

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**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.

This practice does not apply to:

- The treatment of point and non-point sources of water pollution (Constructed Wetland - 656);

- 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 - 659);
- The creation of a wetland on a site location which was historically non-wetland (Wetland Creation - 658).
- The management of fish and wildlife habitat on wetlands restored under this standard.

**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 (in SC the "SC Depressional Wetland Functional Assessment" or the "SC Floodplain Functional Assessment" will be used). Contact an NRCS Biologist for assistance with the assessment.

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 (e.g., increased water depth, berms or microtopography).

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. This includes the manipulation of water levels to control unwanted vegetation. The establishment and/or use of non-native plant species shall be discouraged.

Where soil disturbance is necessary, it must be scheduled to ensure optimum pollinator success.

All wetland restoration plans will be reviewed by the NRCS State Biologist and NRCS State Engineer.

### **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**

The hydroperiod, hydrodynamics, and dominant water source of the restored site shall approximate the conditions that existed before alteration. This includes affects to hydrology restoration caused by roads, ditches, drains, terraces, etc. within the watershed.

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 – 356 unless there is no potential for damage to the feature or other areas on or off site due to erosion,

breaching, or overtopping. The standards and specifications for Dike (356) and Structure for Water Control (587) will be used as appropriate. Refer to the Engineering Field Handbook, Chapters 13, "Wetland Restoration, Enhancement and Creation," and 6, "Structures", for additional design information.

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, Code 396.

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.

**This section not part of national standard, was this added by engineers (in blue)?**  
**Surface Drainage Removal**

Where open channels were constructed to drain the wetland, the channel will be filled with earth or controlled with a grade stabilization structure to restore the wetland hydrologic conditions. A water control structure may be required to manage water levels for wetland operation and maintenance.

Provisions will be made to store, pass or divert the flow from the 10-year frequency, 24-hour storm so that it does not cause erosion and offsite flooding impacts.

Where the channel serves as an outlet for upstream lands, it is necessary to meet applicable state and local laws and regulations pertaining to flooding, surface and subsurface drainage or storage.

The channel may be blocked with earth fill without a flow control device where flow duration and rate will not cause erosion and head cutting. The minimum length of a channel to be filled will be based on the hydraulic conductivity (permeability) of the soil at the site.

For channel blocks, the minimum length

to be filled is 50 feet for soils with an average hydraulic conductivity of less than 0.6 inches per hour, 100 feet for 0.6 to 2.0 inches per hour, and 150 feet for greater than 2.0 inches per hour.

The side slopes on channel blocks will be 3:1 or flatter. All fill will be compacted to achieve the density of adjacent materials. The fill for channel block will be crowned a minimum of one foot above the top of the lowest existing channel bank to account for settlement and to prevent concentrated flow over the channel block.

**Grade Stabilization Structure**

When the 10-year frequency, 24-hour duration storm flow or groundwater inflow will prevent stabilizing the site due to long duration flows or high peak discharge, the channel will be filled and stabilized with a structure that meets the criteria for Grade Stabilization Structure (410).

**Water Control Structure**

When it is desirable to control or manipulate the water level for operation and maintenance (e.g. biological manipulation, nuisance vegetation) of the wetland at an elevation different than that caused by blocking the channel, a water control device meeting criteria of Water Control Structure (587) may be used.

Materials used for grade stabilization or water control structures will have minimum 25 year durability in the soil, water and climate conditions associated with the site unless site specific operation and maintenance plans and designs document rationale for shorter life materials.

Fire resistant materials will be used for exposed portions of structures where vegetation will be maintained by burning.

**Subsurface Drainage Removal**

In areas where subsurface drains were used to remove surface water or soil saturation, the existing system will be modified to restore the wetland hydrologic conditions.

Use old drainage records, interviews and site investigations as needed to determine the extent of the existing system. The effect of any modification to the existing subsurface drainage system on upstream landowners will

be evaluated, and the landowner will be notified of potential offsite impacts. This evaluation will include both surface and subsurface impacts.

Where the subsurface drain serves as an outlet for upstream properties, it will be necessary to meet applicable state and local laws and regulations pertaining to subsurface drainage and flooding.

Upstream surface and subsurface drainage will not be impacted unless appropriate easements are obtained or mitigation measures are implemented.

The effects of the subsurface drainage system may be eliminated by the following:

- a. removing a portion of the drain at the downstream edge of the site,
- b. modifying the drain with a water control device, or
- c. installing non-perforated pipe through the wetland site.

The minimum length of drain to be removed is 50 feet for soils with an average hydraulic conductivity of less than 0.6 inches per hour, 100 feet for 0.6 to 2.0 inches per hour and 150 feet for greater than 2.0 inches per hour.

All envelope filter material or other flow enhancing material will also be removed for the length. The trench will be filled and compacted to achieve a density equal to adjacent material.

A water control device placed on the inlet of an existing drain will limit inflow that will prevent damage to the drain downstream of the site. If the drain serves other areas, inflow will be limited to the capacity originally apportioned to the drain.

#### **Storage Volume Replacement**

Where the wetland site has been filled by sediment, land shaping or other activities, the storage may be replaced by excavating the fill material from the site or by construction of an earthen embankment.

Sediment deposition or other fill materials will only be removed to the top of the buried hydric soil. Sediment will be removed and placed on upland sites.

If the presence of hazardous waste materials in the sediment or fill is suspected, soil samples will be collected and analyzed for the presence of hazardous waste as identified by local, state or federal authorities.

#### **Embankments**

An earthen embankment may be constructed to create a pool storage volume equal to that which existed prior to conversion of the site. Embankments with an effective height of less than 6 feet will meet the criteria for Dike (356). Embankments with an effective height greater than 6 feet will meet the criteria for Pond (378).

Embankments meeting criteria for dikes will safely handle a 10-year frequency, 24-hour storm at the dike design high water level.

Embankment material should be soils which are stable for fill construction. Organic soils should not be used for embankment materials.

#### **Dugout/Swales**

Dugouts, Swales and potholes will meet criteria for Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644).

Wetland dugouts may be used to restore previously filled wetlands and to develop wetlands. A wetland dugout is a constructed shallow depression area. Side slopes shall be shaped to a stable grade. All excavated material shall be spread on non-wetland sites or hauled off-site. No spoil will be allowed in any drainage path.

Pocosins may be developed or restored through blasting, excavation or by restoring the hydrology to existing depression areas. Blasting is to be done by experienced personnel in accordance with federal, state and local regulations.

#### **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. Restoration of wetland plant communities will be based on reference wetlands of the type being restored or a suitable technical reference.

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 (minimum of six species).
- Refer to the following technical guides for a list of adapted native species, suggested seeding rates and seeding dates that are to be used for the establishment of vegetation:
  1. South Carolina Conservation Cover – Technical Guidance (Using Native Species, Wildlife Habitat Emphasis) 327 (a)
  2. South Carolina Conservation Cover – Technical Guidance (Using Introduced and/or Native Species) 327 (b)

3. Refer to the criteria and follow Conservation Practice Tree and Shrub Establishment (612) for establishing forest species.

## **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.

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.

**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.
- Input from other agencies including the SC Department of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service) and organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the Audubon Society to assist in the development of the wetland restoration plan.
- Possible enhancement of rare and declining habitat for threatened, endangered and other plants and animals of concern.

**PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

- All necessary local, state, and federal permits shall be obtained by the landowner (or designee) prior to the restoration.
- 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.
- 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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