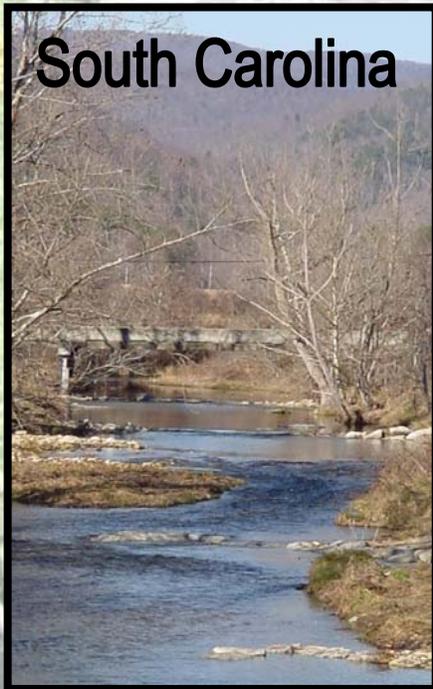
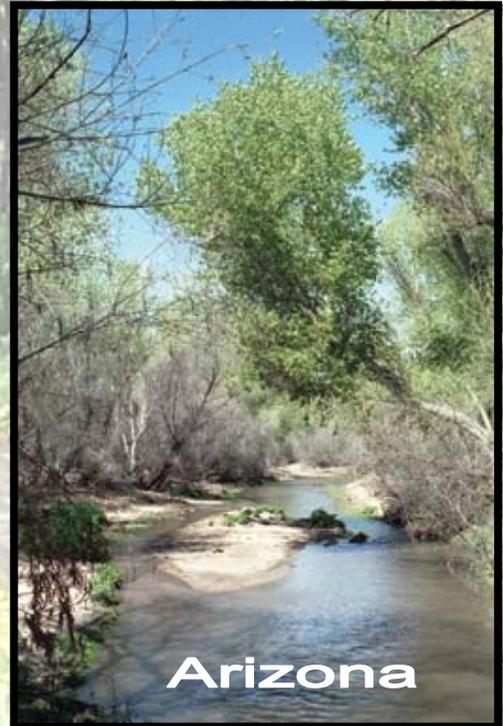


# Stream Visual Assessment Protocol.2 – Utah



**Colorado**

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## **Preface to SVAP Version 2**

This document presents a revised and updated NRCS Stream Visual Assessment Protocol Version 2 (SVAP 2) for use by conservation planners, field office personnel and private landowners. Like its predecessor, it is a relatively easy-to-use tool for qualitatively evaluating the condition of aquatic ecosystems associated with Wadeable streams, i.e., those shallow enough to be sampled without use of a boat. Such Wadeable streams include those modified to improve drainage on agricultural lands, especially if these systems are part of an ecologically functional stream and/or river network. While the protocol does not require users to be experts in aquatic ecology, it does require they read the protocol's user guidance thoroughly before beginning an assessment. The SVAP and SVAP2 are tools that work best when users first identify local stream reference conditions that can effectively provide a standard for comparison. State offices are encouraged to refine the protocol based on the physical settings, stream conditions, and life history requirements of aquatic fauna found in their specific locales. Additional guidance on how to make state modifications is provided in Appendix 3.

Both versions of the Stream Visual Assessment Protocol provide a relatively basic level of ecological assessment based on qualitative descriptions. Each is designed to give a snapshot of Wadeable stream ecosystem conditions that allows planners and conservationists to assist landowners with determining the quality of stream habitats located on their property. SVAP 2 was developed to provide more comprehensive descriptions of several scoring elements, namely channel condition, hydrological alteration, riparian area conditions, and fish habitat complexity. Field conservationists are encouraged to use SVAP 2 in those situations where more detail is needed to critically score these elements and their relative contribution to the condition of the stream. This version lends itself to tracking trends in stream conditions over time, as well as identifying resource concerns and their potential causes. The original SVAP is designed to be conducted with the landowner. SVAP 2 can be completed with a landowner or with a conservation planning team. Background information relevant to ecological processes and functions of stream/riparian ecosystems is incorporated into both versions of the SVAP.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Introduction

This assessment procedure is a national protocol that provides an initial evaluation of the overall condition of wadeable streams, their riparian zones, and their instream habitats. The majority of the nation's streams and rivers are small, often with intermittent flows, and yet they constitute a close multi-dimensional linkage between land and water management. These smaller streams and rivers are increasingly a focus of NRCS assistance to landowners. This protocol is developed for relatively small streams, be they perennial or intermittent. If the stream can be sampled during low flow or seasonally wet periods of the year without a boat, it can be assessed using the SVAP. Although this protocol has been developed for use nation-wide, its authors recognize the importance of regional differences in influencing stream conditions. NRCS thus encourages modification and calibration of the national protocol's scoring elements if needed to achieve greater sensitivity to resource conditions at state and regional levels. Thus, the SVAP2 can be viewed as a national framework for States to revise or amend, if necessary, to better assess local stream and riparian conditions. Guidance for such modifications is provided in Appendix 3.

This SVAP 2 protocol can be successfully applied by conservationists with limited training in biology, geomorphology, or hydrology. Since publication of the initial version of the SVAP, the protocol has taken on broader applications as a tool to (1) evaluate quality criteria for conservation planning, (2) establish eligibility for Farm Bill programs, (3) identify potential resource concerns, and (4) assess trends in stream and riparian conditions over time. Consequently, NRCS state offices have played a large role in modifying the protocol, updating training materials, and transferring SVAP2 technology to the field. States should continue with such efforts and also pay close attention to achieving consistency in how the protocol is applied within their states and in adjacent states. It is less critical that a particular assessment discern between a score of 5 or 6 with subtle subjective differences than it is that the protocol be interpreted and applied consistently, year-to-year by multiple users. Consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness can be gained by collaborating closely with local users, and those in other states within your region. NRCS state offices are encouraged to contact appropriate National Technology Support Center (NTSC) specialists regarding refinement of this SVAP2's scoring criteria to more accurately reflect local conditions. NTSC's can also assist with coordinating regional training to improve understanding of the methodology and consistency in use of the SVAP2.

The SVAP2 is a preliminary qualitative assessment tool to evaluate features that affect overall stream conditions at the property level. The tool assesses visually apparent physical, chemical, and biological features within a specified reach of a stream corridor. Because of its qualitative nature, the protocol may not detect all causes of resource concerns, especially if such causes are a result of land use actions in other parts of the watershed. It does provide a means to assess site conditions in the context of the larger watershed. A synthesis of information gathered during the preliminary assessment and field assessment portions of the protocol can be used to provide general guidance to landowners on how watershed features and practices they employ are reflected in the quality of their stream ecosystems.

## What is a Healthy Stream?

A stream's watershed captures precipitation, filters and stores water, and regulates its release through the stream channel network and eventually into a lake, another watershed, or an estuary and the ocean. Watersheds are characterized by different climates, geomorphic features, soil types, vegetation, and land uses. Their upland features control the quantity and timing of water and materials that make their way overland and into a stream system. The environmental conditions of a stream or river corridor (such as water quantity and quality, riparian and floodplain function, and habitat quality) are thus linked to the entire watershed. These linkages affect stream processes that act vertically, laterally, longitudinally, and over time. Land managers may have little control of watershed management beyond their property lines or jurisdictional boundaries. Nevertheless, activities that occur in many individual farm fields, rangelands, or pastures can have cumulative impacts on the condition of an individual landowner's stream, and those downstream. Sound watershed and stream corridor management are important for maintaining stream conditions that allow the stream to be resilient and resistant to natural disturbance and human-caused perturbations. The natural resilience of a stream to recover from floods, fire, and drought is an indicator that it is healthy (Meyer, 1997).

Streams, their floodplains and adjacent riparian areas are complex ecosystems where numerous biological, physical, and chemical processes interact (Cushing and Allen, 2001). Changes in any one feature or process in a stream ecosystem have cascading effects throughout the stream as it flows downstream and as its flows change with seasonal shifts in precipitation. Stream processes are inter-connected and these connections maintain a balance of materials that are transported and deposited by the stream, including sediment, water, wood, and nutrients. If conditions change, these processes must re-adjust to keep the stream resilient and functional for energy and material transport and aquatic fauna and flora. The conditions of a stream reflect current and past land uses and management actions. As such, they can also help predict future trends of watershed land use and conditions.

Multiple factors affect stream conditions and therefore stream quality (Figure 1). For example, increased nutrient loads alone may not cause a visual change to a forested stream. But when combined with tree removal and channel widening, the result may shift the energy dynamics from a community based on leaf litter inputs to one based on algae and aquatic plants. The resulting chemical changes caused by photosynthesis and respiration of aquatic plants coupled with temperature increases due to loss of canopy cover will alter the aquatic community.

Many stream processes are in delicate balance. For example, the force of the stream flow, the amount of sediment, and the stream features that slow or hasten flow must be in relative balance to prevent channel incision or bank erosion. Increases in sediment loads beyond the capacity of the stream to transport them downstream can lead to extensive deposition of sediments and channel widening.

Lastly, the biological community of a stream also affects its overall condition. As indicators of biological integrity fish, aquatic invertebrates, and all other members of a stream's community portray a pattern of stream condition that further enhances our ability to detect concerns. For example, the prevalence of exotic species in a fish assemblage of a particular stream often indicates deterioration in stream function or quality. While beyond the scope of the SVAP2,

such indices of biological integrity provide an even more comprehensive picture of a stream ecosystem's condition (Giller and Malmqvist, 1998; Matthews, 1998).

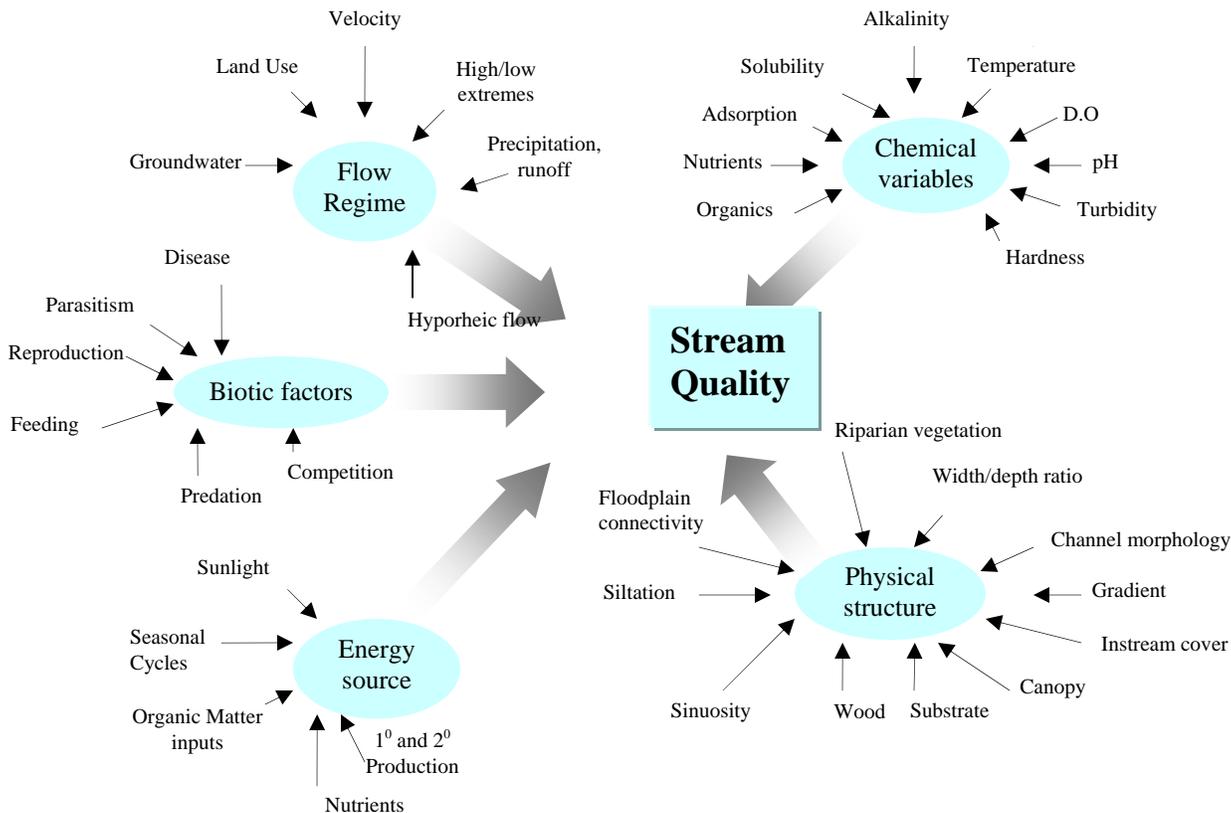


Figure 1: Factors that influence the quality or condition of streams (modified from Karr 1986).

Stream corridors benefit from complex and diverse physical structure. Such complexity increases “channel roughness” that dissipates the energy of water and reduces its erosive power. Structural complexity is provided by channel form (i.e., meanders, pools, riffles, backwaters, wetlands), profile (i.e., stream gradient, width, and depth), materials that have fallen into the channel (trees and bank material), overhanging vegetation, roots extending into the flow, and streambed materials (sand, gravel, rocks, and boulders). The movement of these materials and the path of flow form pools, riffles, backwaters, side-channels, floodplain wetlands, and many other types of habitats. Thus, streams with complex floodplains and a diversity of structural features generally support a higher diversity of aquatic species (Schlosser 1982; Pearsons et al., 1992; Gurnell et al., 1995).

Chemical pollution of streams and rivers diminishes stream health and harms aquatic species. The major categories of chemical pollutants are (1) oxygen-depleting sources such as manure, ammonia, and organic wastes; (2) nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from both fertilizers

and animal wastes; (3) acids from mining or industrial effluents; and (4) contaminants such as pesticides, salts, metals, and pharmaceuticals. It is important to note that the effects of many chemicals depend on multiple factors. For example, an increase in the pH caused by excessive algal plant growth may cause an otherwise safe concentration of ammonia to become toxic.

Finally, it is important to recognize that healthy, resilient streams, riparian areas and floodplains operate as a connected stream corridor system. Lateral exchange of water and materials between a stream and its floodplain is the driving force for nutrient dynamics in the stream corridor community. Primary productivity of floodplain habitats is closely tied to *hydroperiod*, or the length of time the floodplain is inundated or saturated with water. Productivity is greatest in wetlands with pulsed flooding (i.e., periodic inundation and drying) and high nutrient input, and lower in drained or permanently flooded conditions. Floodplains and their associated wetlands thus play a critical role in the health of the stream itself. An example would be the removal of nitrogen (denitrification) in floodwaters by floodplain wetlands (Forshay and Stanley, 2005).

