

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

**CONSTRUCTED WETLAND**

(acre)

**CODE 656**

**DEFINITION**

A constructed shallow water ecosystem designed to simulate natural wetlands.

historically was not a wetland, or was a wetland with a different hydrology, vegetation type, or functions that occurred naturally on site.

**PURPOSE**

To reduce the pollution potential of runoff and wastewater from agricultural lands to water resources

**CRITERIA**

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

Where a constructed wetland is a component of a planned conservation system or agricultural waste management system

Where wastewater or runoff originates from agricultural lands including livestock or aquaculture facilities

Where a constructed wetland can be constructed, operated and maintained without polluting air or water resources

This practice does not apply to: wetland restoration (657) intended to rehabilitate a degraded wetland where the soils, hydrology, vegetative community, and biological habitat are returned to original conditions; wetland enhancement (659) intended to rehabilitate a degraded wetland where specific functions and/or values are enhanced beyond original conditions; or wetland creation (658) for creating a wetland on a site location which

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

**Laws and Regulations.** All federal, state, and local laws, rules and regulations governing the use of constructed wetlands must be followed. Constructed wetlands for waste treatment shall not be designed to discharge to waters of the state unless permitted by state laws and regulations, and appropriate permits have been obtained to do so. In addition, if discharge is permitted, the receiving surface water must have the capacity to assimilate the constructed wetland's effluent during low flow periods.

**Location.** Constructed wetlands shall be located outside the limits of wetlands of any classification.

Constructed wetlands located within a floodplain shall be protected from inundation or damage from a 25-year flood event, or larger, if required by laws, rules,

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and regulations.

Constructed wetlands shall be located to provide sufficient separation distances from structures such as residences and commercial buildings so prevailing winds and landscape elements such as building arrangement, landforms, and vegetation will minimize odors and protect aesthetic values. They shall be located with a separation distance that will minimize the potential for contamination of ground water resources. This distance shall be in accordance with laws, rules and regulations.

The soil, hydrology, and vegetative characteristics of the site and its contributing watershed before construction shall be documented.

**Type.** Constructed wetlands shall be designed as surface flow systems consisting of adequate seepage control, a suitable plant medium, rooted emergent hydrophytic vegetation, and the structural components needed to contain and control the flow.

**Influent.** The influent to the constructed wetland shall be pretreated to reduce the concentrations of solids, organics, and nutrients to levels that will be tolerated by the wetland system and not cause excessive accretion within the wetland.

Where significant sediment and organic debris are expected in the wastewater or runoff to be treated, provisions for its entrapment before entry into the wetland must be provided.

**Water budget.** A water budget that evaluates runoff or wastewater volumes, precipitation, evaporation, and water use shall be used to determine the required hydraulic retention time in the wetland and storage requirements of the wetland pretreatment and post treatment facilities when included.

**Embankment.** The perimeter embankment shall have a minimum top width of 10 to 15 feet. Interior embankments shall have a minimum top width of 8 feet. If site conditions or owner preference result in a narrower top width, the Operation and Maintenance plan must reflect the additional effort required for vegetation maintenance and embankment repair. All embankment side slopes shall be a minimum of a 2 horizontal to 1 vertical.

**Vegetation.** Vegetation selected for the constructed wetland shall be hydrophytic plants suitable for local climatic conditions and tolerant of the concentrations of nutrients, pesticides, and other constituents in the runoff or wastewater stream and selected for their treatment potential. Preference shall be given to native wetland plants with localized genetic material. Plant materials collected or grown from material collected within the same Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) are considered local.

**Planting medium.** The soil used for the planting medium shall have a cation exchange capacity, pH, electrical conductivity, soil organic matter, and textural class that is conducive to wetland plant growth and retention of contaminants.

**Seepage control.** The constructed wetland shall be located in soils with an acceptable permeability that meets all applicable regulations, or it shall be lined. Measures for controlling seepage shall be designed according to the procedures of NEH Part 651, Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook, Appendix 10d, "Geotechnical Design and Construction Guidelines."

Livestock shall be excluded from the wetland.

**Additional Criteria for Wetlands  
Constructed for Waste Treatment**

**Topography.** Site topography shall accommodate the requirements for length to width ratios of the wetland and the wetland cells, and the requirement that the wetland cells be level side to side with grades of less than 0.05 ft/ft lengthwise.

**Inlet.** An inlet structure that will allow control of flow discharged to the wetland and screening of influent to prevent debris from entering the wetland shall be provided. Design of the inlet structure shall assure its function throughout the life of the wetland considering accretion.

**Influent.** Constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment shall not allow for direct inclusion of contaminated and/or uncontaminated runoff.

