type of vehicle or equipment, speed, loads, soil, climatic, and other conditions under which vehicles and equipment are expected to operate need to be considered.

Where general public use is anticipated, roads shall be designed to meet applicable federal, state and local criteria.

**Location.** Roads shall be located to serve the purpose intended, to facilitate the control and disposal of surface and subsurface water, to control or reduce erosion, to make the best use of topographic features, and to include scenic vistas where possible. The roads should generally follow natural contours and slopes to minimize disturbance of drainage patterns. Roads shall be located where they can be maintained and where water management problems are not created. To reduce potential pollution, roads shall be located away from water bodies and watercourses. Overland flow should not be impeded. Utilize buffers where possible to protect waterbodies.

**Alignment.** The gradient and horizontal alignment shall be adapted to the intensity of use, mode of travel, the type of equipment and load weights, and the level of development.

Grades normally should not exceed 10 percent except for short lengths of up to 50 feet. Maximum grades of 18 percent should only be exceeded if necessary for special uses such as logging roads, field access roads, fire protection roads or other roads not accessible for use by the general public.

The minimum radius of curvature of centerline for turn arounds and curves shall be 40 feet for cars only and 50 feet for cars with trailers up to 30 feet long. The use of minimum radius curves should be avoided if longer radius curves can be obtained at practically the same cost.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service [State Office](#) or visit the [electronic Field Office Technical Guide](#).

For stream crossings, the road should be aligned so that it crosses perpendicular to the channel as much as possible.

**Width.** The minimum width of the roadbed is 14 ft for one-way traffic and 20 ft for two-way traffic. The roadbed width includes a tread-width of 10 feet for one-way traffic or 16 feet for two-way traffic. Each type of road also requires 2 feet of shoulder width on each side. Single-lane logging or special-purpose roads can have a minimum width of 10 feet, with greater widths at curves and turnouts. The two-way traffic width shall be increased approximately 4 feet for trailer traffic. The shoulder width may be either gravel or grass.

For agricultural access roads, minimum widths of 12 feet are acceptable on tangents with fairly level sections without appreciable depth of cut or fill. Minimum widths of 14 feet shall be used on all curves, side hill sections or areas of substantial cut or fill. Sufficient side clearance shall be allowed for clear passage of trucks along the finished road. Generally, a minimum of two feet of cleared area is to be maintained from the edge of the graded surface.

Turnouts shall be used on single lane roads where vehicles travel in both directions on a limited basis. Where turnouts are used, road width shall be increased to a minimum of 20 feet for a distance of at least 30 feet.

Turnouts shall be spaced every 200 to 500 feet. Where sight distances exceed 1000 feet, turnouts may be spaced at 1000 feet.

**Side Slopes.** All cuts and fills shall be designed to have stable slopes of a minimum of 2 horizontal to 1 vertical on heights of less than 4 feet. For short lengths, rock areas, or very steep hillsides, steeper slopes may be permitted, if soil conditions warrant and special stabilization measures are installed.

Areas with geological conditions and soils subject to slides shall be avoided or treated to prevent slides.

**Drainage.** The type of drainage structure used will depend on the intended use and runoff conditions. Culverts, bridges, fords, or grade dips for water management shall be provided at all natural drainage ways. The capacity and design shall be consistent with sound engineering principles and shall be adequate for the class of vehicle, type of road, development, or use. When a culvert

or bridge is installed in a drainage way, its minimum capacity shall convey the design storm runoff without causing erosion or road overtopping. Table 1 lists minimum design storm frequencies for various road types.

**Table 1**

Road Type	Storm Frequency
Forest Access Roads, Farm Field Access Roads	2 year - 24 Hour
Farm Driveways, Recreation Facility Access Roads	10 year - 24 Hour
Public Access Roads, Camp grounds, etc.	25 year - 24 Hour

An erosion-resistant low point or overflow area may be constructed across the access road to supplement culvert capacity on non-public use roads. Culverts, bridges, fords and hardened overflow areas should be installed so the road crossing does not significantly impact fish migration.

Roadside ditches shall be adequate to provide surface drainage for the roadway and deep enough, as needed to serve as outlets for subsurface drainage. At a minimum, the roadside ditch shall be 1.0 foot below the top of road surface to provide internal drainage. Ditch channels shall be designed to be on stable grades or protected with structures or linings for stability.

