

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

**AQUACULTURE PONDS**

(Ac.)  
CODE 397



**DEFINITION**

A water impoundment constructed and managed for commercial aquaculture production.

**PURPOSE**

Provide a favorable aquatic environment for producing, growing, harvesting, and marketing commercial aquaculture crops.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to:

- All impoundments that store water and are managed for commercial aquaculture purposes.
- Embankment impoundments that do not exceed the requirements for Class (a) dams having a product of storage times effective height of dam less than 3,000 acre-ft<sup>2</sup> and effective height of dam less than 35 feet, as defined in NRCS conservation practice standard Pond, Code 378.

**CRITERIA**

Aquaculture ponds shall meet the requirements of all Federal, state, and local laws, rules, or

regulations. Any required permits will be obtained prior to construction and stocking. In particular, requirements for Rule 5L-3, F.A.C (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Aquaculture Best Management Practices Rules) will be met.

A thorough aquaculture resource assessment shall be made to determine the feasibility of the project prior to design.

Aquaculture ponds may be: (1) embankment ponds that intercept and store surface runoff water, or (2) off-channel impoundments or excavated ponds that are filled by diverting spring or stream flows or pumping ground water.

The site must be protected from flooding, sedimentation, and non-sediment contamination. For restricted non-native species, the aquaculture pond shall be protected to a level at least one foot above the 100-year flood elevation. All other aquaculture ponds constructed within the 100-year flood zone should contact FDACS Division of Aquaculture for approval of your facility plan prior to construction.

The soils within the pond area, as well as those in the contributing drainage area, must be checked for residues of pesticides and other harmful chemicals if there is any possibility of contamination.

Acid soils within the pond area shall be limed to achieve a neutral condition or the desired pH level to meet production goals.

When multiple ponds are installed, each pond shall be arranged so that it can be managed independently of the others to facilitate harvesting and the control of parasites and disease.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

All ponds shall be designed to prevent the escape of restricted non-native species to downstream waters.

**Water supply.** Any available water source may be used if the quality and quantity are adequate. A consumptive use permit shall be obtained, if required, prior to operation. If water is pumped from rivers and streams or other sources where undesirable fish, pesticide residue, fish disease, and parasites may be introduced, filters must be installed in the pumping system.

Evaporation rates, fish-stocking densities, production goals, and species requirements shall be used in establishing required incoming flow rates.

**Water quality.** Water entering the pond shall be aerated to increase dissolved oxygen and dissipate harmful gases to meet production goals. The minimum dissolved oxygen level in ponds is 3 to 5 parts per million.

Water temperature and water chemistry shall be suitable for use for fish-stocking density and species requirements in the planned aquaculture production.

Incoming water shall be added as far away from outlet drain as possible to prevent the rapid removal of fresh water from the pond.

**Design Criteria - Embankment Ponds.** Earthfill dams and embankments around excavated ponds shall meet or exceed the requirements for embankments specified for Pond (378).

The minimum top width of the embankment shall be 14 feet, where it is to be used as a road for harvesting, feeding, and management purposes and is nonpublic.

**Design Criteria - Excavated Ponds.** Ponds established by excavating and constructing an embankment around their outer perimeter that excludes outside runoff shall have either an auxiliary spillway or have a principal spillway pipe installed with sufficient capacity to remove a 10-year/24-hour direct rainfall amount in 48 hours. A minimum 8-inch diameter pipe shall be used.

Dike construction shall add the required embankment settlement to the minimum freeboard requirements that are specified in NRCS conservation practice standard Pond, Code 378.

The need for a berm will be based on the results of an embankment and foundation stability

analysis. If a stability analysis is not performed, all earth dikes shall have a berm either constructed or occurring naturally with a minimum berm width of 10 feet between the outside toe of dike and top of bank of outlet drainage ditch.

**Size and depth.** The pond shall be constructed to the recommended size and depth for the species to be grown and desired production goals.

**Pond bottom.** Where fish are harvested by seining, the pond bottom shall be smooth and free of all stumps, trees, roots, and other debris. Existing channels and depressions in the pond area shall be filled and smoothed. The edges of the pond should be deepened to provide at least 3 feet of water.

Where crawfish are harvested by trapping, complete clearing and removal of trees, stumps, and other vegetation is not required.

The pond bottom shall be sloped to the outlet at a gradient of at least 0.2 foot per 100 feet.

**Pipes and conduits.** Any pump discharge through dikes shall be installed above expected high water level, and provisions shall be made to prevent pump and motor vibrations from being transmitted to discharge conduits.

Interior embankments constructed for division of water or to direct water flow for circulation shall have adequate cross section to provide for stability and function for its intended purpose.

Adequate provisions must be made to protect earth surfaces from turbulent water at pipe inlets and outlets.

**Drains.** All ponds shall have facilities for complete as well as partial drawdown. Turn-down pipes, quick-release valves, bottom-water release sleeves, pumps or other devices for water level control and pond management are to be included in the construction of the drawdown facility as appropriate. Conduit design and seepage control shall meet or exceed the requirements specified in NRCS conservation practice standard Pond, Code 378.

**Effluent discharge.** Provisions shall be made for any needed treatment of water released downstream from the aquaculture impoundment structure. Production water discharged will be treated in accordance with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Aquaculture, *Aquaculture Best Management Practices Manual*.

**Access and safety.** Provisions shall be made for access to the site as well as access for operation and maintenance. Access ramps shall have a grade for equipment access of 4 horizontal to 1 vertical (4:1) or flatter.

Appropriate safety features shall be provided and located near the facility to aid people who may fall into the pond and devices installed to prevent such accidents.

Fences shall be installed as necessary to exclude livestock and unwanted traffic.

**Vegetative cover.** A protective cover of vegetation shall be established on all exposed soil surfaces that have been disturbed in accordance with NRCS conservation practice standard Critical Area Planting, Code 342.

### CONSIDERATIONS

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Aquaculture, or the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences should be consulted for recommendation on pond size, water depths, and adapted commercial aquatic species.

Consider any adverse impact to cultural resources when planning for aquaculture ponds.

The visual design of ponds should be carefully considered in areas of high public visibility and those associated with recreational fishing.

Consider the effects on the volume of downstream flow or aquifers that might cause undesirable environmental, social, or economic effects and contribute to water table decline from heavy pumping.

Measures to avoid depredation by birds or other animals should be included in the design.

### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for constructing aquaculture ponds shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the site specific requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose.

As a minimum the plan shall include:

- A site location map with topographic information
- Typical cross sections of the pond(s) showing the elevations and dimensions
- Structure size, location, material type, and elevations
- Location and type of fence, if required
- Areas to be vegetated and vegetative specification

### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

A plan for operation and maintenance shall be prepared for use by those responsible for the system. This plan shall provide for inspection, operation, and maintenance of vegetation, pipes, valves, spillways, roads, and other parts of the system.

The pond should be inspected periodically and especially after heavy rains to determine whether it is functioning properly or if repairs are needed. Embankments should be inspected for erosion. Rills shall be filled with suitable material, compacted, seeded and fertilized as needed.

Appurtenances such as trashracks, outlet structures, and valves shall be kept free of trash and replaced when needed.

The vegetative cover of the embankment and earth spillway shall be maintained by mowing and fertilizing or burning when needed. Trees can cause leaks and safety hazards and should not be permitted on the embankment or in the auxiliary spillway.

### REFERENCES

- Florida Administrative Code Rule 5L-3  
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Aquaculture,  
*Aquaculture Best Management Practices Manual.*
- NRCS Conservation Practice Standards  
Critical Area Planting, Code 342  
Pond, Code 378