Riparian wetlands may also influence stream channel morphology and flows, buffering the stream channel against the physical effects of high flows by dissipating energy as waters spread out onto the floodplain. In many instances, these floodplains provide refuge habitat for aquatic species, especially during flood events. As stream flows recede, riparian wetlands provide water storage, slowly releasing water and aquatic organisms back to the stream through surface and subsurface transport, thereby influencing stream base flows during drier times of the year.

In summary, physical, chemical and biological elements that influence stream conditions also provide indicators of how well a stream is functioning and responding to natural disturbances (e.g., floods) or human actions (e.g., land clearing). A stream corridor that maintains key ecological and physical functions over time is a healthy, resilient ecosystem that can support diverse communities of aquatic species.

## **What is the stream type? Stream Classification**

A healthy stream will look and function differently depending on its location or ecological setting. A mountain stream that flows through a narrow valley over a shale bedrock bottom, is very different from a stream that flows through a wide valley over alluvial deposits. Similarly, coastal streams are different from piedmont streams and desert canyon streams. Accurately classifying the type of stream in an area of interest is important to assessing the current condition, or health, of that particular stream. Stream classification is a way to account for the effects of natural variation in streams and helps avoid comparing the conditions of streams of different classes. A stream's **classification** provides a point of reference for subsequent assessments that may occur at the site. Ideally a separate SVAP modification should be developed for each stream class, but realistically this is not possible. At best, states should identify only as many stream classes as are necessary to account for natural variation in streams caused by the prevailing environmental influences of their region. Some important factors to consider are MLRA or **ecoregion**, **drainage area**, and **gradient**. *Ecoregions* are geographic areas in which ecosystems are expected to be similar. *Drainage area* is the size of the area of a watershed (catchment or basin). *Gradient* is the slope of a stream. For example, an SVAP2 modification may be warranted for low gradient, wadeable streams of the northern Piedmont of North Carolina. References regarding Stream Classification can be found in Appendix 1.

NRCS state offices are responsible for SVAP2 modifications. Because there are many stream classification systems, states should select the one most suitable to their ecoregion and decide the scale at which their SVAP2 will be modified or refined (e.g., for all stream classes within the state, for all stream classes within an ecoregion of the state, or for several stream classes within an ecoregion). Enough “upfront” work should be done by state offices in tailoring the protocol to permit field offices to use it without further modification. This includes refining and evaluating the protocol, modifying the element criteria and scoring to reflect local conditions, and delineating the geographic boundaries for its intended use.

## **Reference Sites**

One of the most difficult challenges associated with evaluating a stream’s quality or existing condition is the determination of historic and potential conditions. An accurate assessment of the stream requires a benchmark of, or reference to, what a healthy stream in the targeted ecoregions should look like. We often assume that historic conditions of streams were healthy or resilient after disturbances. However, it is unrealistic to expect that all stream systems can potentially be as resilient as they were prior to extensive land use activity. In such cases, land managers often identify a benchmark condition that reflects the “least impaired conditions” of the ecoregion. Under this scenario, the SVAP2 would be adapted to reflect the stream corridor conditions to which managers are aspiring to.

Reference sites represent the range of conditions that potentially exist for a particular class of stream. Least-impaired reference sites represent the best conditions attainable, and most-impaired reference sites the worst. One challenge in selecting least-impaired reference sites is that there are few streams left, especially in agricultural landscapes that have not been influenced by human actions. Accessible, least-impaired reference sites are important not only because they define a benchmark for attainable conditions, but they also serve as demonstration areas for field staff to observe the characteristics of the region’s best streams that would result in the highest possible SVAP2 scores. A common pitfall in reference site selection is the failure to survey a wide enough area to find sites that are truly least-impaired and are representative of an entire class of stream. Another common problem, particularly in highly altered landscapes, is the failure to identify sites that are most-impaired. In addition to setting the lower “bar” of the stream health gradient, most-impaired sites provide a clear illustration of how streams are not supposed to look, and serve as models for improvement actions. Remember, reference sites should represent an entire stream class and thus may be located in another county or state. Therefore, it helps if they can be identified at a state or higher level and with the help of state agencies that may have already established reference sites that represent a full range of human perturbations for a given class of stream.

## Using This Protocol

This protocol is intended for use in the field with the landowner. Conducting the assessment with the landowner provides an opportunity to discuss natural resource concerns and conservation opportunities. Before leaving the office to assess a stream, a preliminary assessment of watershed features should be conducted in the field office. The Stream Visual Assessment Summary Sheet provides a standardized form for recording information and data collected during both the preliminary and field portions of the assessment.

### 1. Preliminary Assessment of the Stream's Watershed:

- Become familiar with watershed conditions* before going to the assessment site. Stream conditions are influenced by the entire watershed including uplands that surround the assessment site. Changes in upland conditions can change the discharge, timing, or duration of stream-flow events that affect stream conditions. Aerial photographs, topographic maps, stream gages and any other source of data available can be used to obtain information about watershed conditions before conducting the SVAP2 on a stream. State agencies, watershed groups, local landowners, and federal land managers are likely to already have documented relevant information about watershed conditions. Ecoregion descriptions, size of the watershed (drainage area) and upland practices often explain conditions at the assessment site and are helpful for addressing some of the elements in SVAP2.
- Gather land use information about the watershed* to provide a context for the stream to be assessed and a better understanding of the conditions at the site. For example, road crossings and water control structures may prevent movement of aquatic species. Mining, agriculture, and urbanization, all influence water quality and quantity as well as stream corridor condition.
- Review available water resource information* for the watershed and stream reach. Water control structures and/or activities outside of your assessment reach may be affecting streamflow. Ask the landowner if he or she is aware of upstream withdrawals (e.g., surface diversions or pump stations), drains, or any features that affect the amount of instream flow during the year. The Environmental Protection Agency's Surf Your Watershed website (<http://www.epa.gov/surf>) is also a good source of information.
- Consult your state fish and wildlife agency* regarding stream and riparian species likely to be present in the reach and whether fish passage to or from the area is limited.
- Become familiar with potential riparian plant species and community types* appropriate to the area to be assessed.

## 2. Delineating the Assessment Reach:

You need to assess one or more representative reaches, evaluate conditions on both sides of the stream, and indicate left and right bank conditions as you look downstream. A *reach* is a length of stream with relatively consistent gradient and channel form. An *assessment reach for this protocol is, at a minimum, a length of stream equal to 12 times the bankfull channel width*. Longer reaches may be appropriate, depending on the objectives of the assessment.

*Bankfull channel width* is the stream width at the bankfull discharge, or flow rate that forms and controls the shape and size of the active channel. *Bankfull discharge* or *bankfull flow* is the flow rate at which the stream begins to move onto its active floodplain if one is present. On average, the bankfull discharge occurs every 1.5 to 2 years, depending on local stream channel and weather conditions. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between baseflow (“low flow”), bankfull flow, and the floodplain.

*Bankfull width* is determined by locating the first *flat* depositional surface occurring above the bed of the stream. The lowest elevation at which the bankfull surface could occur is at the top of the point bars or other sediment deposits in the channel bed. These generally occur on the inside of the meanders (white part of the figure below). Other indicators of bankfull elevation include (1) a break in slope on the bank, (2) vegetation changes or exposed roots, (3) a change in the particle size of bank material, and (4) wood or small debris left from high waters. In temperate areas of the country, vegetation can grow into depositional bars below some bankfull indicators. Therefore, look for signs of *well established* vegetation at the elevation level with the top of point bars to help identify bankfull stage.

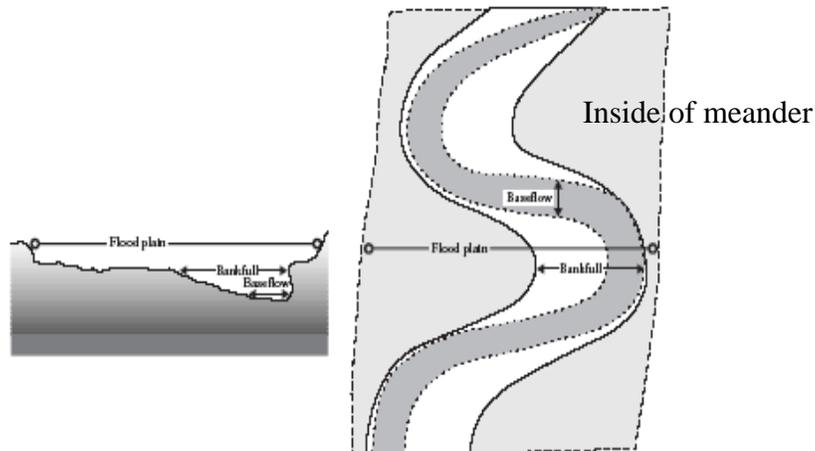


Figure 2: Baseflow, bankfull, and floodplain locations (Rosgen, 1996)

The following videos and documents are excellent resources to assist field personnel in identifying bankfull discharge indicators across the coterminous United States. They can be downloaded from: <http://www.stream.fs.fed.us>. Click on “Publications and Products.”

1. *A Guide to Field Identification of Bankfull Stage in the Western United States*, principally narrated by Luna B. Leopold.
2. *Identifying Bankfull Stage in Forested Streams of the Eastern United States*, principally narrated by M. Gordon Wolman.
3. *Guide to Identification of Bankfull Stage in the Northeastern United States*. USDA General Technical Report (RMRS-GTR-133-CD). Fort Collins, CO.
4. Harrelson, C., L. Rawlins and J. P. Potyondy (1994). Stream Channel Reference Sites: An Illustrated Guide to Field Technique. USDA General Technical Report (RM-245): 61.

Often the stream length within the landowner's property boundaries is shorter than the minimum length needed to adequately determine conditions using the SVAP2. If permission is received to cross property boundaries, it is appropriate to do so in order to evaluate an adequate length of the stream. If crossing property boundaries is not an option, the assessment reach length will be the length that is within the property boundaries. When large sections of stream are to be assessed and there are constraints that prohibit assessing the entire stream length, representative reaches of the stream on the property should be "sub-sampled." Using aerial photographs, topographic maps and various stream classification methods, streams can be stratified into smaller units (stream reaches) that share common physical characteristics such as stream gradient and average bankfull width. The degree of stratification will depend on the reason you are assessing the stream. If you are simply providing an opportunity for the landowner to learn about the general conditions of the stream, perhaps only one reach is assessed. If the SVAP2 is being conducted to identify potential improvement actions, the entire stream within the property should be assessed. SVAP2 scores can then be used as a preliminary and qualitative evaluation of conditions. Low scores likely indicate more quantitative assessments of geomorphic, hydrological, and biological features of the stream corridor are needed to determine what stressors are causing the problems identified. Quantitative assessments should only be completed by trained specialists (i.e., stream ecologists, hydrologists, geomorphologists, hydraulic engineers) to assure the complex features influencing stream conditions are being evaluated as accurately as possible. If there are several stream types (reaches) within the property, multiple Stream Visual Assessments should be completed, one for each reach. Regardless of the situation, the SVAP2 requires field personnel to score four elements based upon the entire length of the stream that is within a single landowner's property. These are: Riparian Area Quantity, Riparian Area Quality, Canopy Cover, and Barriers to Aquatic Species Movement.

### 3. Scoring the Elements of the Stream Visual Assessment Protocol

The SVAP2 ideally should be completed during base flows when habitat feature limitations are likely to be most visible. Each assessment element is scored with a value of zero to 10. Some of the 16 elements, for example *Salinity*, may not be relevant to the stream you are assessing. Score only those elements appropriate to the ecological setting of the stream. *Livestock or Human Waste* should be scored in all reach assessments.

Background information is provided for each assessment element as well as a description of “*what to look for.*” Using Part 2B of the *Stream Visual Assessment Protocol Summary Sheet*, record the score that best fits the observations you make in the assessment reach. Base your observations on the descriptions in the matrix provided for each element assessed. Assign a score that applies to the conditions you observe in the assessment reach. If the conditions of the stream fit descriptions that occur in more than one column of the matrix, score the element based on the lower valued descriptions. For example, when scoring the element Hydrological Alteration, if bankfull flows occur according to the natural flow regime (Score 10 -9 column) but there is a water control structure present (Score 8-7 column), assign the score based on the lowest scoring indicator present within the reach, which in this case would be an 8 or 7. Again, evaluate conditions on both sides of the stream, and note left bank and right bank conditions as you look downstream.

The complete assessment is recorded on the four-page Summary Sheet which consists of two principal sections: (1) Preliminary Watershed Assessment and (2) Field Assessment.

Section 1 records basic information about the watershed and reach, such as drainage area, location, and land uses. Space is provided for a description of the reach, which may be useful to locate the reach or illustrate problem areas. On this worksheet indicate tributaries, presence of drainage ditches, and irrigation ditches; note springs and ponds that drain to the stream; include road crossings and note whether they are fords, culverts, or bridges.

Section 2 is used to record the scores for up to 16 assessment elements. Score an element by comparing your observations to the descriptions provided. If you have difficulty matching descriptions, try to compare what you are observing to the conditions at reference sites for your area. Again, some of the elements may not be applicable to your site and therefore should not be included in the assessment. The overall assessment score is determined by adding the values for each element and dividing by the number of elements assessed. For example, if your scores add up to 76 and you used 12 assessment elements, you would have an overall assessment value of 6.3, which is classified as *FAIR*. This value provides a numerical score of the environmental condition of the stream reach. This value can be used as a general statement about the "state of the environment" of the stream or (over time) as an indicator of trends in condition.

## Element 1. Channel Condition

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Channel Condition

The shape of a stream channel changes constantly, imperceptibly or dramatically, depending on the condition of the stream corridor (channel, riparian area, and floodplain) and how it transports water and materials. Channel condition is a description of the *geomorphic* stage of the channel as it adjusts its shape relative to its floodplain. Channel adjustments resulting in a dramatic drop in streambed elevation (incision or degradation) or excessive deposition of bedload that raises the bed elevation (aggradation), affect the degree of bank shear and often decrease stream channel stability. Such channel adjustments can have substantial effects on the condition of streams, adjacent riparian areas, associated habitats, and their biota. For example, the greater the incision in a channel, the more it is separated from its floodplain, both physically and ecologically. Conversely, the greater the aggradation, the wider and shallower a stream becomes, which can affect riparian vegetation, surface water temperatures and stream and riparian habitat features.

