

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

HEAVY USE AREA PROTECTION

(Ac.)

CODE 561

DEFINITION

The stabilization of areas frequently and intensively used by people, animals, or vehicles by establishing vegetative cover, by surfacing with suitable materials, and/or by installing needed structures.

PURPOSE

- Reduce soil erosion
- Improve water quantity and quality
- Improve air quality
- Improve aesthetics
- Improve livestock health

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to urban, agricultural, recreational, or other frequently and intensively used areas requiring treatment to address one or more resource concerns.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

All planned work shall comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Measures shall be taken to limit the generation of particulate matter.

Safety of the users shall be incorporated into the design of the heavy use area protection.

Design Load. The design load will be based on the type of traffic, (vehicular, animal, or human) anticipated on the heavy use area. The minimum design load for areas that support vehicular traffic will be a wheel load of 4000 pounds.

Foundation. All site foundations shall be evaluated for soil moisture, permeability, textures, and bearing strength in combination with the design load and anticipated frequency of use.

A base course of gravel, crushed stone, other suitable material and/or geotextile shall be provided on all sites with a need for increased load bearing strength, drainage, separation of material, and soil reinforcement. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Engineering Handbook Series (NEHS), Parts 642 and 643 (formerly NEH, Section 20), and AASHTO M-288 (latest edition) provide guidance in quality specification and geotextile selection.

An impervious barrier shall be provided on sites with a porous foundation (high permeability rate), where there is a need to protect ground water from contamination.

Foundation preparation shall consist of removal and disposal at designated areas of soil and other material that are not adequate to support the design loads.

Surface treatment. The surface treatment shall meet the following criteria:

Bituminous Pavement. The thickness of the pavement course, the kind and size of aggregate, the type of proportioning of bituminous materials, and the mixing and placing of these materials shall be in accordance with Department of Transportation criteria for the expected loading.

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

NRCS, AL
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Concrete. The quality and thickness of concrete and the spacing and size of reinforcing steel shall be appropriate for the expected loading.

Other Cementitious Materials. Soil cement, roller compacted concrete, and coal combustion by-products (flue gas desulfurization sludge and fly ash) may be used as surface material if designed and installed to withstand the anticipated loads and surface abrasion.

Aggregate. A fine or coarse aggregate surface shall be a minimum 2-inches thick.

Other. Surfacing materials such as cinders, tanbark, bark mulch, brick chips, shredded rubber and/or sawdust, shall have a minimum layer thickness of 2 inches.

Structures. All structures shall be designed according to appropriate NRCS standards and specifications or Engineering Handbook recommendations.

Sprays and artificial mulches. When utilizing sprays of asphalt, oil, plastic, manufactured mulches, and similar materials, the manufacturer's recommendations for application shall be incorporated into the design.

Drainage and erosion control. Provision shall be made for surface and subsurface drainage, as needed, and for disposal of runoff without causing erosion or water quality impairment. Provision shall be made to exclude unpolluted run-on water from the treatment area. All treatment areas shall be shaped to prevent ponding of water. The finished surface of the treated area at its outside edge shall be the same elevation as the adjacent soil surface.

Vegetative Measures. Liming, fertilizing, soil preparation, seeding, mulching, sodding, and vegetation management shall be according to the planned use and appropriate conservation practice standard in the technical guide. In areas where traffic can be managed to maintain vegetative cover, grass species which are wear resistant and have fast recovery from wear may be used. Common bermudagrass, hybrid bermudagrass, bahiagrass, and tall fescue are species that may be used. Selection will be based on specific site and soil conditions. Vegetative cover will be established and managed according to the Conservation Practice Standard, Code 342 - Critical Area Planting. If vegetation is not appropriate, other measures shall be used to accomplish the intended purpose.

Additional Criteria for Areas Utilized by Livestock

Alabama NRCS Conservation Practice Standards: Critical Area Planting - Code 342; Fencing - Code 382; Prescribed Grazing - Code 528A; Filter Strip - Code 393; or Use Exclusion - Code 472, shall be used as companion practices, when needed, to meet the intended purpose of the heavy use area protection.

