

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

WETLAND RESTORATION

(Ac.)

CODE 657

DEFINITION

The return of a wetland and its functions to a close approximation of its original condition as it existed prior to disturbance on a former or degraded wetland site.

PURPOSE

To restore wetland function, value, habitat, diversity, and capacity to a close approximation of the pre-disturbance conditions by restoring:

- Conditions conducive to hydric soil maintenance.
- Wetland hydrology (dominant water source, hydroperiod, and hydrodynamics).
- Native hydrophytic vegetation (including the removal of undesired species, and/or seeding or planting of desired species).
- Original fish and wildlife habitats.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies only to natural wetland sites with hydric soils which have been subject to the degradation of hydrology, vegetation, or soils.

This practice is applicable only where the natural hydrologic conditions can be approximated by actions such as modifying drainage, restoring stream/floodplain connectivity, removing diversions, dikes, and levees, and/or by using a natural or artificial water source to provide conditions similar to the original, natural conditions.

For embankment projects, this practice applies only to areas where the predominant slope is two percent or less.

This practice does not apply to:

- The treatment of point and non-point sources of water pollution (Constructed Wetland - PA656);
- The rehabilitation of a degraded wetland, the reestablishment of a former wetland, or the modification of an existing wetland, where specific wetland functions are augmented beyond the original natural conditions; possibly at the expense of other functions (Wetland Enhancement - PA659);
- The creation of a wetland on a site location which was historically non-wetland (Wetland Creation - PA658);
- The management of fish and wildlife habitat on wetlands restored under Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – PA644.

CRITERIA**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

The purpose, goals, and objectives of the restoration shall be clearly defined in the restoration plan, including soils, hydrology, vegetation, and fish and wildlife habitat criteria that are to be met and are appropriate for the site and the project objectives.

These planning steps shall be done with the use of a functional assessment-type procedure, or a state approved equivalent. The objectives will be determined by an analysis of current and historic site functions. They will be based on those functions which can reasonably be supported by current site constraints. Data from historic and recent

aerial photography and/or other remotely sensed data, soil maps, topographic maps, stream gage data, intact reference wetlands, and historical records shall be gathered.

The soils, hydrology and vegetative conditions existing on the site, the adjacent landscape, and the contributing watershed shall be documented in the planning process.

The nutrient and pesticide tolerance of the plant and animal species likely to occur shall be evaluated where known nutrient and pesticide contamination exists. Sites suspected of containing hazardous material shall be tested to identify appropriate remedial measures. If remedial measures are not possible or practicable, the practice shall not be planned.

The availability of sufficient water rights should be reviewed prior to restoration.

Upon completion, the site shall meet soil, hydrology, vegetation, and habitat conditions of the wetland that previously existed on the site to the extent practicable.

Where offsite hydrologic alterations or the presence of invasive species impact the site, the design shall compensate for these impacts to the extent practicable.

Invasive species, federal/state listed noxious plant species, and nuisance species (e.g., those whose presence or overpopulation jeopardize the practice) shall be controlled on the site as necessary to restore wetland functions. The establishment and/or use of non-native plant species shall be discouraged.

Criteria for Hydric Soil Restoration

Restoration sites will be located on soils that are hydric.

If the hydric soil is covered by fill, sediment, spoil, or other depositional material, the material covering the hydric soil shall be removed to the extent needed to restore the original soil functions.

Soil hydrodynamic and bio-geochemical properties such as permeability, porosity, pH, or soil organic carbon levels shall be restored to the extent needed to restore hydric soil functions.

Criteria for Hydrology Restoration

General - The hydroperiod, hydrodynamics, and dominant water source of the restored site

shall approximate the conditions that existed before alteration. The restoration plan shall document the adequacy of available water sources based on groundwater investigation, stream gage data, water budgeting, or other appropriate means.

The work associated with the wetland shall not adversely affect adjacent properties or other water users unless agreed to by signed written letter, easement or permit.

Timing and level setting of water control structures, if needed, will be based on the actions needed to maintain a close approximation of the original, natural hydrologic conditions.

The original natural water supply should be used to reestablish the site's hydrology to approximate the hydrologic conditions of the wetland type. If this is not possible, an alternate natural or artificial water supply can be used; however, these sources shall not be diverted from other wetland resources. If the alternate water source requires energy inputs, these shall be estimated and documented in the restoration plan.