Conceptual models of how a channel evolves, or adjusts over time illustrate the sequence of geomorphic changes in a stream that result from disturbances in the watershed. Such sequences are useful for evaluating trends in channel condition. The stages of the Schumm Channel Evolution Model (CEM), as shown in Figure 3, provide a visual orientation of the pattern of stream bed adjustment in an incising stream, its gradual detachment from the existing floodplain, and eventual formation of a new floodplain at a lower elevation. A similar model by Simon (1989) is also described in the *Stream Corridor Restoration Handbook* (FISRWG, 1998) available in most NRCS field offices.

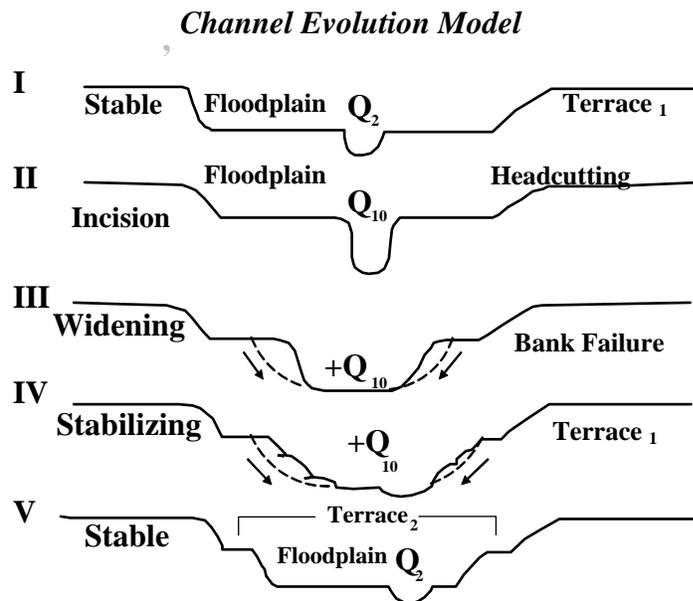


Figure 3. Channel Evolution Model, after Schumm, Harvey and Watson, 1984.  $Q_2$  indicates a flood interval of 2 years;  $Q_{10}$  indicates an interval of 10 years.

Stage I channels are generally stable and have frequent interaction with their floodplains. The relative stability of the stream bed and banks is due to the fact that the stream and its floodplain are connected and flooding occurs at regular intervals (e.g.,  $Q_2$ ). Consequently, the stream's banks and floodplain are well-vegetated. Depositional areas (bars), if present, form a gradual transition into the active floodplain, as shown by the arrow in Photo 1.

**Photo 1: CEM Stage 1 - Typically excellent channel condition with natural bank protection.**



Land-use activities that increase runoff, such as land-clearing, paving, or channel straightening often result in channel incision processes characteristic of stage II in channel evolution. The height of the banks increases due to downcutting of the channel and the stream and floodplain have less frequent interaction. Bank vegetation becomes stressed and banks are prone to failure. Once failures begin, the channel widening of stage III begins. A Stage II channel is typically narrower at the bed relative to the depth (often referred to as low width-to-depth ratio) than a stage III channel. A stage II channel is in an active downward trend in condition and active head-cuts are often present (Photo 2).

**Photo 2: CEM stage II. Poor channel condition, head cuts common.**



During stage III, bank failures increase the formation of bars located next to the now relatively vertical banks. In stage III, alternating point bars are typically forming on opposite banks adjacent to vertical banks (Photo 3). Channel widening continues until the stream bed is wide enough to disperse stream flows, and slow the water, beginning stage IV in channel evolution. Bank vegetation loss continues.

**Photo 3: CEM stage III, with bars adjacent to vertical banks**



During stage IV, sediments begin to build up in the channel instead of moving downstream, aggrading the bed. Eventually, vegetation begins to establish in the sediment deposited along the edge of the stream, creating channel roughness and further slowing the flow. An early stage IV channel indicates relatively poor conditions, while a late stage IV channel indicates an improving trend in channel condition. At this stage, the stream has become more sinuous. Alternating bar features are apparent.

Stage V begins when a new floodplain begins to form. Early in stage V, bank vegetation may not be fully established and some bank erosion is likely. In a late stage V, the original active floodplain from stage I is now a high terrace and the evolution of a stage I channel begins, with a new floodplain developing at a lower elevation than the terrace (Photo 4).

**Photo 4: CEM stage V channel with developing floodplain (left) and “abandoned floodplain,” now a terrace, behind trees on right side of stream**



Keep this conceptual channel evolution model in mind as you visually assess the characteristics of the stream. In areas where heavy vegetation occurs naturally due to higher annual precipitation, eroded banks and slightly incised channels may be masked and consequently harder to observe. In these areas, try to observe bank features from a location near the channel

bed. In using the scoring matrix that follows, note that a channel that is either incising or aggrading cannot score higher than an 8. Use the upper right portion of the matrix to score incising or incised channel reaches. Use the lower right portion of the matrix to score aggrading channel reaches.

**Element 1. Channel Condition Scoring Matrix**

<b>Natural, stable channel with established bank vegetation.</b>	<b>If channel is incising (appears to be downcutting or degrading), score this element based on the descriptions in the upper section of the matrix:</b>											
<p>No discernible signs of incision (such as vertical banks) or aggradation (such as very shallow multiple channels);</p> <p>Active channel and floodplain are connected throughout reach, and flooded at natural intervals;</p> <p>Streambanks low with few or no bank failures;</p> <p>Stage I : Score 10 Stage V: Score 9 (if terrace is visible)</p>	<p>Evidence of past incision and some recovery; some bank erosion possible;</p> <p>Active channel and floodplain are connected in <i>most</i> areas, inundated seasonally;</p> <p>Streambanks may be low or appear to be steepening;</p> <p>Top of point bars are below active floodplain.</p> <p>Stage I: Score 8 Stage V: Score 7-8 Stage IV: Score 6</p>	<p>Active incision evident; plants are stressed , dying or falling in channel;</p> <p>Active channel appears to be disconnected from the floodplain, with infrequent or no inundation;</p> <p>Steep banks, bank failures evident or imminent ;</p> <p>Point bars located adjacent to steep banks.</p> <p>Stage IV: Score 5 Stage III: Score 4 Stage II: Score 3</p>	<p>Headcuts or surface cracks on banks; active incision; vegetation very sparse;</p> <p>Little or no connection between floodplain and stream channel, and no inundation;</p> <p>Steep streambanks and failures prominent;</p> <p>Point bars, if present, located adjacent to steep banks.</p> <p>Stage II or III, scores ranging from 2 to 0, depending on severity.</p>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>If channel is aggrading (appears to be filling in and is relatively wide and shallow), score this element based on the descriptions in the lower section of the matrix:</b>												
<p>No more than 1 bar forming in channel</p>	<p>Minimal lateral migration and bank erosion;</p> <p>A few shallow places in reach, due to sediment deposits;</p> <p>Minimal bar formation (less than 3).</p>	<p>Moderate lateral migration and bank erosion;</p> <p>Deposition of sediments causing channel to be very shallow in places;</p> <p>3-4 bars in channel</p>	<p>Severe lateral channel migration, and bank erosion;</p> <p>Deposition of sediments causing channel to be very shallow in reach;</p> <p>Braided channels (5 or more bars in channel).</p>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>											

**What to look for:** State Offices are encouraged to develop photo series appropriate to their particular area. Photos shown here are from all regions of the US.

- ☑ **Channel is not incising or aggrading.** A score of 10 is appropriate for a stage I channel (Photo 5) with a frequently inundated floodplain that often covers the width of the valley. A late stage V channel with a lower active (frequently flooded) floodplain, well-established vegetation on the banks, and a higher terrace (abandoned floodplain) from previous channel evolutions would score 9 (Photo 6).



**Photo 5: CEM stage 1. Score: 10**



**Photo 6: CEM stage 5. Score: 9**

- ☑ **Channel appears to be incising.** Scores of 8, 7, or 6 indicate *degrees* of observable detachment between the active bankfull channel and the floodplain. The top of the point bars are below the elevation of the floodplain. A stage I or V channel that has an active, but *less frequent* out-of-bank flow into the floodplain would score an 8 (Photos 7 and 8).



**Photo 7: CEM stage I. Point bars below bank. Score: 8**



**Photo 8: CEM stage V. Slight floodplain detachment. Score: 8**

- ☑ **Channel is incising.** If active channel erosion is apparent on the outside of meanders of a stage V and it is forming a new floodplain and out-of-bank flows still occur, lower the score to a 7 (Photo 9 ).



**Photo 9: CEM stage V. Score: 7**

- ☑ **Channel is incising.** Active bank erosion is causing sediment build up in channel, forming depositional features of a stage IV channel. The channel is still adjusting its width. If top of bars are below active floodplain, score a 6 (Photo 10). Lower score to 5 if top of bars of the stage IV channel are *adjacent* to steep banks (Photo 11).

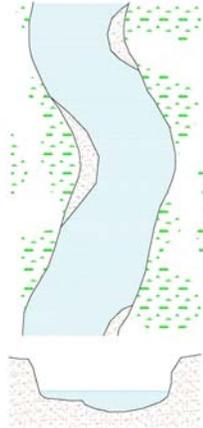


**Photo 10: CEM stage IV. Score: 6**



**Photo 11: CEM stage IV. Score: 5**

- ☑ **Channel is incising.** There is disconnect between the floodplain and the bankfull channel (Photo 12), with riparian vegetation compromised by lack of seasonal flooding and lowered water table. Channel appears to be widening in areas of sediment build-up, typical of Stage III channels (score 4).



**Photo 12: CEM stage III. Score: 4**  
**Note point bar adjacent to steep bank**  
**(where person is standing).**

- ☑ **Channel is incising,** with no connection between the active floodplain and the vegetation. Tensile cracks or headcuts often present in a Stage II channel; score would be a 3 (Photo 13).



**Photo 13; CEM, stage II. Score: 3**

- ☑ **Channel is deeply incised** and completely disconnected from floodplain, usually characteristic of a Stage II or III depending on whether channel widening has begun. Scores range from 2 to 0 depending on observed conditions (Photos 14 and 15).



**Photo 14: CEM stage III, with active point bars forming. Score: 2 or 1.**



**Photo 15: CEM stage II. Score: 1**

Guide to Photos Ratings and CEM Stage		
Photo No	CEM Stage	SVAP Score
1	I	10
2	II	1-0
3	III	4
4	V	9
5	I	10
6	V	9
7	I	8
8	V	8
9	V	7
10	IV	6
11	IV	5
12	III	4
13	II	3
14	III	2 - 1
15	II	1 - 0

***What to look for (aggrading channels):***

The removal of willows and other kinds of riparian vegetation will decrease bank stability and contribute to streambank failure. Excessive streambank failure and *lateral migration* (the process of a stream shifting from side to side within a valley or other confinement) often result in wider and shallower channels unable to transport sediments downstream. Excessive channel filling occurs when a stream channel can no longer transport both the size and load of sediments associated with the watershed runoff conditions. Streams with no pools that previously had pools and riffles are most likely aggraded. Stream

segments that are excessively wide and shallow with multiple center bars are often aggraded. Streams that once maintained single- or dual-threaded channel patterns, but have converted to a braided system (three or more channels at bankfull discharge), are typically aggraded. Excessively aggraded systems are unstable and channel adjustments from side to side can be rapid.

- ☑ **Channel is aggrading.** The streambed appears to be filling with sediment faster than it can be transported downstream. Deposits appear “over-steepened” and unstable, as in Photo 18. Channel appears to be wider and shallower than in other reaches of stream. Some bank erosion is evident. Some mid- channel bars may be forming or present. Bed features such as pools and riffles appear to be less discernable or segregated. Lateral migration of channel is apparent. Point bar(s) may be separated from their floodplain. Scores range from 8 to 6 depending on degree of impairment from stable reference conditions (Photos 16, 17 and 18).



**Photo 16: Aggrading channel with point bar separated from floodplain. Score: 8**



**Photo 17: Aggrading channel with shallow areas in reach. Score: 6 -7**

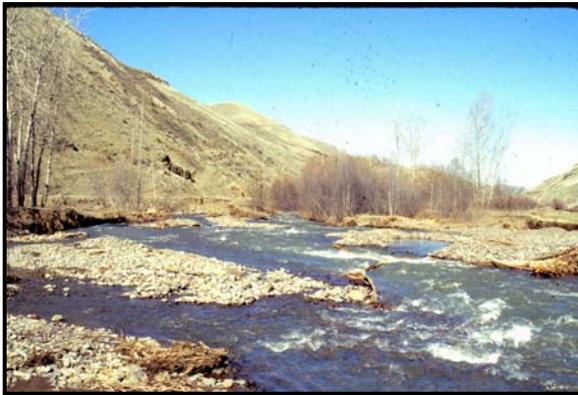
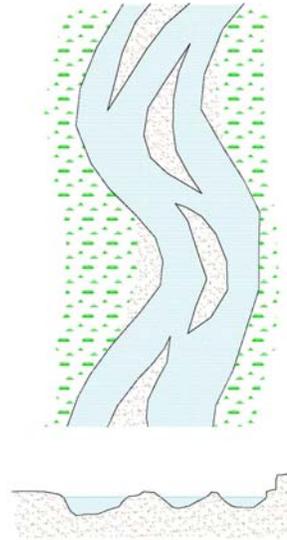


**Photo 18: Aggrading channel, downward trend with latently migration evident. Score: 5**

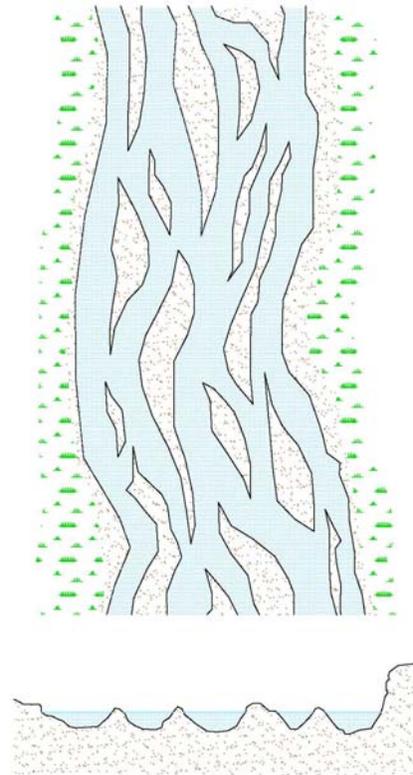
- Channel is aggrading.** Channel is wide and shallow and the banks are actively eroding. Extensive deposition such as center bars and side bars are present. The stream bed appears to have less pool-riffle feature with a more consistent riffle-plane bed. Bank vegetation is sparse. Pools that would have typically formed in the meander bend portion are shallow and featureless. Scores range from 5 to 9 (Photo 19).



