



Conservation Practice Overview

Stream Crossing (Code 578)

A stream crossing is a stabilized area or a structure constructed across a stream to provide a travel way for people, livestock, equipment, or vehicles.

Practice Information

Stream crossings can be used to provide access to another land unit, improve water quality by reducing sediment and nutrient loading of the stream, or reduce streambank and streambed erosion. This practice applies where an intermittent or perennial water course exists and a ford, bridge, or culvert-type crossing is needed.



A ford crossing is best suited for a wide, shallow watercourse with a firm streambed. Typical materials used for a ford crossing are concrete or rock. Ford crossings have the least detrimental effect on water quality when their use is infrequent. If the stream crossing will be used often, as in a dairy operation, a bridge or culvert crossing should be used.

Culverts and bridges work best on sites where the stream channel is relatively narrow or where the banks are steep. Bridges that fully span the stream are preferred where excessive sediment flows or large woody debris is expected. Culvert crossings are usually more economical to install than bridges, however, culverts have some potential to impede passage of fish and other aquatic organisms.

Evaluate the need for safety features such as guard rails and reflectors on culvert or bridge crossings, and water-depth signage on ford crossings.

Common Associated Practices

Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Stream Crossing (Code 578) is commonly applied with CPSs such as Animal Trails and Walkways (Code 575), Access Road (Code 560), and Fence (Code 382).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.