Water-breaks, water-bars, diversions or broad based dips may be used to control surface runoff on low-intensity use forest, ranch or similar roads. On steep grades where runoff and erosion is anticipated down the road, water bars should be considered. Water bars must be constructed of materials that are compatible with the use and maintenance of the road surface. Water bar discharge areas must be well vegetated or have other erosion resistant materials. See Figure 1 Recommended Spacing of Relief Culverts and Water Bars Based on Soil Type.

Roadbed drainage shall be provided at all seep areas and high water table areas. The depth, spacing, outlets, and size of roadbed drains shall be such as to keep the water table at least 24 inches below the surface.

Surface crowning can also help direct road runoff into the side drainage ditches. The centerline of the access road shall be crowned at least 3 inches higher than the shoulder or the access road shall be graded from one side of the road to the other on a single uniform slope. Unobstructed flow into the ditches must be maintained to prevent flows from causing roadside erosion. Provide a turnaround at the end of dead end roads. In some areas, turnarounds may also be desirable for stream, lake, recreation, or other access purposes.

Provide parking space as needed to keep vehicles off the road or from being parked in undesirable locations.

**Surfacing.** Access roads shall be given a wearing course or surface treatment if required by traffic needs, soil, climate, erosion control, or particulate matter emission control. The type of treatment, if needed, depends on local conditions, available materials, and the existing road base. If these factors or the volume of traffic is not a problem, no special treatment of the surface is required. On weak bearing capacity soils such as silts, organics, and clays, the surface treatment should be underlain with a geotextile material specifically designed for road stabilization

applications when the road is used on a regular basis.

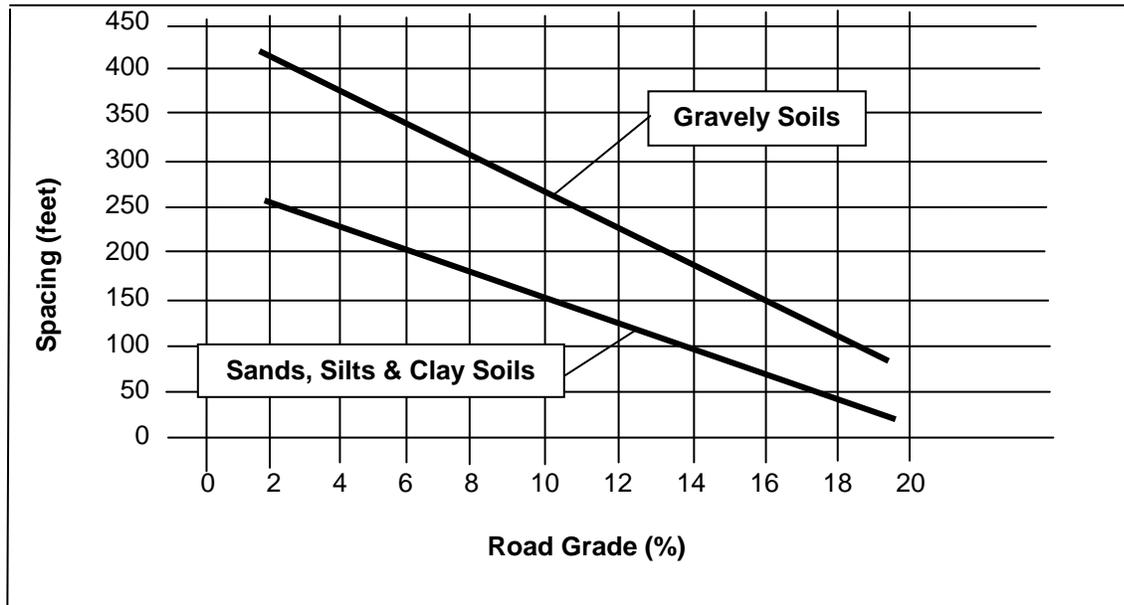
Unsurfaced roads may require controlled access to prevent damage or hazardous conditions during adverse climatic conditions.

Toxic and acid-forming materials shall not be used on roads. This should not be construed to prohibit use of chemicals for dust control and snow and ice removal after considering potential impacts on stabilizing vegetation.