**Photo 19: Multiple aggraded wide and shallow channels, with actively eroding streambanks. Score: 4**



**Photo 20: Aggraded channel. Score: 2**



**Photo 21: Aggraded channel. Score: 1-0**

- ☑ **Channel is aggrading.** Channel is extremely wide and shallow with interconnected channels (Photos 20 and 21). Streambanks are typically unstable and highly eroded with sparse vegetation. Excessive deposition is common throughout the active channel. Multiple bars, both center and side bars, are located throughout the active channel. Lateral migration is common.

*As you conclude assessment of this element of SVAP, remember that **Channel Condition** is of critical importance to overall stream health, yet difficult to visually assess accurately. Scores of less than 5 for channel condition may indicate substantial channel adjustments are occurring and a quantitative assessment by well-trained specialists is warranted.*

## **ELEMENT 2. Hydrologic Alteration**

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Hydrologic Alteration

Hydrologic alteration is the degree to which *hydrology* and stream flow conditions differ from natural, unregulated flow patterns. Streamflow regime affects the distribution and abundance of stream species and influences the health of streams through several physical and chemical processes (Allan, 1995; Poff et al., 1997). Naturally occurring daily and annual flow variations provide ecological benefits to floodplain ecosystems and the aquatic and terrestrial organisms that depend upon them (Poff and Ward, 1989). With respect to fish, natural stream flow variations provide cues for spawning, egg hatching, rearing, and swimming to off-channel floodplain habitats for feeding or reproduction, and upstream or downstream migration (Junk et al., 1989).

The full range of streamflow at any point in a given watershed is essential in maintaining the complex physical and biological structures and functions of a stream corridor. The geometry, composition, and appearance of a stream channel and its adjacent floodplain are largely the result of fluvial processes that govern a dynamic equilibrium between streamflow, the materials it carries, and riparian vegetation (Lane, 1955; Leopold et al., 1964). Bankfull and higher flows are important factors that control stream channel shape and function and maintain physical habitat for animals and plants (Wolman and Miller, 1960). Generally, bankfull flow occurs every 1 to 2 years in unregulated alluvial rivers (Wolman and Leopold, 1957) and lasts for only a few days each year. However, numerous researchers have recorded bankfull flow return intervals greater than 2 years (Williams, 1978), especially in arid and semi-arid settings such as we experience in the southwestern US (Wolman and Gerson, 1978). Conversely, in regions dominated by frequent, prolonged rainfall, bankfull flow can occur once or twice yearly. Consequently, the 2-year event should be considered as only a coarse estimate of bankfull flow. The reader is encouraged to seek additional assistance when working in streams where streamflow is generated by monsoonal precipitation or other extreme climatic events, or affected by significant flow regulation because of upstream reservoirs, pump plants, or diversions.

Water and land management practices that alter the timing, duration, magnitude, frequency, or rate of change of streamflow patterns can substantially alter riparian and instream habitat along regulated stream reaches (Calow and Petts, 1994). Water withdrawals, watershed and floodplain development, agricultural or wastewater effluents, and practices that change surface runoff (e.g.,

dikes and levees) or subsurface drainage (e.g., tile drainage systems) affect the amount and quality of water in a stream channel across the water year.

The effects of water withdrawals on aquatic resources and stream condition can usually be readily observed (especially during low-flow periods). However, augmenting streamflow with irrigation runoff or stormwater from municipal areas also often results in adverse physical and biological impacts. For example, the total runoff volume from a one-acre parking lot is about 16 times that produced by an undeveloped acre of meadow (Schueler, 1994). Additionally, peak discharge, velocity, and time of concentration also increase significantly when natural landscapes are replaced by impervious surfaces (Booth, 1990). Further, runoff introduces pollutants to waterways, and often results in rapid physical deterioration and aquatic community changes (Booth and Jackson, 1997). Finally, heavy grazing and clearcutting often have similar, although typically less severe, effects (Platts, 1991; Jones and Grant, 1996).

**Element 2. Hydrologic Alteration Scoring Matrix**

Bankfull or higher flows occur according to the flow regime that is characteristic of the site, generally every 1 to 2 years, and no dams, dikes, or development in the floodplain <sup>‡</sup> , or water control structures are present ; and natural flow regime <sup>†</sup> prevails.	Bankfull or higher flows occur only once every 3 to 5 years, or less often than the local natural flow regime. Developments in the floodplain, stream water withdrawals, flow augmentation, or water control structures may be present <i>but</i> do not significantly alter the natural flow regime <sup>†</sup> .	Bankfull or higher flows occur only once every 6 to 10 years, or less often than the local natural flow regime. Developments in the floodplain, stream water withdrawals, flow augmentation, or water control structures alter the natural flow regime <sup>†</sup> .	Bankfull or higher flows rarely occur. Stream water withdrawals completely de-water channel; and/or flow augmentation, stormwater, or urban runoff discharges directly into stream and severely alters the natural flow regime <sup>†</sup> .
<b>10    9</b>	<b>8    7    6</b>	<b>5    4    3</b>	<b>2    1    0</b>

<sup>‡</sup> “Development in the floodplain” refers to transportation infrastructure (i.e., roads, railways, etc.), commercial or residential development, land conversion for agriculture or other uses, and similar activities that alter the timing, concentration, and delivery of precipitation as surface runoff or subsurface drainage.

<sup>†</sup> As used here, “natural flow regime” refers to streamflow patterns unaffected by water withdrawals, floodplain development, agricultural or wastewater effluents, and practices that change surface runoff (e.g., dikes and levees) or subsurface drainage (e.g., tile drainage systems).

**What to look for:**

- Ask the landowner about the frequency of bankfull, overbank, and low flows, referring to Figure 2 as needed. Be cautious—water in an adjacent field does not necessarily indicate natural flooding. The water may have flowed overland from a low spot in the bank outside the assessment reach or be an artifact of irrigation or drainage management.

- ☑ Look for indicators that help identify bankfull stage (refer to Channel Condition element). If you see newly deposited debris (e.g., leaves, branches, etc.) or unvegetated mineral sediments (mud lines, sands and silts) near the edge of the active channel it is very likely that bankfull or higher flows have occurred in recent months.
- ☑ If channel bars are present, inspect the type and general age of vegetation. A vegetative community dominated by invasive species or seedlings less than two years old is a good indicator that bankfull or higher flows have occurred in the last two years, or with some regularity. An absence of vegetation on bars could be interpreted in the same manner, unless the stream is braided (three or more channels with excessive sand, gravel and/or cobble substrates and a notable lack of permanent vegetation) and/or streamflow is significantly regulated.
- ☑ Evidence of flooding includes high water marks (such as water stain lines), sediment deposits, or stream debris well above the stream channel. Look for these on streambanks, trees or rocks, or other structures (such as bridge pilings or culverts).
- ☑ Water control structures are any feature that alters streamflow. Examples commonly include stream surface intakes (e.g., pump stations, flashboard or full-round risers, drop pipes, stop log structures, screw or flap gate structures), streamside infiltration galleries or ring wells, diversions, dikes, or dams (both temporary and permanent). Any water control structures that divert water directly out of a stream should be suitably “screened” to prevent entrapment or capture of fish.

### **ELEMENT 3. Bank Condition**

#### Description and Rational for Assessing Bank Condition

Stable streambanks are essential components of functional physical habitat and unimpaired biological communities. An excess of fine sediment in streams impacts aquatic species assemblages (Waters, 1995), and results in significant water quality impacts with severe economic consequences (Pons, 2003). Simon et al. (2000) found that unstable streambanks can contribute as much as 85 percent of the total sediment yield in an entire watershed. Severely unstable streambanks can result in the loss of valuable farmland, force changes in water tables, and endanger transportation infrastructure and other floodplain features.

Bank erosion is a natural mechanism in alluvial rivers, cannot be totally eradicated, and provides important physical and ecological functions to the evolution of stream channels and floodplains (Wolman and Leopold, 1957; Hooke and Redmond, 1992). Excessive bank erosion usually occurs where riparian areas are degraded or when a stream is unstable because of changes in land management practices, hydrology, sediment dynamics, or isolation from its floodplain. Bank failures are generally attributed to the interaction of fluvial and gravitational forces (Thorne, 1982)—high, steep banks with undercutting occurring at the base of the slopes are very prone to erosion or collapse.

A healthy riparian corridor with a well-vegetated floodplain contributes to bank stability. The roots of some perennial grasses, sedges, and woody vegetation can help hold bank soils together

and physically protect the bank from scour during bankfull and higher flow events. Therefore, the type of vegetation covering streambanks is an important component of bank stability. For example, many trees, shrubs, sedges, and rushes have the type of root masses capable of withstanding high streamflow events, while Kentucky bluegrass does not. Further, native riparian vegetation generally provides better erosion resistance and bank stability than invasive species (Tickner et al., 2001). Finally, surface and subsurface soil types also influence bank stability. For example, banks with a thin soil cover over gravel or sand are more prone to collapse than are banks with deep, cohesive soil layers.

**Element 3. Bank Condition Scoring Matrix**

Banks are stable; protected by roots of natural vegetation, wood, and rock <sup>†</sup> ;	Banks are moderately stable, protected by roots of natural vegetation, wood, or rock or a combination of materials;	Banks are moderately unstable; very little protection of banks by roots of natural wood, vegetation, or rock;	Banks are unstable; no bank protection with roots, wood, rock or vegetation;
No man-made structures present on bank;	Limited number of structures present on bank;	Man-made structures cover more than half of reach or entire bank;	Riprap, and/or other structures dominate banks;
No excessive erosion or bank failures <sup>‡</sup> ;	Evidence of erosion or bank failures, some with re-establishment of vegetation;	Excessive bank erosion or active bank failures;	Numerous active bank failures;
No recreational or livestock access.	Recreational use and, or grazing do not negatively impact bank condition.	Recreational and/or livestock use are contributing to bank instability.	Recreational and/or livestock use are contributing to bank instability.
Right Bank	10 9 8 7 6	5 4 3	2 1 0
Left Bank	10 9 8 7 6	5 4 3	2 1 0

<sup>†</sup> Natural wood and rock does not mean riprap, gabions, log cribs, or other man-made revetments.

<sup>‡</sup> “Bank failure” refers to a section of streambank that collapses and falls into the stream, usually because of slope instability.

**Score each bank individually and average the total to report a single, composite Bank Condition Score.**

**What to look for:**

- Evaluate the entire length of all banks along the assessment reach, and then consider the proportion of unstable to stable banks. Obviously, if a quantifiable portion of the reach shows signs of accelerated erosion or bank failures, bank stability is a problem and should be scored as such. Conversely, if the majority of the reach shows minimal erosion

and no signs of bank failure, bank stability is likely good. Finally, it is best to score this element during the summer or whenever flows in your assessment reach are low.

- ☑ Signs of erosion and possible bank stability problems include unvegetated stretches, exposed tree roots, and scalloped edges (sections of eroded bank between relatively intact sections).
- ☑ When observing banks from within the active channel or below bankfull elevation, look for piping holes, rills, and or gullies. Each of these concentrated flow paths is associated with eventual bank stability problems or outright failures.
- ☑ Look for tension cracks while walking along streambanks. Tension cracks will appear as vertical fissures or crevices running along the top of the streambank roughly parallel to the flow.
- ☑ Evidence of construction, vehicular, or animal paths near banks or grazing areas leading directly to the water's edge suggest conditions that may lead to bank collapse.
- ☑ Sections of streambank lying instream adjacent to existing banks are a telltale sign of active bank erosion and instability.



Photo 22: Streambank with tension crack

## **ELEMENTS 4 and 5. Riparian Area Quantity and Quality**

### Description and Rational for Assessing Riparian Area Conditions

Riparian areas are the vegetated areas adjacent to stream channels that function as transitional areas between the stream and uplands. Riparian vegetation thrives on the moisture provided by stream flow and ground water associated with the stream corridor. Riparian areas may or may not include floodplains and associated wetlands, depending on the valley form of the stream corridor. For example, steep mountainous streams in narrow V-shaped valleys often do not have obvious floodplains. Riparian areas are among the most biologically diverse habitats of landscapes and they are sources of wood, leaves, and organic matter for the stream. These areas

provide important habitat and travel corridors for numerous plants, insects, amphibians, birds, and mammals.

Ecological processes that occur in the stream corridor are linked to those in uplands via intact riparian areas. Riparian areas themselves also provide valuable functions that maintain or improve stream and floodplain conditions (see below). The capacity for riparian areas to sustain these functions depends in part on the quality and quantity of the riparian vegetation and how it interacts with the stream ecosystem. The *quality* of the riparian area increases with the width, complexity and linear extent of its vegetation along a stream. A complex riparian community consists of diverse plant species native to the site or functioning similarly to native species, with multiple age-classes providing vertical structural diversity suitable for the site. As discussed previously, the quality of riparian areas is influenced by the hydrological features of the stream, as well as upland and bank conditions. Well-established and connected riparian areas provide critical functions for maintaining healthy, resilient stream ecosystems, which include:

- 1) Providing a vegetative filter for surface run-off, reducing pollutants and sediment entering streams, and no concentrated flow from upland areas;
- 2) Providing roughness that slows water and the erosive effects of floodwater;
- 3) Providing root systems that bind soil, protect streambank integrity, and build floodplain surfaces;
- 4) Providing moisture, soil conditions, surface macro-topography and micro-topography, and microclimates for a diversity of riparian plants, animals, and microorganisms;
- 5) Providing shade or overhanging vegetation to maintain cooler water temperatures for aquatic species;
- 6) Providing large wood to forested stream channels, which offers instream cover, creates pools, traps sediments, and provides habitat for stream biota;
- 7) Providing organic material (leaves, twigs, grass) and insects for stream and riparian food chains;
- 8) Providing undercut banks important to fish for hiding and resting; and
- 9) Providing diverse, complex off-channel habitats, such as backwaters, wetlands, and side channels formed by the interaction of streamflow, riparian vegetation, and often large wood. These areas of slower water provide critical refuge during floods for a variety of aquatic species, and serve as rearing areas for juvenile fish.

