

**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, surfacing with suitable materials, and/or installing needed structures.

**PURPOSE**

- To provide a stable, non-eroding surface for areas frequently used by animals, people, or vehicles
- To protect and improve water quality

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

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

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Plan and design heavy use areas to comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Design Load. Base the design load on the type and frequency of traffic, (vehicular, animal, or human) anticipated on the heavy use area.

Foundation. Evaluate all site foundations for soil moisture, permeability, texture, and bearing strength based on the design load and planned frequency of use.

Where necessary, prepare the foundation by removal and disposal of materials that are not adequate to support the design loads.

Use a base course of gravel, crushed stone, other suitable material and/or geotextile on all sites that need increased load bearing strength, drainage, separation of material, and soil reinforcement. Refer to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Engineering Handbook, Parts 642 and Design Note 24, Guide for Use of Geotextiles, for guidance on geotextile selection.

On sites with porous foundations (high permeability rate), with a need to protect ground water from contamination, provide an impervious barrier.

Surface Treatment. Select a surface treatment that is stable and appropriate to the purpose of the heavy use area. Surface treatments must meet the following requirements according to the material used.

Concrete. Design the thickness and compressive strength of concrete according to the expected loading and

use. For installations where it is necessary to limit the permeability of the concrete, refer to NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Waste Storage Facility (313) and ACI 360R-06, Design of Slabs-on-Ground, for design criteria for slabs on grade.

Bituminous Concrete Pavement. Refer to AASHTO Guide for Design of Pavement Structures or the applicable state department of highway's specification for design criteria for bituminous concrete paving.

In lieu of a site specific design, for areas that will be subject to light use, pave with a minimum of 4 inches of compacted bituminous concrete over a subgrade of at least 4 inches of well compacted gravel. Use bituminous concrete mixtures commonly used for road paving in the area. Compact the surface with a heavy steel wheel roller until the bituminous concrete is thoroughly compacted and roller marks are eliminated.

Other Cementitious Materials. Other cementitious materials such as soil cement, roller compacted concrete, and coal combustion by-products (flue gas desulphurization sludge and fly ash) can be used to provide a durable, stable surfacing material. Develop site specific mix designs based on the properties of the material with compressive strengths necessary for the expected use and loading on the heavy use area.

**Coal combustion by products such as bottom ash blend (BAB), fluidized bed ash, or fly ash.**

All areas using bottom ash blend (BAB) shall be 9 inches thick for animal traffic. Areas that support vehicle traffic shall be a minimum of 12 inches thick.

Other types of fly ash may be used only with the area engineer's approval.

Aggregate. Design fine or coarse aggregate surfaces at least 6 inches thick. If the surface will be compacted, choose a well graded aggregate.

Experience has shown that in Arkansas 6 inches has led to more consistent applications of the HUAs. Sprays and Artificial Mulches. When utilizing sprays of asphalt, oil, plastic, manufactured mulches, and similar materials, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for design requirements.

Other. Surfacing materials, such as limestone screenings, cinders, tanbark, bark mulch, brick chips, shredded rubber and/or sawdust, shall have a minimum layer thickness of 4 inches.

Structures. Design any structures associated with the heavy use area, including roofs, according to appropriate NRCS standards. Where NRCS standards do not exist, design structures according to the requirements of the particular construction material and accepted engineering practice. Base environmental design loads for buildings associated with heavy use areas on criteria in ASCE 7 - Minimum Design Loads for Buildings and Other Structures: ASCE/SEI 7-05.

Drainage and Erosion Control. Include provisions in the design for surface and subsurface drainage, as needed. Include provisions for disposal of runoff without causing erosion or water quality impairment. To the extent possible, prevent runoff from entering the heavy use area.

Vegetative Measures. Where appropriate, stabilize all areas disturbed by construction with vegetation as soon as possible after construction. Refer to NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Critical Area Planting (342). If vegetation is not appropriate for the site, use other measures to stabilize the area.

#### **Additional Criteria for Areas Used by Livestock**

The treated area may include all areas where livestock congregate and cause surface stability problems. This includes feeding areas, portable hay rings, watering facilities, feeding troughs, mineral boxes, and other facilities where livestock concentrations cause resource concerns. These areas shall be located 100 feet from streams, ponds, lakes, seeps, sinkholes, wells, or other critical landscape features unless heavy use area is planned to allow limited access to a water source or for a stream channel crossing.

NRCS conservation practice standards Critical Area Planting (342), Fencing (382); Prescribed Grazing (528a), Filter Strip (393), Vegetative Treatment Area (635), Waste Storage Facility (313), Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380), or Use Exclusion (472) shall be

used as companion practices when needed to meet the intended purpose of the heavy use area protection.

Include provisions in the design of the heavy use area to collect, store, utilize and/or treat manure and contaminated runoff.

#### **Additional Criteria for Recreation Areas**

Heavy use protection in recreation areas that are accessible to the public must meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Heavy use areas can have a significant impact on adjoining land uses. These impacts can be environmental, visual, and cultural. Care should be taken when selecting the type of treatment to ensure that it is compatible with adjoining areas. Consider such things as proximity to neighbors, utilities, cultural resources, environmentally sensitive areas, and the land use where the stabilization will take place. Stabilization techniques used in a cattle feeding area may not be appropriate for a recreation area.

