

## **Karst Sinkhole Treatment (No.) 527**

### **DEFINITION**

The treatment of sinkholes in karst areas to reduce contamination of groundwater resources, and/or to improve farm safety.

### **PURPOSE**

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system in karst topography, which is an area underlain by solutioned carbonate bedrock with sinkholes and caverns. The practice supports one or more of the following purposes:

- Improve water quality
- Improve farm safety

### **CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On any land surface or in conjunction with any existing practice where the soils and geologic conditions are characterized by sinkholes or karst topography.

This practice does not apply to erosional or collapse features caused by failure or leakage of underground pipes or constructed surface drainage features (e.g., canals), or due to piping of unstable soil materials, or due to poorly compacted or poorly constructed features.

This practice does not apply to sinkholes that may appear in or beneath structures or in flowing streams. Treatment of sinkholes in these areas will be determined through engineering investigations and structural design solutions.

### **CRITERIA**

#### **General Criteria Applicable to all Purposes**

The installation and operation of karst sinkhole treatment(s) will comply with all Federal, State, and local laws, rules, and regulations.

A geologic investigation of the potential impact of the treatment on groundwater, surface water run-in, and the karst features will be conducted by a qualified geologist.

Trash and other material will be removed from the sinkhole and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

Excess surface water caused by construction activities will be diverted from the sinkhole area.

Nutrient and pest management plans will be developed for the drainage area of the sinkhole controlled by the landowner.

### **Vegetative Treatment**

All sinkholes treated will have a vegetated buffer established and/or maintained. The buffer will be a minimum of 25-feet wide measured from the rim of the sinkhole. The buffer area may be extended to prevent concentrated flow channels from occurring and entering the sinkhole. The width of the vegetated buffer will be established and maintained in accordance with the type of buffer chosen. The sinkhole and surrounding buffer area will be fenced.

Use vegetation adapted to the site that will accomplish the desired purpose. Preference shall be given to native species in order to reduce the introduction of invasive plant species; provide management of existing invasive species; and minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species may cause. If native plant materials are not adaptable or proven effective for the planned use, then non-native species may be used. Refer to the Field Office Technical Guide, Section II, Invasive Plant Species, for plant materials identified as invasive species.

Livestock will be excluded from the vegetative buffer except when grazing would be beneficial to maintenance of the buffer.

Nutrients, herbicides, pesticides, and animal waste will not be applied within an established buffer area. Only mechanical treatments shall be used for weed control.

Appropriate erosion and sediment control measures will be used to reduce the amount of sediment entering sinkhole openings during the establishment of the vegetative buffer.

### **Surface Water Control**

Changes to the volume of surface water that enters a sinkhole may disturb the underground hydrology. To the extent possible, the surface water flow should be maintained at historic (or predevelopment) volumes.

Pre-existing concentrated flow channels will be stabilized but should not otherwise be altered. If a plug or inverted filter is used, the area to be protected will be characterized by a qualified Geologist to enable a suitable design. Concentrated flow caused by construction activities will be dispersed with a suitable spreading or diversion technique.

### **Sinkhole Treatment/Closing**

Adequate protection of most sinkhole and sinkhole areas can be achieved by the use of vegetative buffers and livestock exclusion. However, if an open sinkhole is a safety hazard, it may be treated with a rock filter, gabions, or other methods approved by the State Conservation Engineer or delegated authority.

Sinkholes to be treated or closed via a reverse filter or plug shall be excavated to stable, unweathered bedrock, if possible, prior to construction.

Sinkholes that open into caves shall not be filled under any circumstances. Gated openings may be used for safety reasons.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Consider the potential effects of installation and operation of karst sinkhole treatment on the cultural, archeological, historic and economic resources.

Current and planned land use should be considered. In particular, structures, septic drain fields, wells, feedlots, ponds, and animal waste storage systems should not be located over a sinkhole site or within the impact area.

Sinkholes may be natural conveyances of organic material and nutrients important to cave fauna.

For a sinkhole receiving contaminated overland flow, every effort should be made to first treat the source of the contamination. Although it is important to maintain the hydrology of the karst system, it may be more beneficial to the groundwater quality to divert the contaminated water away from the sinkhole. In some cases, it may be necessary to completely plug a sinkhole with sealing materials rather than treat it with an inverted filter. Acceptable sealing materials are provided in ASTM D 5299, part 6.4. An example

of this would be a sinkhole in a feedlot or a site that is difficult to protect by any other method.

The sinkhole treatment should not result in excessive surface water ponding or high soil moisture conditions over an extended period of time.

When filling a sinkhole, mounding of the fill material may be needed to offset future settlement due to consolidation and migration of the fill material into subsurface voids. Additional fill may be required as treatment ages.

Treatment of one sinkhole may have an effect on other sinkholes or solution features in the vicinity.

The use of a conservation easement for the buffer and sinkhole should be considered.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Plans and specifications shall be prepared in accordance with the criteria of this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended use.

Support data documentation requirements are as follows:

- Inventory and evaluation records
  - Assistance notes or special report
- Survey notes, where applicable
  - Design survey
  - Construction layout survey
  - Construction check survey
- Design records
  - Physical data, functional requirements, and site constraints, where applicable
  - Soils/subsurface investigation report, where applicable
  - The geologic investigation will include a study of potential impacts on the karst resource
  - Depth to stable, bedrock not weathered
  - Description of planned treatment measures
  - The drainage area of sinkhole delineated on a topographic map
  - Availability of safe outlet for surface water, if applicable
  - Special safety requirements
- Design and quantity calculations
- Construction drawings/specifications with:
  - Location map
  - "Designed by" and "Checked by" names or initials
  - Approval signature
  - Job class designation

- Initials from preconstruction conference
- As-built notes
- Construction inspection records
  - Assistance notes or separate inspection records
  - Construction approval signature
- Record of any variances approved, where applicable
- Record of approvals of in-field changes affecting function and/or job class, where applicable

#### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

An operation and maintenance (O&M) plan shall be developed for this practice. The O&M plan shall be consistent with the purposes of the practice, its intended life, safety requirements, and the criteria for the design.