Provisions shall be made to collect, store, utilize, and/or treat manure accumulations and contaminated runoff in accordance with other NRCS conservation practice standards. Porous heavy use protection for outdoor animal confinement locations will be underlain with good clay material to minimize drainage to groundwater. Surface runoff from these locations will be stored and/or treated.

Treatment area. The treated area shall extend a minimum of 10 ft. (6 ft. for small ruminants that are managed separately from larger animals) outside the limits of facilities such as portable hay rings, watering facilities, feeding troughs, mineral boxes, and other facilities where livestock concentrations cause resource concerns. When concrete is used for these small treatment areas, a minimum of one contraction joint across the middle of the area shall be required.

For walkways the minimum treatment width shall be 8 ft. (cattle only). A width of 15 ft. is generally used for cattle/vehicles type walkways. All walkways shall be fenced.

Treatment areas for stream crossings and watering ramps shall have a minimum bottom width of 10 ft. and a maximum bottom width of 20 feet. "Cattle only" stream crossings may be as narrow as 6 feet. Provisions shall be made to minimize livestock standing or wading in the stream or pond. Ramps shall have a slope of 5 to 1 or flatter toward the water source with side slopes of 2.5 to 1 or flatter. Protection for watering ramps shall extend into the pond or stream to protect the pond or stream bottom. Where stream channels or pond bottoms are composed of stable coarse rocky material or solid bedrock, the requirement to extend the treatment area into the channel may be waived.

Stream Crossings. Crossings shall be located where the streambed is stable. Avoid stream crossings in wetland areas. Crossings shall be perpendicular to the direction of stream flow. Stream crossings shall have a toe trench constructed on the upstream and downstream

edges. Stream crossings shall be installed in accordance with Interim Conservation Practice Standard, Code 578 - Stream Crossing.

Watering Ramps. Ramps may only be located in streams or in ponds to serve as a water source when no other practical source of livestock water is available or can be reasonably developed. Ramps are especially not preferred in streams and shall only be used as a last-alternative watering source. Ramps in streams shall not extend more than 5 feet into the stream or to the center of the stream, whichever is less.

Ramps in streams shall be installed perpendicular to the direction of the stream flow and in areas where the streambed is stable. Wetlands shall be avoided. Watering ramps located in streams shall have a toe trench constructed on the upstream and downstream edges of the ramp.

Ramps installed in farm ponds shall extend far enough into the pond to insure access to water during drought conditions.

Ramp areas shall have diversions installed or be shaped so as to prevent surface water from entering the ramp.

Fencing. Fencing shall be installed as necessary to control all animal traffic. Stream crossings and watering ramps shall be permanently fenced to prevent livestock access to the stream or pond except at the access ramps. Fencing shall be built in accordance with Conservation Practice Standard, Code 382 - Fencing. Alternative fencing procedures, which provide permanent and positive control, may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

Geotextile. A non-woven needle-punched geotextile fabric shall be installed under all treatment areas and shall turn upward at the outer edge and extend to the surface. Geotextile is not required if the foundation is on rock. The geotextile fabric shall meet the following minimum requirements.

REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-WOVEN GEOTEXTILE		
Property	Test Method	Minimum
Tensile Strength	Grab Test ASTM D 4632	120 lb.
Puncture Test	ASTM D 4833	60 lb.

The geotextile fabric will be placed in the toe trenches of stream crossings and watering ramps. In the upstream toe of stream crossings and watering ramps in streams, the fabric will be backlapped over its own trench. A minimum 12 in. overlap shall be used at all joints.

Surface treatment. Material for surface treatment of areas such as watering facilities, hay rings, walkways, paddocks, and loafing areas shall have a maximum stone size of 2 inches. All material shall be smoothed uniformly and compacted. Acceptable materials include gravel, graded stone, crusher run stone, clayey gravel, chert with a soil/clay binder, and other similar products. The minimum depth of material shall be 6 in. uncompacted. Materials that will not result in a smooth walking surface for livestock will be placed 5 in. thick uncompacted with a 1 in. topping for finer grained material.