To the extent technically feasible reestablish macrotopography and/or microtopography. Use reference sites within the local area to determine desired topographic relief. The location, size, and geometry of earthen structures, if needed, shall match that of the original macrotopographic features to the extent practicable.

Macrotopographic features, including ditch plugs installed in lieu of re-filling surface drainage ditches, shall meet the requirements of other practice standards to which they may apply due to purpose, size, water storage capacity, hazard class, or other parameters. If no other practice standard applies, they shall meet the requirements for Dike – PA356 unless there is no potential for damage to the feature or other areas on or off site due to erosion, breaching, or overtopping.

Excavations from within the wetland shall remove sediment to approximate the original topography or establish a water level that will compensate for the sediment that remains.

Water control structures that may impede the movement of target aquatic species or species of concern shall meet the criteria in Fish Passage, PA396.

Wetland restoration sites that exhibit soil oxidation and/or subsidence, resulting in a lower surface elevation compared to pre-disturbance, shall take into account the appropriate hydrologic regime needed to support the original wetland functions.

Water depths for at least ninety percent of the total area below the design normal water elevation shall be three feet or less.

Embankments – Embankments may be used to impound water and provide wetland hydrology. Refer to the criteria for embankments in the Pennsylvania Conservation Practice Standard for Pond, Code 378. For embankment projects, water depths for at least sixty percent of the total area below the designed normal water elevation will be eighteen inches or less. The overall bottom slope from the three foot water depth to zero will be convex or flat, but not concave.

Existing drainage systems will be utilized, removed or modified as needed to achieve the intended purpose.

Subsurface Drain Plugs - In areas where subsurface drains were used to lower the water table, wetland hydrology may be restored by removing or plugging the drain or replacing the perforated drain with a non-perforated drain.

The minimum length of drain to be removed or plugged shall be as follows:

Length of Drain	Average Hydraulic Conductivity of Soil
50 feet	<0.6 inches/hour
100 feet	0.6 to 2.0 inches/hour
150 feet	>2.0 inches/hour

All envelope filter material or other flow enhancing material shall also be removed for this length. The trench used to alter the drain shall be filled and compacted to achieve a density equal to adjacent natural soil material.

When subsurface drains also function as outlets for other drained areas where drainage is still desired, appropriate measures must be incorporated to keep the upstream drainage

systems functional. A non-perforated pipe shall replace the perforated pipe through the wetland area to be restored, and shall extend beyond the wetland in all directions at least the minimum length previously specified for length of drain to be removed or plugged. Drains may also be re-routed around the wetland at the same minimum distances from the wetland, or where topography permits, setting a water control structure at a level that does not affect upstream drainage.

A water control structure may be placed on the inlet of an existing drain. The water control structure shall be attached to a non-perforated conduit that extends at least the minimum length previously specified for length of drain to be removed. The connections of the water control structure and the non-perforated pipe shall be watertight.

Surface Drain Plugs - In areas where open ditches were constructed to provide drainage, wetland hydrology may be restored by constructing surface drain plugs, using a pipe riser or other structures within the ditch to control the water level, or by filling a surface drain to the original ground line. Refer to the criteria for embankments when fill will be placed on the ditch banks.

All fill shall be similar to adjacent soil materials and be compacted to achieve the density of the adjacent materials. Crown the fill a minimum of one foot above the top of the lower existing channel bank to account for settling.

The minimum length of surface drain plugs shall be (6H + 4) feet. "Minimum length" refers to the length as measured along the top of the plug. "H" is measured from the settled top of the embankment to the low point along the centerline of the embankment (fill).

Removal of Fill Material – On sites where a wetland has been filled by sediment, land shaping, or other activities, the hydrology may be restored by removing the fill material from the site. Fill material shall be removed only to the top of the buried hydric soil, placed on an upland site, and stabilized so that no erosion of the material occurs.

Criteria for Vegetative Restoration

Hydrophytic vegetation restoration shall be of species typical for the wetland type(s) being established and the varying hydrologic regimes and soil types within the wetland. Preference

shall be given to native wetland plants with localized genetic material.

Where natural colonization of acceptable species can realistically be expected to occur within 5 years, sites may be left to revegetate naturally. If not, the appropriate species will be established by seeding or planting.

Adequate substrate material and site preparation necessary for proper establishment of the selected plant species shall be included in the plan.