Well-established riparian areas are critical for stream health. For this reason, it is important to evaluate both the quantity and the quality of the riparian area, and *score the riparian conditions of the entire stream within a property boundary*. Visually score the entire stream if possible. If the stream is too extensive to score using SVAP2, score only the assessment reach visually and use recent aerial photos (less than 2 years old) to score those riparian areas of the stream outside of the assessment reach.

**Element 4. Riparian Area Quantity Scoring Matrix**

Natural plant community extends at least two bankfull widths or over the entire active floodplain and is generally contiguous throughout property.	Natural plant community extends at least one bankfull width or over 1/2 to 2/3 of active floodplain and is generally contiguous throughout property.  Vegetation gaps do not exceed 10% of the estimated length of the stream on the property.	Natural plant community extends at least one-half of the bankfull width or over at least 1/2 of active floodplain.  Vegetation gaps do not exceed 30% of the estimated length of the stream on the property.	Natural plant community extends at least 1/3 of the bankfull width or over 1/4 of active floodplain.  Vegetation gaps exceed 30% of the estimated length of the stream on the property.	Natural plant community extends less than 1/3 of the bankfull width or less than 1/4 of active floodplain.  Vegetation gaps exceed 30% of the estimated length of the stream on the property
<b>Left</b>	<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7</b>	<b>6 5</b>	<b>4 3 2</b>
<b>Right</b>	<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7</b>	<b>6 5</b>	<b>4 3 2</b>

**Score each bank separately.** Scores should represent the entire stream riparian area within the property. Score for this element = left bank score + right bank score /2. If the score of one bank is 7 or greater and the score of the other bank is 4 or less, subtract 2 points from final score.

**What to look for:**

- This element rates the extent of the riparian area on the property (length x width). Estimate the width of the vegetation area from the edge of the active channel outward to where natural riparian vegetation ends and other land-use/land cover begins.
- Vegetation gaps are lengths of streamside with no natural vegetation ecologically suitable for the site and at a density and spacing uncharacteristic of the plant community being assessed. Estimate gap percentage by dividing the total length of gaps by the total length of the stream within the property boundary multiplied by 100.
- For this element, “natural plant community” means one with species native to the site or introduced species that have become “naturalized” and function similarly to native species of designated reference sites, growing at densities characteristic of the site. Regional plant guidebooks are useful to have in the field for scoring this element.
- Compare the width of the riparian area to the bankfull channel width. In steep, V-shaped valley forms there may not be enough room for a floodplain riparian area to extend as far

as one or two active channel widths. In this case, a score may be adjusted to a higher value, based on reference site conditions.

**Element 5. Riparian Area Quality Scoring Matrix**

Natural and diverse riparian vegetation with composition, density and age structure appropriate for the site.	Natural and diverse riparian vegetation with composition, density and age structure appropriate for the site.	Natural vegetation compromised.	Little or no natural vegetation.
No invasive species or concentrated flows through area.	Invasive species present in small numbers (20% cover or less).	Evidence of concentrated flows running through the riparian area.	Evidence of concentrated flows running through the riparian area.
		Invasive species common (>20%<50% cover).	Invasive species widespread (>50% cover).
<b>Left</b>	<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7 6</b>	<b>5 4 3</b>
<b>Right</b>	<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7 6</b>	<b>5 4 3</b>

Score should represent the entire stream riparian area within the property.

Score for this element = left bank score + right bank score /2.

**What to look for:**

- Plant species should be native or naturalized and consist of multiple structural layers (grasses and forbs, shrubs, and some trees). Forested sites should also have a diverse mix of shrubs, understory trees, and new shrub and tree regeneration. Early successional sites (recently disturbed by fire, tree harvesting, grazing, land clearing) should have representative native species (typically herbaceous, woody and tree seedlings). Continually disturbed sites usually have only a few species and often these include non-native invasive species. As “early” vegetation matures, the structure of the plant community becomes more diverse with a multi-layer canopy. Finally, the plant community reaches a mature stage with regeneration, growth and mortality occurring in all layers. In forested streams, mature trees with potential for falling into the stream are present. Regional plant guidebooks are useful for scoring this element.
- Vigorously growing vegetation in the riparian area on both sides of the stream is important for healthy stream and riparian conditions. In doing the assessment, examine both sides of the stream and note on the site diagram (Page 4 of the Summary Sheet) which side of the stream has problems. For the highest ratings, there should be no evidence of concentrated flows through the riparian area that are not adequately buffered or intended to “short-circuit” the riparian area or buffer, and no non-native invasive species.

- ☑ The type, timing, intensity, and extent of activities in riparian areas are critical in determining the impact on these areas. Note these in the summary sheet. Riparian areas that have roads, agricultural activities, residential or commercial structures, excessive animal use, or significant areas of bare soils have reduced functional value for the stream and its watershed.

## ELEMENT 6. Canopy Cover

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Canopy Cover

In forested riparian areas, shading of the stream is important because it keeps water cool and limits algal growth. Cool water has a greater oxygen holding capacity than warm water. In many cases, when streamside trees are removed, the stream is exposed to the warming effects of the sun causing the water temperature to increase for longer periods during the daylight hours and for more days during the year. This shift in light intensity and temperature often causes a decline in the numbers of certain species of fish, insects, and other invertebrates and some aquatic plants. They may be replaced altogether by other species that are more tolerant of increased light intensity, lower dissolved oxygen, and warmer water temperature. For example, trout and salmon require cool, oxygen-rich water, and may rely on food organisms produced by detritus-based food chains. Loss of streamside vegetation that causes increased water temperature and decreased oxygen levels contributes to the decrease in abundance of trout and salmon from many streams that historically supported these species. Warmwater species also benefit from canopy cover to keep streams from exceeding optimal temperatures. Increased light and the warmer water also promote excessive growth of submerged macrophytes (vascular plants) and algae that can cause a shift from a detritus-based to an algae-based food chain, thus altering the biotic community of the stream. Although some stream food webs are detritus-based, others (especially some warmwater streams) are algae-based and require a certain amount of light to be naturally productive. *Therefore, this element is particularly sensitive to the type of stream (stream class) and fish community that is being assessed and calibration of scoring may be necessary.* Remember that many of the features of this element are highly affected by the degree of upstream shading. Therefore, the element is assessed for canopy over the entire property rather than at a single assessment reach. Choose the matrix appropriate for the stream and its native fauna. For example, if the stream is a “trout stream,” use the matrix for Coldwater Streams. If the stream is naturally warmer than 70°F, use the matrix for Warmwater Streams. Lastly, percentages in the scoring matrix should be modified according to the site’s potential for plant communities that will provide shade to the stream.

### **Element 6. Canopy Cover :Warmwater Streams Southern UT**

30 to 75% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner’s property	>75% shaded within the length of the stream in landowner’s property	29% to 20% water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner’s property	<20% water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner’s property
<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7 6</b>	<b>5 4 3</b>	<b>2 1 0</b>

**Element 6. Canopy Cover: Coldwater Streams Scoring Matrix**

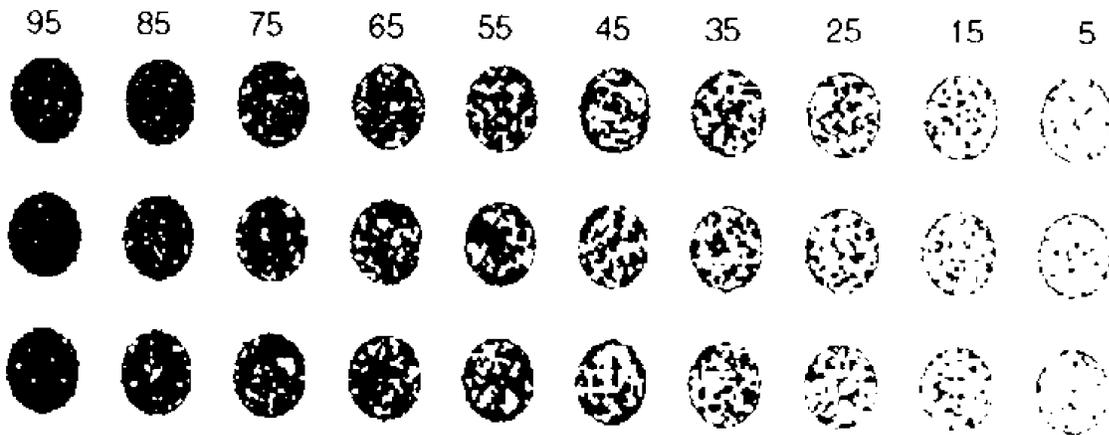
>75% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.	75% to 50% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.	49% to 20% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.	<20% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.
10 9	8 7 6	5 4 3	2 1 0

**Element 6. Canopy Cover: Warmwater Streams Scoring Matrix**

50 to 75% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.	>75% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.	49% to 20% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.	<20% of water surface shaded within the length of the stream in landowner's property.
10 9	8 7 6	5 4 3	2 1 0

**What to look for:**

- Estimate the percent of the stream surface area that is shaded over the entire property. This may require cover estimates at several points within and outside the assessment reach. Time of the year, time of the day, and weather can affect your observation of shading. Therefore, the relative amount of shade is estimated by assuming that the sun is directly overhead and the vegetation is in full leaf-out. To enhance accuracy of the assessment, aerial photographs taken during full leaf-out should be used to supplement your visual assessments. The following illustration may be used as a guide for both visual and aerial estimates.



**Figure 4. Percent canopy cover. Numbers above the ovals refer to the percent black (= shade/cover).** USDA Forest Service FIA Manual, <http://fia.fs.fed.us/library.htm#Manuals>

**ELEMENT 7. Water Appearance**

Description and Rationale for Assessing Water Appearance

The water appearance assessment element compares turbidity, color, and other visual characteristics of the water with those of a reference stream. The assessment of turbidity is the depth to which an object can be clearly seen. Clear water indicates low turbidity. Cloudy or

opaque water indicates high turbidity. Turbidity is caused mostly by particles of soil and organic and inorganic matter suspended in the water column. Streams often show some turbidity after a storm event because of soil and organic particles carried by runoff into the stream or suspended by turbulence. Intrinsic characteristics of a watershed, such as geology and soils unaffected by human activities, should be considered in reference conditions and assessment. For example, glacial flour creates high turbidity and is considered a natural process of erosion in glacial streams. Tea-colored water due to tannins from a natural process in bogs and wetlands may also affect clarity in some streams. Altered clarity due to natural processes would not receive low ratings. This element is difficult to visually assess. If a score less than 5 is assigned, a co

**Element 7. Water Appearance Scoring Matrix**

Very clear, or clarity appropriate to site (3-6'). No motor oil sheen on surface; no evidence of metal precipitates in streams.	Slightly turbid, especially after storm event, but water clears rapidly (>1.5-3'); no motor oil sheen on surface; no evidence of metal precipitates in stream.	Turbid most of the time (0.5-1.5') and/or presence of metal precipitates and/or motor oil sheen present in slackwater areas.	High turbidity most of the time (<0.5') and/or considerable amount of metal precipitates and/or motor oil sheen present throughout reach.
<b>10 9 8</b>	<b>7 6 5</b>	<b>4 3 2</b>	<b>1 0</b>

**What to Look For:**

- Clarity of the water is an obvious and easy feature to assess. The deeper an object in the water can be seen, the lower the amount of turbidity. This measure should be taken after a stream has had the opportunity to "settle down" following a storm event.
- A stream should not smell like oil or have pronounced motor oil sheen on its surface.
- Use the depth that objects are visible only if the stream is deep enough to evaluate turbidity using this approach. For example, if the water is clear but only 1 foot deep, do not rate it as if an object became obscured at a depth of 1 foot.

**Visibility Depth Range Guidance:**

Clear Visibility	3-6'
Slightly Turbid	1.5-3'
Turbid	0.5-1.5'
High Turbidity	<0.5

## Element 8. Nutrient Enrichment

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Nutrient Enrichment

Nutrients are necessary for stream food webs by promoting algal and aquatic plant growth, which provide habitat and food for aquatic organisms. However, an excessive amount of algal and plant growth is detrimental to stream ecosystems. High levels of nutrients (especially phosphorus and nitrogen) lead to increased growth of algae and aquatic plants. Subsequently, respiration and decomposition of plant organic matter consume dissolved oxygen in the water, lowering the concentration of oxygen available to aquatic organisms, and possibly contributing to significant die-offs. A landowner may have seen fish gulping for air at the water surface during warm weather indicating a lack of dissolved oxygen. Streams respond differently to nutrient loading. The presence of algal blooms - thick mats of algae and an overabundance of aquatic plants (i.e., macrophytes) - are often indicators that nutrients are high. However, the absence of such blooms may not always be indicative of nutrient concentrations. Stream velocity, light availability, temperature and types of stable substrate present in a stream are important factors that affect algal and plant abundances. Water quality problems that arise from excess turbidity, herbicides, or salinity will also affect the abundance or absence of algae or macrophytes. If there is little or no algal growth, assess the factors described in the “*what to look for*” section, and summarize your findings accordingly.

### Element 8. Nutrient Enrichment Scoring Matrix

Clear water along entire reach; little algal growth present.	Fairly clear or slightly greenish water; moderate algal growth on substrates.	Greenish water particularly in slow sections; abundant algal growth, especially during warmer months; and/or slight odor of ammonia or rotten eggs; and/or sporadic growth of aquatic plants within slack water areas.	Pea green color present; thick algal mats dominating stream; and/or strong odor of ammonia or rotten eggs, and/or dense stands of aquatic plants widely dispersed.
10 9	8 7 6	5 4 3	2 1 0

#### *What to look for:*

- Velocity:** Streams with high velocity >.33 ft/sec and high concentrations of nutrients are typically not dominated by filamentous algae. Thus, the water may appear very clear yet still have high nutrient concentrations.
- Light:** If light is a limiting factor, due to shading from riparian vegetation, look for algal growth on rocks and boulders in reaches exposed to light.
- Temperature:** Most algae grow more rapidly at higher temperatures. Within a range of 32° F to 77° F, increasing temperature by 18° F typically doubles the rate of algal growth.

- Substrate:** Low complexity of substrate reduces filamentous algal growth.
- Macrophyte Presence:** The presence of dense stands of aquatic macrophytes may be an indicator of nutrient availability. Diversity with the aquatic plant community should be noted and considered. Some species typically associated with springs, such as water cress, may not be associated with heavy nutrient loading.. Clear water and a diverse, dispersed aquatic plant community are optimal for this characteristic.