Materials for treatment of stream crossings and watering ramps shall consist of one or more of the following:

1. Rock riprap
2. Graded stone
3. Crusher run stone

Selection of rock riprap material for stream crossings shall be based on stream velocities and soil conditions at the site according to the Interim Conservation Practice Standard, Code 578 - Stream Crossing. Thickness of the material shall be in accordance with the design. Surface material shall extend the full length and width of the treatment area. All surfaces shall be smoothed uniformly and compacted. The finished surface of materials placed in the stream channel shall be on the same grade as the natural streambed above and below the site.

Additional Criteria for Areas Utilized for Recreation

The treated area shall be conducive to the overall recreation area and aesthetically blend with the general landscape and surroundings.

Plants, landscaping timbers, traffic control measures, wooden walkways, etc., shall be evaluated for effectiveness, aesthetics, and accessibility as covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

CONSIDERATIONS

When stabilizing heavily used areas consider adjoining land uses and the proximity to residences, utilities, cultural resource areas, wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas, and areas of special scenic value.

For heavy use areas conducive to protection by vegetation, consideration must be given to effect(s) of treading and/or miring. The vegetative species selected should tolerate and persist under heavy use conditions. If practicable, consider increasing the size of the area and/or establishing a rest/non-use period to allow plant recovery and increase vigor.

Heavy use area protection effects on the water budget, especially on volumes and rates of runoff, infiltration, and transpiration due to the installation of less pervious surfaces should be considered in the selection of surfacing materials.

The transport of sediments, nutrients, bacteria, organic matter from animal manures, oils, and chemicals associated with vehicular traffic, and soluble and sediment-attached substances carried by runoff should be considered in selection of companion conservation practices.

Consider using additional air quality conservation practices such as Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (Code 380) or Herbaceous Wind Barriers (Code 603) to impede transport of particulate matter between the source (i.e., heavy use area) and nearby sensitive areas.

If the purpose of the heavy use area protection is improvement of water quality, the heavy use area should be (re)located as far away from the waterbody or watercourse as possible. Any work in and/or discharges near streams, wetlands, or waterbodies may require a permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers, state water quality (permitting) authority, or local authority.

The size of the heavy use areas utilized by livestock is dependent on the landowner's operation including type and number of animal, confinement periods, and/or the intended use. The size of treatment areas can range from 30 square feet per animal in partial-confinement to 400 square feet per animal in total confinement to 4000 or more square feet for animal exercise areas. Heavy use protection areas should be kept as small as practicable.

When surface treatment such as bark mulch, wood-fiber, or other non-durable materials are used for short-term livestock containment areas, consideration should be given to vegetation of the affected area with a cover crop.

For areas with aggregate surfaces that will be frequently scraped, consideration should be given to the use of concrete or cementitious materials to lessen the recurring cost of aggregate replacement. Four-inch thickness of concrete may be used around watering facilities for agricultural applications. If concrete is used, it should have a roughened surface.

To minimize differential settlement at concrete contraction joints, consider the use of a tooled or formed keyway joint.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for heavy use area protection shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. Plans and specifications shall include construction plans, drawings, job sheets, or other similar documents. These documents shall specify the requirements for installing the practice, including the kind, amount, and quality of materials to be used.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An Operation and Maintenance (O&M) plan shall be prepared for and reviewed with the landowner or operator. The plan shall specify that the treated areas and associated practices are inspected annually and after significant storm events to identify repair and maintenance needs.

The O&M plan shall detail the level of repairs needed to maintain the effectiveness and useful life of the practice.

For livestock operations, the O&M plan for heavy use areas may be included as a part of the overall waste management plan. Periodic removal and management of manure accumulations will be addressed in the O&M plan.

Conservation practices should be implemented that limit particulate matter emission into long-term maintenance plans.

REFERENCES

Alabama NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

[Critical Area Planting - Code 342](#)

[Fence - Code 382](#)

[Stream Crossing - Code 578](#)

National Handbook of Conservation Practice Standards:

[Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment - Code 380](#)

[Herbaceous Wind Barriers - Code 603](#)

National Engineering Handbook Series, Part 642 and 643.

Watering Systems for Grazing Livestock: Great Lakes Basin Grazing Network and Michigan State University Extension