Wastewater will be of sufficient volume and duration to keep the constructed wetland moist at all times or accommodations shall be made for the addition of supplemental water.

**Surface Area.** The surface area of the wetland shall be determined using a recognized design procedure in consideration of loading, temperatures, and the desired level of treatment.

**Configuration.** The constructed wetland shall have an overall length to width ratio of 1:1 to 4:1. Individual cells within the constructed wetland shall have a length-to-width ratio of 10:1 to 15:1. The wetland shall consist of at least two rows of parallel cells

**Flow depth.** The design depth shall be based on the most severe season of operation, the desired level of treatment, and the required littoral zone of the plant species being used. The design depth shall be a minimum of 0.33 ft. and a maximum of 1.5 ft.

**Embankments.** Height of the constructed wetland perimeter embankment shall be the sum of the following:

Design depth

Wetland accretion -- a minimum of 1 inch per year for the design life

25-year, 24-hour precipitation

12 inches of freeboard

The height of wetland's interior embankments shall be the minimum of the sum of the following:

Normal design flow depth

Wetland accretion -- minimum of 1 inch per year for the design life

**Overflow Device.** An ungated overflow device shall be provided to operate when the 25-year, 24-hour precipitation is exceeded. The overflow device shall operate without infringing on the wetland perimeter embankment's freeboard.

**Outlet.** Kentucky Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet Division of Water requires "no discharge" from agricultural waste handling systems. Therefore, treated wastewater from an animal operation that leaves constructed wetlands will discharge to storage facilities to allow for land application or recycled through the waste management system.

An outlet structure shall be provided that allows maintenance of proper water level in the wetland and controls the flow from the wetland.

**Additional Criteria for Wetlands  
Constructed for Runoff Treatment**

**Design Storm.** The constructed wetland system shall be designed to contain a 2-year storm runoff. Limited area sites handling only the "first flush" volume shall have a minimum capacity to store 0.5

inch of runoff volume from the entire drainage area. When less than full runoff is stored, bypass of the excess storm flow shall be provided.

**Detention time and surface area.** The detention time and surface area shall be calculated on the time required to achieve the required level of treatment based on the limiting contaminant present.

**Wetland Cells.** Length-to-width ratios are to be 4:1 to 10:1. Other dimensions and shapes that provide a more natural landscape appearance that meet treatment requirements can be used.

NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Code 356, Dike, shall be used as appropriate. Refer to the Engineering Field Handbook Part 650, Chapters 13, "Wetland Restoration, Enhancement, and Creation," and 6, "Structures," for design information. Existing drainage systems will be utilized, removed, or modified as needed to achieve the intended purpose.

**Depth.** Maximum water depth shall be 24 inches except in those instances where deep-water areas are included as a special design.

**Outlet.** A water control structure to automatically regulate storage release in accordance with the design detention time shall be installed.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Locate constructed wetlands downgrade and as near the source of wastewater as practical.

Install measures to exclude or minimize attractiveness of the constructed wetland to wildlife that could be adversely affected by the constructed wetland. Take measures to exclude burrowing animals should they frequent the wetland. Consider the use of fences as an exclusion measure.

Consider the potential for a change in rates of plant growth and transpiration because

of changes in the volume of available soil water.

Consider the effects of downstream flows or aquifers that would affect other water uses or users.

Consider the effects on movement of sediment and soluble sediment attached substances carried by runoff.

Recycle constructed wetland effluent back through the agricultural waste management system when practical.

In northern cold climates consideration should be given to storage of wastewater during winter months instead of wetland operation.

Add additional height to embankments to accommodate accumulated ice when constructed wetlands are used in cold climates.

## 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. Plans shall include construction sequence, vegetation establishment, and management and maintenance requirements.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance plan shall be developed that is consistent with the purposes of the practice, its intended life, safety requirements, and the criteria for its design. Operational requirements should include:

Maintenance of water level in wetland cells appropriate for vegetation

Control flow to wetland according to water budget

Monitoring of wetland performance

Sampling effluent for nutrients prior to utilization.

Surveillance of inlet and outlet

Maintenance requirements should include:

Repair of embankments

Control of vegetation

Repair of fences or other ancillary features

Replacement of wetland plants

Repair of pipelines

Control of unwanted animals (varmints) or vectors (mosquitoes)

## **REFERENCES**

NRCS National Engineering Handbook (NEH) Part 650, Engineering Field Handbook, Chapters 6 and 13.

NEH Part 651n Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook, Appendix 10D "Geotechnical Design and Construction Guidelines."

NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Dike, Code 356
- Structure for Water Control, Code 587
- Waste Treatment Lagoon, Code 359
- Wetland Creation, Code 658