Utilize additional conservation practices to reduce the potential for generation and transport of particulate matter emissions.

**Construction Operations.** Construction operations should be carried out in such a manner that erosion and air and water pollution are minimized and held within legal limits. Construction shall include the following requirements as necessary for the job:

1. Trees, stumps, roots, brush, weeds, and other objectionable material shall be removed from the work area.
2. Unsuitable material shall be removed from the roadbed area.
3. Grading, sub-grade preparation, and compaction shall be done as needed.
4. Surfacing shall be done as needed.
5. Measures must be in place to limit the generation of particulate matter during construction.

**Figure 1. Recommend Spacing of Relief Culverts and Water Bars Based on Soil Types**

**Traffic Safety.** Passing lanes, turnouts, guardrails, signs, and other facilities as needed for safe traffic flow shall be provided. Traffic safety shall be a prime factor in selecting the angle and grade of the intersection with public highways. Preferably, the angles shall be not less than 85 degrees. The public highway shall be entered either at the top of a hill or far enough from the top or a curve to provide visibility and a safe sight distance. The clear sight distance to each side shall not be less than 300 feet or as required by local regulations. [State and local highway officials should be consulted to help determine where an access road may enter a state or town highway. A state highway permit may be required for new access roads entering a highway.](#)

**Erosion Control.** If soil and climatic conditions are favorable, roadbanks and disturbed areas shall be vegetated as soon as possible and skid trails, landings, logging, and similar roads shall be vegetated after harvesting or seasonal use is completed (see Critical Area Planting-342). If the use of vegetation is precluded and protection against erosion is needed, protection shall be provided by non-vegetative materials, such as gravel or other organic or inorganic material (see

Mulching 484), or in accordance with local regulations.

Roadside channels, cross drains, and drainage structure inlets and outlets shall be designed to be stable (see Structure for Water Control). If protection is needed, riprap or other similar materials shall be used.

Watercourses and water quality shall be protected during and after construction by erosion-control facilities and maintenance. Filter strips, water and sediment control basins, and other conservation practices shall be used and maintained as needed.

### CONSIDERATIONS

Consider visual resources and environmental values during the planning and designing of the road system.

When available, consider using organic bio-degradable materials as a surface treatment.

Access roads should be located where minimal adverse impacts will affect wetlands, water bodies, watercourses, wildlife habitat, and air quality. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Effects on downstream flows or aquifers that would affect other water uses or users.
- Effects on the volume and timing of downstream flow to prohibit undesirable environmental, social, or economic effects.
- Short-term and construction-related effects of this practice on the quality of on-site downstream water courses.
- Overall effects on erosion and the movement of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment-attached substances that would be carried by runoff from construction activities.
- Effects on wetlands and water-related wildlife habitats that would be associated with the practice.
- Establishing vegetation on road shoulders wider than the 2-4 ft.
- Limiting the number of vehicles and vehicle speed will reduce the potential for generation of particulate matter and decrease safety and air quality concerns.

#### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for constructing access roads shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. [Location of Access Road shall be shown on an aerial photo/map.](#)

#### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance plan will be developed and carried out for the life of the practice:

1. Inspect culverts, roadside ditches, water bars and outlets after each major runoff event and restore flow capacity as needed.
2. Minimize the damage to vegetative buffers adjacent to the road when it is necessary to chemically treat the road surface to maintain erosion protection.
3. Maintain vegetated areas in adequate cover to meet the intended purpose(s).
4. Fill low areas in travel treads and re-grade, as needed, to maintain road cross section.
5. Inspect roads with water-bars periodically to insure proper cross section is available and outlets are stable.
6. Conservation practices that limit particulate matter emissions should be incorporated into long-term maintenance plans.
7. [Trees, brush and other woody vegetation along the access road that is obstructing line of site or the overall maintenance shall be removed.](#)

#### REFERENCES

- [A Landowner's Guide to Building Forest Access Roads, USDA – Forest Service \(NA-TP-06-98\) Richard L. Wiest, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, July, 1998](#)  
<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/stewardship/accessroads/accessroads.htm>
- [Using All-Weather Geotextile Lanes and Pads, MWPS, Agricultural Engineers Digest \(AED\) 45, July 1999](#)