## Element 9. Manure or Human Waste Presence

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Manure or Human Waste Presence

Manure and human waste increase nutrients and biochemical oxygen demand in streams which alter food webs and nutrient cycles of stream/riparian ecosystems. Ask the property manager if and when livestock have access to the stream. Manure from livestock contaminates water if livestock have direct access to the stream or runoff from corrals, pastures, or paddocks is not diverted away from the stream. Similarly, wastewater piped or diverted directly to a stream is a health risk to aquatic species and humans. *Score this element on the entire property and all properties where SVAP2 is completed.*

### Element 9. Manure or Human Waste Scoring Matrix

Livestock do not have access to stream;  no pipes or concentrated flows discharging animal waste or sewage directly into stream.	Livestock access to stream is controlled and/or limited to small watering or crossing areas;  no pipes or concentrated flows discharging animal waste or sewage directly into stream.	Livestock have unlimited access to stream during some portion of the year;  manure is noticeable in stream; and/or  pipes or concentrated flows discharge treated animal waste or sewage directly into stream	Livestock have unlimited access to stream during entire year;  manure is noticeable in stream; and/or  pipes or concentrated flows discharge untreated animal waste or sewage directly into stream .
<b>10    9</b>	<b>8    7    6</b>	<b>5    4    3</b>	<b>2    1    0</b>

#### *What to look for:*

- Indications of livestock droppings in or adjacent to the stream channel.
- Features such as fences, water gaps, and hardened crossings that limit livestock access to stream.
- Areas with slow moving water and sunlight with unusually dense vegetation or algal blooms.
- Pipes or concentrated flow areas that may be dumping livestock or human waste directly into the stream.

## Element 10. Pools

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Pools

Regardless of the stream channel type, pools are important resting and feeding habitat for fish. Streams with a mix of shallow and deep pools offer diverse habitat for different species. In fish-bearing streams, a general rule of thumb to distinguish deep pools from shallow pools is this: a deep pool is 2 times deeper than the maximum depth of its upstream riffle, while a shallow pool is less than 2 times deeper than the maximum depth of its upstream riffle. This general rule may not apply to extremely high gradient streams, dominated by cascades, however. Continuous pools (those not separated by riffles, wood jams, rock “steps”, or fast-water) provide less diverse habitat and are indicative of poor stream structure and should not be considered for scoring in the first 3 boxes (only the last). Fish use such cover to rest, hide from predators, catch food items in the swirling currents that occur around submerged structures, and avoid territorial conflicts. Isolated pools occur when stream flows are so low that portions of the stream are essentially de-watered temporarily. If deep enough, these isolated pools serve as refuges for stranded fish and other aquatic species until rains restore continuous flow in the system and re-connect the pools to their temporarily dry riffles.

Fish are often limited by the amount of available cover in pools, such as submerged logs, boulders, tree roots and undercut banks. Stream alteration often reduces the amount and complexity of pools, thus degrading fish habitat. On the other hand, beavers often create pools in streams which may add habitat diversity and enhance pool habitats; however, their effects may also inundate riffles and other shallow water habitats. Thus, it is important to assess SVAP stream reaches in the correct context, i.e., in relation to local reference conditions. States are encouraged to modify scoring of this element according to local pool-to-riffle ratios generally present in reference stream reaches. Remember, you are assessing representative reaches of streams throughout the area and if conditions should change dramatically within the property due to alteration, or other influences affecting the structure and function of the stream, additional reaches should be assessed.

***Only one pool morphology type (low gradient OR high gradient) should be used per assessment reach.***

#### Pools – Low Gradient Streams ( $\leq 2\%$ ) **Southern UT Intermittent**

More than 2 deep pools (>2.5 feet) separated by riffles, each with greater than 15% of the pool bottom obscured by depth, wood, or other cover. Shallow pools also present.	One or 2 deep pools separated by riffles, each with greater than 30% of the pool bottom obscured by depth wood, or other cover; at least one shallow pool present.	Pools present but shallow (< 2 times maximum depth of the upstream riffle). Only 10 – 30% of pool bottoms are obscured due to depth or wood cover.	Pools absent, but some slow water habitat is available; no cover discernible. or Reach is dominated by uniform pool habitat of any depth or cover conditions; no riffles present
<b>10</b> <b>9</b>	<b>8</b> <b>7</b> <b>6</b>	<b>5</b> <b>4</b> <b>3</b>	<b>2</b> <b>1</b> <b>0</b>

**Element 10. Pools: Low-Gradient Streams Scoring Matrix (<2%)**

More than 2 deep pools separated by riffles, each with greater than 30% of the pool bottom obscured by depth, wood, or other cover. Shallow pools also present.	One or 2 deep pools separated by riffles, each with greater than 30% of the pool bottom obscured by depth wood, or other cover; at least one shallow pool present.	Pools present but shallow (< 2 times maximum depth of the upstream riffle). Only 10 – 30% of pool bottoms are obscured due to depth or wood cover.	Pools absent, but some slow water habitat is available; no cover discernible. or Reach is dominated by shallow continuous pools or slow water.
<b>10</b> <b>9</b>	<b>8</b> <b>7</b> <b>6</b>	<b>5</b> <b>4</b> <b>3</b>	<b>2</b> <b>1</b> <b>0</b>

**What to look for:**

- ☑ The number of pools per assessment reach is estimated based on walking the stream or probing from the streambank with a stick or pole. You should find deep pools on the outside of meander bends. Pools are typically separated by riffles or other shallow water habitats. In drier climates, deep pools may be temporarily isolated from their riffles, yet still provide important refuge habitat. Pools are formed by obstructions in the stream channel such as fallen trees, accumulations of wood (jams), beaver dams, boulders, root wads, rock outcrops, beaver dams, and accumulated plant debris.
- ☑ Assess pool cover by estimating the percent of the pool bottom that is obscured by cover features, or depth, assuming you are positioned directly over the feature looking straight down at the stream bottom. In shallow, clear streams a visual inspection may provide an accurate estimate.

**Element 10. Pools: High-Gradient Streams (>2%) Scoring Matrix**

More than 3 deep pools separated by boulders or wood, each with greater than 30% of the pool bottom obscured by depth, wood, or other cover. For small streams, pool bottoms may not be completely obscured by depth, but pools are deep enough to provide adequate cover for resident fish.	Two to 3 deep pools, each with greater than 30% of the pool bottom obscured by depth wood, or other cover; at least one shallow pool present. For small streams, pool bottoms may not be completely obscured by depth, but pools are deep enough to provide <i>some</i> cover for resident fish.	Pools present but relatively shallow, with only 10 – 30% of pool bottoms obscured by depth or wood cover.  For small streams, pool bottoms may not be completely obscured by depth, but pools are deep enough to provide <i>minimal</i> cover for resident fish.	Pools absent.
Shallow pools also present.	At least one shallow pool also present.	No shallow pools present.	
<b>10    9</b>	<b>8    7    6</b>	<b>5    4    3</b>	<b>2    1    0</b>

**What to look for:**

- ☑ In high-gradient streams energy is dissipated by alternating slow and fast water conditions with step/pools and rapids/scour pools. Step/pools operate similar to stair steps with water dropping vertically over nearly complete channel obstructions (often a large rock and/or large wood) scouring out small depressions, or plunge pools (Hunter, 1991). Streams with step/pool conditions usually have gradients >4% and pools are spaced at 1 pool every 1.5 to 4 bankfull channel widths. Pool spacing decreases as gradient increases (Rosgen, 1996).

- ☑ Streams with gradients between 2 and 4% are often rapids and lateral scour pool dominated. Scour pool spacing is typically 1 pool every 4 to 5 bankfull channel widths and is created by channel confinements and wood or sediments.
- ☑ Plunge pools and scour pools are important aquatic habitat features providing resting and hiding cover for fish and aquatic species. With these pools, turbulence, large rock, wood, and the depth of water all contribute hiding cover for fish.

## Element 11. Barriers to Aquatic Species Movement

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Barriers to Aquatic Species Movement

Most aquatic organisms move around their habitats, or undertake daily, seasonal, or annual migrations. For example, anadromous trout and salmon spawn and rear in freshwater, move to marine environments to grow to adulthood, and return to freshwater after a period of months or years to reproduce and die (Groot and Margolis, 1991). Other fish commonly use estuaries, river mouths, and the lower reaches of rivers within a span of a few days for feeding, sheltering, or as refuge from predators (Gross et al., 1988). Still others use headwater streams for spawning, and downstream lakes or rivers for feeding as they mature. Consequently, barriers that block the movement of fish or other aquatic organisms are important components of stream assessment.

Instream features or water management practices can create barriers that limit or prohibit the passage of aquatic organisms either seasonally or annually. Passage barriers may prevent the movement or migration of fish, deny access to important breeding or foraging habitats, and isolate populations of fish and other aquatic animals. Both natural and manmade barriers occur within river and stream systems, and natural physical barriers include waterfalls, cascades, and large rapids. Common manmade physical barriers include dams, diversions, culverts, weirs, excessively high grade control structures or buried sills with broad crests. Chemical and biological barriers such as water quality and quantity (e.g., temperature and low stream flows) and predation from non-native species also exist in many rivers across the United States. However, these types of passage problems are often seasonal and can be difficult to identify with limited field time and site-specific data.

Passage barriers are typically categorized by characteristics such as water velocity, water depth, and barrier height in relation to the passage requirements of a given species and/or life stage. Three commonly-used barrier classes are:

- *Partial* – impassable to some species or certain age classes all or most of the time;
- *Temporary* – impassable during some times to all or most species and/or age classes (e.g., during low flow conditions);
- *Complete* – impassable to all fish at all times.

For example, a poorly designed or damaged culvert may be a temporary barrier to upstream migrating adults when flows are high because velocities within the culvert barrel exceed their natural swimming capabilities. Some highly migratory fishes like Pacific salmonids can leap six feet or more to bypass a waterfall, whereas shad in the same river will be faced with a complete

barrier (Bell, 1990; Haro and Kynard, 1997). Many State and Federal Agencies have laws that are applicable to this element. Conservationists should become familiar with state-applicable regulations as part of the Preliminary Assessment.

**Element 11. Barriers to Aquatic Species Movement Scoring Matrix**

No artificial barriers that prohibit movement of aquatic organisms during any time of the year.	Physical structures, water withdrawals and/or water quality <i>seasonally</i> restrict movement of aquatic species.	Physical structures, water withdrawals and/or water quality restrict movement of aquatic species <i>throughout the year</i> .	Physical structures, water withdrawals and/or water quality <i>prohibit</i> movement of aquatic species.
<b>10</b>	<b>9 8 7</b>	<b>6 5 4 3</b>	<b>2 1 0</b>

When addressing this element, assess a length of stream at least 12 times the bankfull width, or the entire stream length on the landowner’s property, whichever is greater. Be sure to detail in the notes the species and life stages of aquatic organisms for which you are evaluating barriers.

**What to look for:**

- Ask the landowner about any dams or other barriers that may be present 3 to 5 miles upstream or downstream of his or her property.
- Note the presence of natural barriers along the assessment reach, their size.
- Beaver dams generally do not prevent fish migration and should not be identified as passage barriers unless supporting information exists.
- Livestock and/or equipment crossings can be passage barriers if water flows fast and shallow (less than 6 inches) across smooth or uniform surfaces at least half as wide (from upstream to downstream) as the bankfull width. For example, a 12-foot wide hardened vehicle ford that crosses a stream with a bankfull width of 20 feet is likely a temporary passage barrier.
- Low-head dams are most likely temporary or complete barriers, especially if outfitted with a concrete apron that covers the streambed along the entire downstream face.
- Culverts can be especially problematic to migratory aquatic organisms. Unless specifically designed with passage purposes in mind, most culverts are partial upstream passage barriers for the smallest life stages of native fish. Culverts should be scored as temporary or complete passage barriers if the culvert:
  - alignment doesn’t match the stream
  - width is less than bankfull width
  - slope is greater than channel slope
  - is not countersunk
  - is perched (elevated) above the outlet pool
  - inlet is plugged with debris
  - inlet or outlet shows sign of erosion or instability

## Element 12. Fish Habitat Complexity

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Fish Habitat Complexity

The dynamic features of stream corridors create diverse habitat types and conditions for fish and other aquatic species. Quality fish habitat is a mosaic of different types of habitats created by various combinations of water quality and quantity, water depth, velocity, wood, boulders, riparian vegetation, and the species that inhabit stream corridors. The greater the variety of habitat features, the more likely a stream is to support a diversity of aquatic species. Fish require these *complex* habitats with diverse types of hiding, resting, and feeding cover in parts of the stream and variable flow features. For example, deep pools (with slower currents) provide cover, thermal refuge, and a place to rest. Riffles (with faster currents) provide benthic invertebrates to prey on. Fast water is well-aerated, providing more oxygen to the stream ecosystem. The more types of different structural features, the more resilient the habitat is to natural disturbances (such as floods) as well as human perturbations (such as water withdrawals). The dynamic nature of instream habitat features assures fish and other species are able to find suitable areas to rear, feed, grow, hide, and reproduce during the course of their life histories. Because fish habitat needs and types vary considerably from species to species and throughout the country, states should adjust scoring of this element to reflect reference conditions and species habitat features characteristic of their region.