Where planting and/or seeding is necessary, the minimum number of native species to be established shall be based on a reference wetland with the type of vegetative communities and species planned on the restoration site:

- Where the dominant vegetation will be herbaceous community types, a subset of the original vegetative community shall be established within 5 years, or a suitable precursor to the original community will be established within 5 years that creates conditions suitable for the establishment of the native community. Species richness shall be addressed in the planning of herbaceous communities. Seeding rates shall be based upon the percentage of pure live seed and labeled with a current seed tag from a registered seed laboratory identifying the germination rate, purity analysis, and other seed statistics.
- Where the dominant vegetation will be forest or woodland community types, vegetation establishment will include a mix of woody species (trees and/or shrubs) adequate to establish the reference wetland community.

CONSIDERATIONS

Soil Considerations

Consider making changes to physical soil properties, including:

- Increasing or decreasing saturated hydraulic conductivity by mechanical compaction or tillage, as appropriate.
- Incorporating soil amendments.

- The effect of construction equipment on soil density, infiltration, and structure.

Consider changes in soil bio-geochemical properties, including increasing soil organic carbon by incorporating compost, and increasing or decreasing soil pH with lime, gypsum, or other compounds

Hydrology Considerations

Consider the general hydrologic effects of the restoration, including impacts on downstream stream hydrographs, volumes of surface runoff, and groundwater resources due to changes of water use and movement created by the restoration.

Consider the impacts of water level management, including:

- Increased predation due to concentrating aquatic organisms, including herptivores, in small pool areas during draw downs
- Increased predation of amphibians due to high water levels that can sustain predators.
- Decreased ability of aquatic organisms to move within the wetland and from the wetland area to adjacent habitats, including fish and amphibians as water levels are decreased.
- Increases in water temperature on-site, and in off-site receiving waters.
- Changes in the quantity and direction of movement of subsurface flows due to increases or decreases in water depth.
- The effect changes in hydrologic regime have on soil bio-geochemical properties, including: oxidation/reduction; maintenance of organic soils; and salinity increase or decrease on site and on adjacent areas.

NOTE: State permits must be obtained to lower pools of impoundments for activities regulated by other state permits, or for any impoundment larger than one surface acre. Activities requiring drawdown may include construction maintenance or biological manipulation.

Vegetation Considerations

Consider:

- The relative effects of planting density on fish and wildlife habitat versus production rates in woody plantings.
- The potential for vegetative buffers to increase function by trapping sediment, cycling nutrients, and removing pesticides.
- The selection of vegetation for the protection of structural measures that is appropriate for wetland function.
- The potential for invasive or noxious plant species to establish on bare soils after construction and before the planned plant community is established.
- The use of prescribed burning to restore wetland and adjacent upland plant communities.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Considerations

Consider:

- The addition of coarse woody debris on sites to be restored to woody plant communities for an initial carbon source and fish and wildlife cover.
- The potential to restore habitat capable of supporting fish and wildlife with the ability to control disease vectors such as mosquitoes.
- The potential to establish fish and wildlife corridors to link the site to adjacent landscapes, streams, and water bodies and to increase the sites colonization by native flora.
- The need to provide barriers to passage for unwanted or predatory species.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Plans and specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, or other documentation. The plans and specifications for structural features will include, at a minimum, a plan view, quantities, and sufficient profiles and cross-sections to

define the location, line, and grade for stakeout and checkout. Plans and specifications shall be reviewed and approved by staff with appropriate job approval authority.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

A separate Operation and Maintenance Plan will be prepared for sites that have structural features. The plan will include specific actions for the normal and repetitive operation of installed structural items, especially water control structures, if included in the project. The plan will also include the maintenance actions necessary to assure that constructed items are maintained for the life of the project. It will include the inspection schedule, a list of items to inspect, a checklist of potential damages to look for, recommended repairs, and procedures for documentation.

Management and monitoring activities needed to ensure the continued success of the wetland functions may be included in the above plan, or in a separate Management and Monitoring Plan. In addition to the monitoring schedule, this plan may include the following:

- The timing and methods for the use of fertilizers, pesticides, prescribed burning, or mechanical treatments.
- Circumstances when the use of biological control of undesirable plant species and pests (e.g. using predator or parasitic species) is appropriate, and the approved methods.
- Actions which specifically address any expected problems from invasive or noxious species.
- The circumstances which require the removal of accumulated sediment.
- Conditions which indicate the need to use haying or grazing as a management tool, including timing and methods.

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