By its very nature, a heavy use area will be subject to intensive use. If vegetation will be part of the stabilization technique, consider the durability of the vegetation. Choose plant species that can withstand the expected use. Additional techniques such as geogrids, other reinforcing techniques or planned periods of rest and recovery may need to be employed to ensure that vegetative stabilization will succeed. Preference

should be given to native species when applicable.

Heavy use areas will be intensely used by animals, people, or both. Consider the safety of the users both human and animal during the design. Avoid slippery surfaces, sharp corners or surfaces and structures that might entrap users. For heavy use areas used by livestock avoid the use of sharp aggregates that might injure livestock hooves.

For livestock heavy use areas, provide positive drainage to prevent ponding of water. Such wet areas can have adverse affects on animal health and comfort.

Heavy use area protection often involves paving or otherwise reducing the permeability of the heavily used area. This can reduce infiltration and increase surface runoff. Depending on the size of the heavy use area, this can have an impact on the water budget of the surrounding area. During the planning and design, consider the effects to ground and surface water.

Heavy use areas are places where animals, people, or vehicles are concentrated. The resulting manure, sediments, bacteria, petroleum products, and trash that might accumulate on the heavy use area can result in degraded runoff water quality. During planning and design consider how these pollutants will be handled to reduce offsite impacts.

To reduce the negative water quality impact of heavy use areas, consider locating them as far as possible from waterbodies or water courses. In some

cases this may require relocating the heavily used area rather than just armoring an area that is already in use.

Surface erosion can be a problem on large heavy use areas that do not use a hard surface such as concrete. In these cases the designer may need to include measures on the area that reduce the flow length of runoff to reduce erosion problems.

To reduce the potential for air quality problems from particulate matter associated with heavy use areas, consider the use of NRCS Conservation Practice Standards Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380), Herbaceous Wind Barriers (603), or the use of palliative treatments such as lignosulfonate, synthetic polymers, organic oils, or chloride compounds to control dust from bare heavy use areas.

Heavy use areas for livestock can vary widely in size depending on how the operator manages his livestock. Because heavy use areas can be expensive to construct and maintain, a significant consideration should be to reduce the size of the heavy use area as much as possible. This may require changes in how the livestock are managed but in the long run may result in less maintenance and a more efficient operation.

For areas that will need to be cleaned frequently by scraping, loose aggregate or other non-cementitious materials may not be the best choice. Consider a more durable surface such as concrete.

By-products from coal fired power

plants such as fly ash and sludge from scrubbers can vary significantly. Therefore, their toxicity and cementation characteristics should be known to ensure they are compatible with the intended use. Particular care should be taken when designing heavy use areas for stream channel crossings or pond access.

### **Additional Considerations for Fabricated Shelters for Livestock**

Fabricated shelters should be located in areas where the herd is likely to congregate during typical storms. The site should be accessible by vehicle. The site shall be located in an upland area away from riparian areas. Locate shelters at least 5 times the shelter width up wind from buildings, cattle yard areas, feed storage, etc. to avoid snow accumulation. The wind loading shall be in accordance with ASCE Standard 7-05, Minimum Design Loads for Buildings and Other Structures. The post foundation design shall be in accordance with ASAE EP486.1, Shallow Post Foundation Design.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Prepare plans and specifications for Heavy Use Area Protection that describe the requirements for installing the practice according to this standard. As a minimum the plans and specifications shall include:

- A plan view showing the location and extent of the practice.
- Where appropriate, cross-sections showing the type and required thickness of paving or stabilization materials.

- Where appropriate, plans for required structural details.
- Where appropriate, vegetation establishment requirements.
- Construction specifications that describe in writing site specific installation requirements for the heavy use area protection.

### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Prepare an operation and maintenance (O&M) plan for the operator. The minimum requirements to be addressed in the O&M plan are:

- Periodic inspections, especially immediately following significant rainfall events.
- Prompt repair or replacement of damaged components especially surfaces that are subjected to wear or erosion.
- For livestock heavy use areas include requirements for the regular removal and management of manure.
- Where vegetation is specified, periodic mowing, fertilization, and control of vegetation.

### **REFERENCES**

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) 2006. Standard Specification for Geotextiles Used for Highway Applications. AASHTO Standard M288. Washington, DC.

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. 1998. Guide for Design of Pavement Structures with 1998 Supplements. Washington, DC

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The Asphalt Institute. 1975. Full Depth Asphalt Pavement for Private Driveways, Construction Leaflet No. 11. Lexington, KY.

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Midwest Plan Service. "Using All-Weather Geotextile Lanes and Pads," Agricultural Engineers Digest, AED 45, July 1999.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office Technical guide, Section IV, NRCS Conservation Practice Standards: Animal Trails and Walkways, Code 575 Fence, Code 382 Filter Strip, Code 393

Nutrient Management, Code 590 Prescribed Grazing, Code 528A Riparian Forest Buffer, Code 391 Stream Crossing, Code 576 Wastewater Treatment Strip, Code 635 Waste Storage Facility, Code 313

Waste Utilization, Code 633

Reducing Mud Problems In Cattle Heavy Use Areas with Coal Combustion Byproducts (Fly Ash) FSA-1043. Runoff Water Management for Animal Production and Environmental Production FSA-1036, U of A Division of Agricultural Cooperative Extension Service Arkansas Construction Specification 29 – Soil-Cement