### **Element 12. Fish Habitat Complexity Scoring Matrix**

10 or more habitat features available, at least one of which is considered optimal in reference sites (e.g., large wood in forested streams.)	8 to 9 habitat features available.	6 to 7 habitat features available.	4 to 5 habitat features available.	<4 habitat features available.
<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7</b>	<b>6 5</b>	<b>4 3</b>	<b>2 1 0</b>

**Fish habitat features:** Logs/Large wood, deep pools, other pools (i.e. scour, plunge, shallow, pocket) overhanging vegetation, boulders, cobble, riffles, undercut banks, thick root mats, dense macrophyte beds, backwater pools, and other off-channel habitats

**What to look for:** Within the entire assessment reach, observe the number of different habitat features that provide diverse and complex habitats for fish. Each habitat feature must be present in appreciable amounts to score (as compared to suitable reference sites). Features include:

- Logs, large wood** — fallen trees or parts of trees that are submerged in the water and large enough to remain in the assessment reach during normal flows. **Minimum 2/reach; #/reach \_\_\_\_\_**
- Small wood accumulations** — submerged accumulations of small wood pieces, twigs, branches, leaves, and roots. Though likely to be temporary components of stream habitats, their pieces will continue to provide structural complexity as the debris moves within the reach. **Minimum 1/reach; #/reach \_\_\_\_\_**

- Deep pools** - areas of slow water with smooth surface and deep enough to provide protective cover for fish species likely to be present in the stream. **Minimum 2/reach; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Secondary pools** (i.e., scour, plunge, pocket pools) – pools formed by boulders or wood that divert water and scour depressions below turbulent flows. **Minimum 4/reach; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Overhanging vegetation** – tree branches, shrub branches, or perennial herbaceous vegetation growing along the streambank and extending outward over the stream’s surface, providing shade and cover. **Minimum 3/reach; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Large boulders** – submerged or partially submerged large rocks (> 20" diameter) **Minimum 3/reach if no wood; minimum 2/reach if wood present. #/reach \_\_\_\_\_**
- Small boulder clusters** – groups of 2 or more smaller rocks (>10 inches and < 20 inches in diameter) interspersed relatively close together in the channel. **Minimum 3/reach. #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Cobble riffles** – fast, “bubbly” water flowing amongst and over small rocks between 2 and 10 inches in diameter. **Minimum 2/reach. #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Undercut banks** – water-scoured areas extending horizontally beneath the surface of the bank, forming underwater pockets used by fish for hiding and thermal cover. **Minimum 3/reach or 25% of bank area; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Thick root mats** - mats of roots and rootlets, generally from trees but sometimes from mature dense shrubs at or beneath the water surface. **Minimum 3/reach; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Macrophyte beds** – beds of emergent, submerged, or floating leaf aquatic plants thick enough to serve as cover. **Minimum 1/reach; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Off-channel habitats** - side-channels, floodplain wetlands, backwaters, alcoves. **Minimum 2/reach; #/reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- Other locally important habitat features (describe) –**

## Element 13. Aquatic Invertebrate Habitat

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Aquatic Invertebrate Habitat

Four functional groups characterize the feeding functions of most aquatic invertebrates: **shredders, collectors, grazers, and predators**. Some species can be placed in more than one functional feeding group. The groups are typically present in all streams, although the dominance of groups will vary from headwater streams to larger streams and rivers. These

functional feeding groups help predict the location and diverse **substrate needs** of specific invertebrates within the stream. **Substrates** are materials that provide a base for invertebrates to live and colonize. In a healthy stream, substrates are varied, free of sediment, abundant, and in place long enough to allow colonization by invertebrates. High stream velocities, high sediment loads, and frequent flooding may deplete substrate or cause it to be unsuitable habitat, at least temporarily until re-colonization occurs.

Wood and riffle areas with boulders\cobbles support the bulk of the invertebrate community in temperate streams (Benke et al., 1984). Wood typically supports a more diverse invertebrate community, while boulders and cobble within riffles typically support higher numbers (abundance) of species. High numbers of habitat types for fish often equate to high invertebrate habitat types. The scale of habitat assessment is necessarily much smaller for invertebrates because their range of mobility limits the size of their habitat, or *microhabitat*. Therefore, an array of different types of habitat should be found within a smaller area of the reach.

**Element 13. Aquatic Invertebrate Habitat Scoring Matrix**

At least 9 types of habitat present;  a combination of wood with riffles should be present and suitable in addition to other types of habitat. (If non-forested stream, consider reference site's optimal habitat type needed for this high score.)	8 to 6 types of habitat;  site may be in need of more wood or reference habitat features, and stable wood-riffle sections.	5 to 4 types of habitat present	3 to 2 types habitat present	None to 1 type of habitat present
10    9	8    7    6	5    4	3    2	1    0

**Aquatic invertebrate habitat types, in order of importance:** Logs/large wood, cobble within riffles, boulders within riffles. Additional habitat features should include: leaf packs, fine woody debris, overhanging vegetation, aquatic vegetation, undercut banks, pools, and root mats

**What to look for:**

- Observe the abundance of wood and riffles with boulder\cobbles. Remember these two types of substrate play a significant role in invertebrate diversity and abundance.
- Observe the number of different types of habitat *within a representative subsection of the assessment reach* that is equivalent in length to five times the active channel width.
- Habitat types should be present in appreciable amounts (as expected in reference conditions or least impaired conditions) to score.

- ✓ **Logs, large wood** — fallen trees or parts of trees that are submerged or partially submerged in the water and large enough to remain in the assessment reach during normal flows. **Minimum 2/subreach: #/sub-reach**\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ **Large boulders within riffles**– submerged or partially submerged large rocks (> 20" diameter) **Minimum 2/sub-reach if no wood; minimum 1/sub-reach if wood present. #/sub-reach**\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ **Small boulders in riffles clusters** – groups of 2 or more smaller rocks (>10 inches and < 20 inches in diameter) interspersed relatively close together in the channel. **Minimum 2/sub-reach. #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Fine woody debris** —accumulations of twigs, branches, leaves, and roots. Though likely to be temporary components of stream habitats, their pieces will continue to provide structural complexity and substrate for invertebrates as the debris moves within the reach. **Minimum 2/sub-reach; #/sub-reach \_**
- ✓ **Overhanging vegetation** – tree branches, shrub branches, or perennial herbaceous vegetation growing along the streambank and extending outward over the stream’s surface, providing shade, cover and food. **Minimum 1/sub-reach; #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Cobble riffles** – fast, “bubbly” water flowing amongst and over small rocks between 2 and 10 inches in diameter. **Minimum 1/sub-reach. #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Undercut banks** – water-scoured areas extending horizontally beneath the surface of the bank, forming underwater pockets used by aquatic insects for resting and feeding. **Minimum 1/sub-reach or 25% of bank area; #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Pools--** Slow water, deeper than riffles. **No minimum 1/sub-reach. #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Thick root mats** - mats of roots and rootlets, generally from trees but sometimes from mature dense shrubs at or beneath the water surface. **Minimum 1/sub-reach; #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Macrophyte beds** – emergent submerged, or floating leaf aquatic plants thick enough to serve as cover. **Minimum 1/sub-reach; #/sub-reach: \_\_\_\_\_**
- ✓ **Other locally important habitat features (describe) \_\_\_\_\_**

## Element 14. Aquatic Invertebrate Community

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Aquatic Invertebrate Community

This important element reflects the ability of the stream to support aquatic invertebrates such as crayfish, mussels, dragonflies, and caddisflies. However, successful assessments require knowledge of the life cycles of some aquatic insects and other macroinvertebrates and the ability to identify them. For this reason, this is an optional element.

Aquatic invertebrates include crustaceans (such as crayfish), mollusks (such as snails), spiders, and aquatic insects. These organisms are important to aquatic food webs. To better understand aquatic invertebrate functions, habitat needs and interrelationships within the food web, ecologists have categorized these organisms into 4 major functional feeding groups:

- 1) **Shredders** process leaves, sticks and twigs. Their habitats are distinguished by areas that trap and retain organic matter, (i.e., leaf packs). They are generally found in headwater streams.
- 2) **Collectors:** Two types of aquatic invertebrates make up the Collectors, also found generally in headwater streams:
  - a. **Filterers** process smaller organic matter, suspended in the water. Their habitats are large stable rock or logs.
  - b. **Gatherers** - actively collect their food, plant and animal material. Their habitat is usually medium to large rocks.
- 3) **Grazers** feed on algae in areas of streams receiving sunlight. Like gatherers, their habitat is medium to large rocks.
- 4) **Predators** feed on other animals. Their habitats include logs, medium to large rocks, water column, pools, and leaf litter.

The presence of a diversity of intolerant macroinvertebrate species (pollution sensitive) indicates healthy, resilient stream conditions. Macroinvertebrates such as stoneflies, mayflies, and caddisflies, are sensitive to pollution and do not tolerate polluted water. These intolerant orders of insects comprise Group I. Group II macroinvertebrates are facultative, meaning they can tolerate limited pollution. This group includes damselflies, aquatic sowbugs, and crayfish. The dominant presence of Group III macroinvertebrates, including midges, craneflies and leeches without the presence of Group I, suggests the water is significantly polluted. The presence and abundance of only one or two species from Group I species in a reach community does not generally indicate diversity is good. As with all elements in the SVAP, comparison with reference conditions, or those found in least-impaired streams in the area are encouraged.

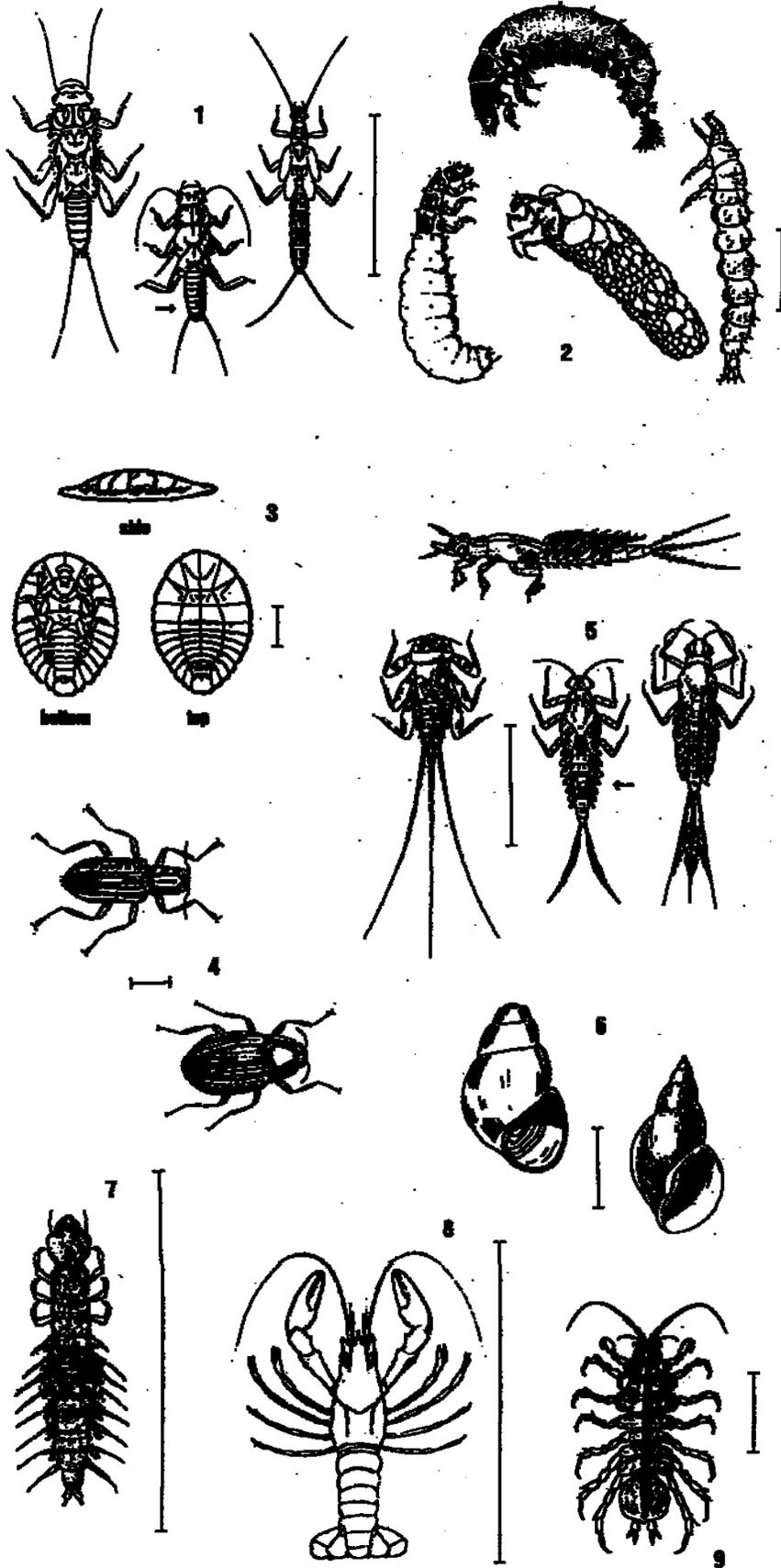
**Element 14. Aquatic Invertebrate Community Scoring Matrix**

Invertebrate community is diverse and well represented by Group I or intolerant species; One or two species do not dominate.	Invertebrate community is well represented by Group II or facultative species, and Group I species are also present; one or two species do not dominate.	Invertebrate community is composed mainly of Groups II and III, and/or 1 or 2 species of any group may dominate.	Invertebrate community composition is predominantly Group III species and/or only 1 or 2 species of any group is present and abundance is low.
10 9 8	7 6 5	4 3 2	1 0

**What to look for:** Figure 5 (below) contains illustrations for each of the three groups of macroinvertebrates with the listing of invertebrate taxonomic order. This rating is qualitative and therefore potential biases should be avoided to provide accurate representation of each site.

- Collect macroinvertebrates by picking up cobbles, gravel, leaf packs, silt, fine woody debris, and other submerged objects in the water. Sample all types of potential insect habitat (refer to Insect/Invertebrate Habitat Element) for an equal amount of time to reduce biases and improve accuracy.
- A healthy and stable invertebrate community will be consistent in its proportional representation (evenness) of species, though individual species abundance may vary in magnitude. Note the kinds of macroinvertebrates (group type), approximate number of each species, and relative abundance of each species sampled. Determine if one or two species dominate the aquatic invertebrate community. An abundance of an individual species, such as caddisflies or snails, is often equated to a tolerance of stress and lower diversity.

**Figure 5. Stream Invertebrates.** Source: Izaak Walton League of America, 707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878-2983. (800) BUG-IWLA



Bar lines indicate relative size.

Group One Taxa: Pollution-sensitive taxa found in good quality water.

- 1 Stonefly Order Plecoptera. .5 to 1.5", 6 legs with hooked antenna, 2 hair-line tails. Smooth (no gills) on lower half of body (see arrow).
- 2 Caddisfly: Order Trichoptera. Up to 1", 6 hooked legs on upper third of body, 2 hooks at back end. May be in a stick, rock, or leaf case with head sticking out. May have fluffy gill tufts on under-side.
- 3 Water Penny: Order Coleoptera. 1/4", flat saucer-shaped body with a raised bump on one side and 6 tiny legs and fluffy gills on the other side. Immature beetle.
- 4 Riffle Beetle: Order Coleoptera. 1/4", oval body covered with tiny hairs, 6 legs, antennae. Walks underwater. Swims beneath surface.
- 5 Mayfly: Order Ephemeroptera. 1/4" to 1", brown, moving, plate-like or feathery gills on sides of lower body (see arrow), 6 large hooked legs, antennae, 2-3 long hair-like tails that may be webbed together.

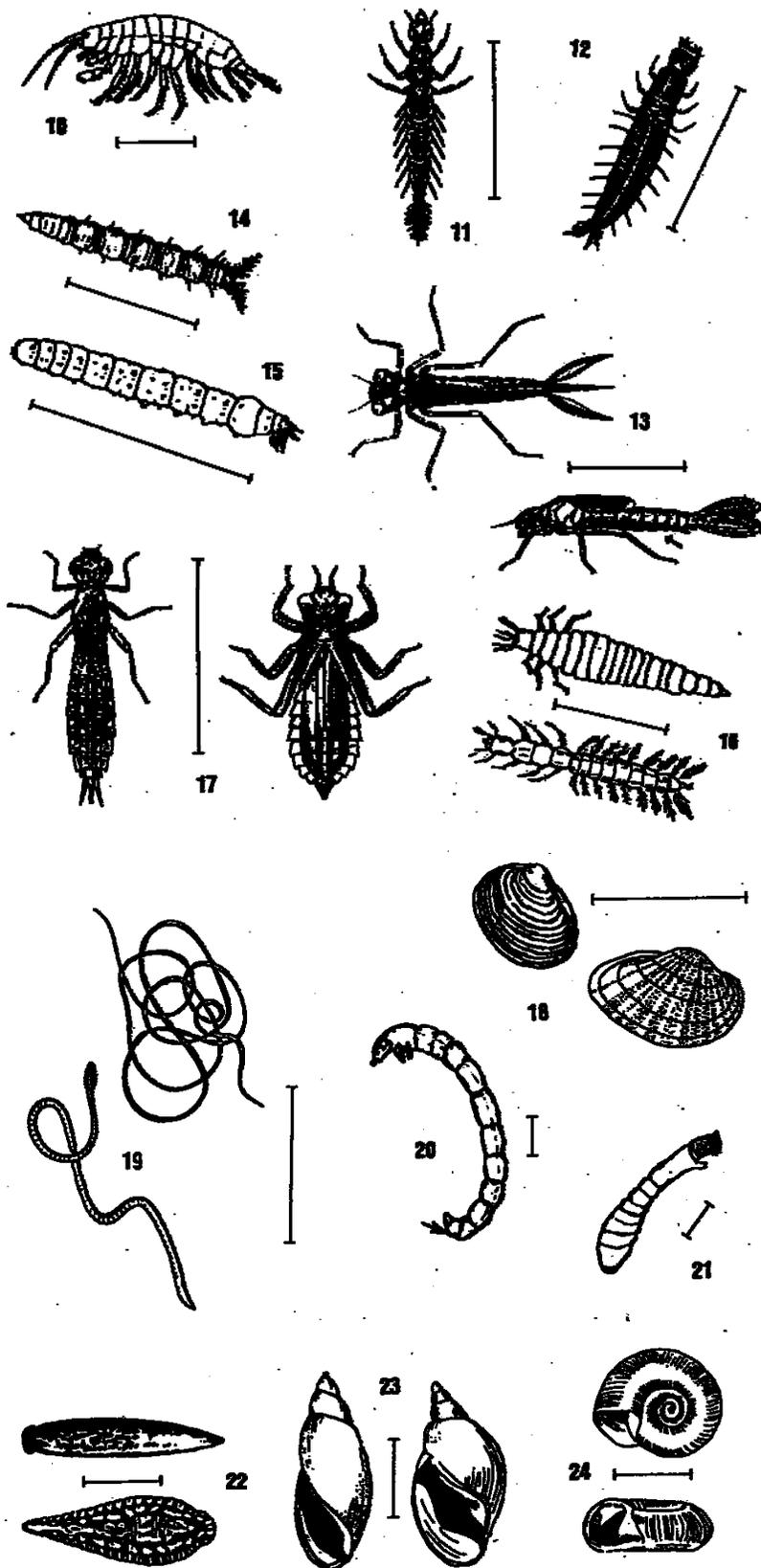
6 Gilled Snail: Class Gastropoda. Shell opening covered by thin plate called operculum. When opening is facing you, shell usually opens on right.

7 Dobsonfly (hellgrammite): Family Corydalidae. 3/4" to 4", dark-colored, 6 legs, large pinching jaws, eight pair of feelers on lower half of body with paired cotton-like gill tufts along under-side, short antennae, 2 tails, and 2 pair of hooks at end.

Group Two Taxa: Somewhat pollution tolerant taxa found in good or fair quality water.

8 Crayfish: Order Decapoda. Up to 6", 1 large claw, 8 legs, resembles lobster.

9 Sowbug: Order Isopoda. 1/4" to 3/4", gray oblong body wider than it is high, more than 6 legs, and long antennae.



Bar lines indicate relative size

**Group Two Taxa (Continued)**

- 10 Scud: Order Amphipoda. 1/4", white to gray, body higher than it is wide, swims sideways, more than 6 legs, resembles small shrimp.
- 11 Alderfly Larva: Family Sialidae. 1" long. Looks like small Hellgrammite but has long, thin, branched tail at back end (no hooks), no gill tufts below.
- 12 Fishfly Larva: Family Cordalidae. Up to 1 1/2" long. Looks like small hellgrammite, but often light reddish-tan color, or with yellowish streaks. No gill tufts underneath.
- 13 Damselfly: Suborder Zygoptera. 1/2" to 1", large eyes, 6 thin hooked legs, 3 broad oar-shaped tails, positioned like a tripod. Smooth (no gills) on sides of lower half of body (arrow).
- 14 Watersnipe Fly Larva: Family Athericidae (Atherix). 1/4" to 1", pale to green, tapered body, many caterpillar-like legs, conical head, feathery "horns" at back end.
- 15 Crane Fly: Suborder Nematocera. 1/3" to 2", milky, green, or light brown, plump caterpillar-like segmented body, 4 finger-like lobes at back end.
- 16. Beetle Larva: Order Coleoptera. 1/4" to 1", light-colored, 6 legs on upper half of body, feelers, antennae.
- 17 Dragon Fly: Suborder Anisoptera., 1/2" to 2", large eyes, 6 hooked legs. Wide oval to round abdomen.
- 18 Clam: Class Bivalvia.

**Group Three Taxa: Pollution-tolerant organisms can be in any quality of water.**

- 19 Aquatic Worm: Class Oligochaeta, 1/4" to 2", can be tiny, thin worm-like body.
- 20 Midge Fly Larva: Suborder Nematocera. Up to 1/4", dark head, worm-like segmented body, 2 legs on each side.
- 21 Blackfly Larva: Family Simulidae. Up to 1/4", one end of body wider. Black head, suction pad on other end.
- 22 Leech: Order Hirudinea. 1/4" to 2", brown, slimy body, end with suction pads.
- 23 Pouch Snail and Pond Snails: Class Gastropoda. No operculum. Breathe air. When opening is facing you, shell usually open to left.
- 24 Other Snails: Class Gastropoda. No operculum. Breathes air. Snail shell coils in one plane.

## Element 15. Riffle Embeddedness

### Description and Rationale for Assessing Riffle Embeddedness

*Embeddedness* measures the degree to which gravel and cobble substrates are surrounded by fine sediment. It relates directly to the suitability of the stream substrate as habitat for macroinvertebrates, fish spawning, and egg incubation. Riffles are areas, often downstream of a pool, where the water is breaking over rocks, cobbles, gravel, or other substrate material on the bed of a stream, causing surface agitation. In coastal areas riffles can be created by shoals and submerged objects. Riffles are critical for maintaining high species diversity and abundance of insects for most streams and for serving as spawning and feeding grounds for some fish species. This element is sensitive to regional landscape differences and should therefore be related to locally established reference conditions, and the native aquatic fauna expected to occur in the watershed.

***Do not assess this element unless riffles or swift-flowing water and coarse substrates are present or a natural feature that should be present.***

### Element 15. Riffle Embeddedness Scoring Matrix

Gravel or cobble substrates are <10% embedded.	Gravel or cobble substrates are 10-20% embedded.	Gravel or cobble substrates are 21-30% embedded.	Gravel or cobble substrates are 31-40% embedded.	Gravel or cobble substrates are >40% embedded.
<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7</b>	<b>6 5</b>	<b>4 3</b>	<b>2 1 0</b>

### Riffle embeddedness Scoring Matrix - for southern UT intermittent streams

Gravel or cobble substrates are <25% embedded	Gravel or cobble substrates are 25-35% embedded	Gravel or cobble substrates are 36-45 % embedded	Gravel or cobble substrates are 46-60% embedded	Gravel or cobble substrates are >60% embedded
<b>10 9</b>	<b>8 7</b>	<b>6 5</b>	<b>4 3</b>	<b>2 1 0</b>

**What to look for:**

- ☑ This element should be used only in riffle areas and in streams where this is a natural feature.
- ☑ The measure is the depth to which objects are buried by sediment. This assessment is made by picking up particles of gravel or cobble with your fingertips at the fine sediment layer. Pull the particle out of the bed and estimate what percent of the particle was buried.
- ☑ Some streams have been so smothered by fine sediment that the original stream bottom is not visible. Test for complete burial of a streambed by probing with a measuring stick. Does substrate move easily when you move the substrate around with your feet? If not, substrate material is likely > 40% embedded.

**Element 16. Salinity** (if applicable)

Description and Rationale for Assessing Salinity

The origin of *elevated* salinity levels in streams is often associated with irrigation of salt laden soils, dryland crop/fallow systems that produce saline seeps, oil and gas well operations, and animal waste. Salt accumulation in streambanks can cause break down of soil structure, decreased infiltration of water, and toxicity. High salinity in streams affects aquatic vegetation, macro-invertebrates, and fish. If observed impacts of salt are a product of natural weathering processes of soil and geologic material un-influenced by humans, this element should not be scored.

**Element 16. Salinity Scoring Matrix**

No wilting, bleaching, leaf burn or stunting of aquatic vegetation, no	Minimal wilting, bleaching, leaf burn, or stunting of aquatic	Aquatic vegetation may show significant wilting, bleaching,	Severe wilting, bleaching, leaf burn, or stunting;
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streamside salt-tolerant vegetation present.	vegetation; some salt-tolerant stream side vegetation.	leaf burn, or stunting; dominance of salt-tolerant streamside vegetation.	presence of only salt tolerant aquatic vegetation; most streamside vegetation is salt tolerant.
<b>10 9 8</b>	<b>7 6 5</b>	<b>4 3</b>	<b>2 1 0</b>

Do not assess this element unless *elevated* salinity levels caused by people are suspected.

**What to look for:**

- High salinity levels can cause a “burning “or “bleaching” of riparian vegetation. Wilting, loss of plant color, decreased productivity and stunted growth are visible signs.
- Other indicators include whitish salt accumulations on streambanks and displacement of salt intolerant vegetation by more tolerant species.

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## Stream Visual Assessment Protocol Summary Sheet

Owner's name \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator's name \_\_\_\_\_

Stream name \_\_\_\_\_ Tributary to: \_\_\_\_\_ HUC: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Preliminary Assessment

#### A. Watershed Description:

Ecoregion or MLRA \_\_\_\_\_ Watershed Drainage area (acres or sq miles ) \_\_\_\_\_

Watershed management structures: (no.): dams \_\_\_ water controls \_\_\_ irrigation diversions \_\_\_

No. of miles of contiguous riparian cover/mile of entire stream in watershed (estimated) \_\_\_\_\_

Land use within watershed (%): cropland \_\_\_ hayland \_\_\_ grazing/pasture \_\_\_ forest \_\_\_  
urban \_\_\_ industrial \_\_\_ other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Agronomic practices in uplands include: \_\_\_\_\_

Confined animal feeding operations (no.) \_\_\_\_\_ Conservation (acres) \_\_\_\_\_ industrial(acres) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of stream miles on property \_\_\_\_\_ Number of total stream miles \_\_\_\_\_

Stream hydrology: \_\_\_ intermittent; months of year wetted : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ perennial; months of year at base flow: \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. Stream/Reach Description:

Stream Gage Location/Discharge: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ cfs

Applicable Reference Stream: \_\_\_\_\_ Reference Stream Location: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_

Information Sources:

## 2. Field Assessment:

### A. Preliminary Field Data:

Date of Field Assessment \_\_\_\_\_ Weather conditions today \_\_\_\_\_  
(ambient temp.\cloud cover)

Weather Conditions over past 2-5 days: \_\_\_\_\_).  
(No. of days precip/average daytime temp.)

Reach Location (UTM or Lat./Long.) \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ Channel Type/classification scheme \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Reach Length (12X bankfull width) \_\_\_\_\_

Riparian Cover Type(s): Forest\_\_\_ Herbaceous\_\_\_ Shrub \_\_\_ Mixed\_\_\_ None\_\_\_

Bank Profile: Stratified\_\_\_ Homogeneous\_\_\_ Cohesive Soil\_\_\_ Non-Cohesive Soil \_\_\_

Gradient (√ one): Low (0-2%)\_\_\_ Moderate (>2<4%)\_\_\_ High (>4%) \_\_\_

Bankfull channel width \_\_\_\_\_ Floodplain width\_\_\_\_\_ Floodplain wetlands, if present acres)\_\_\_\_\_

Dominant substrate (%): boulder \_\_\_\_\_ cobble \_\_\_\_\_ gravel \_\_\_\_\_ sand \_\_\_\_\_ fine sediments \_\_\_\_\_  
( > 250 mm) (60-250mm) (2-60 mm) (2-.06 mm) (< .06 mm)

#### Photo Point Locations and Descriptions:

Photo Pt. #	GPS Coordinates/Waypoints	Description
1		
2		
3		

SVAP Start Time/Water Temp: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ SVAP End Time/Water Temp: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

**B. SVAP2 Scores**

Element	Score
1. Channel Condition	
2. Hydrologic Alteration	
3. Bank Condition	
4. Riparian Area Quantity	
5. Riparian Area Quality	
6. Canopy Cover	
7. Water Appearance	
8. Nutrient Enrichment	
9. Manure or Human Waste	
10. Pools	
11. Barriers to Movement	
12. Fish Habitat Complexity	
13. Aquatic Invertebrate Habitat	

Element	Score
14. Aquatic Invertebrate Community	
15. Riffle Embeddedness	
16. Salinity	

**A. Sum of all elements scored**

**B. Number of elements scored**

<p><b>Overall score: A/B</b> _____</p> <p>1 to 2.9    Severely Degraded</p> <p>3 to 4.9    Poor</p> <p>5 to 6.9    Fair</p> <p>7 to 8.9    Good</p> <p>9 to 10     Excellent</p>
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Suspected causes of SVAP scores less than 5 (5.0 and greater meets Quality Criteria)

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Recommendations for further assessment or actions:

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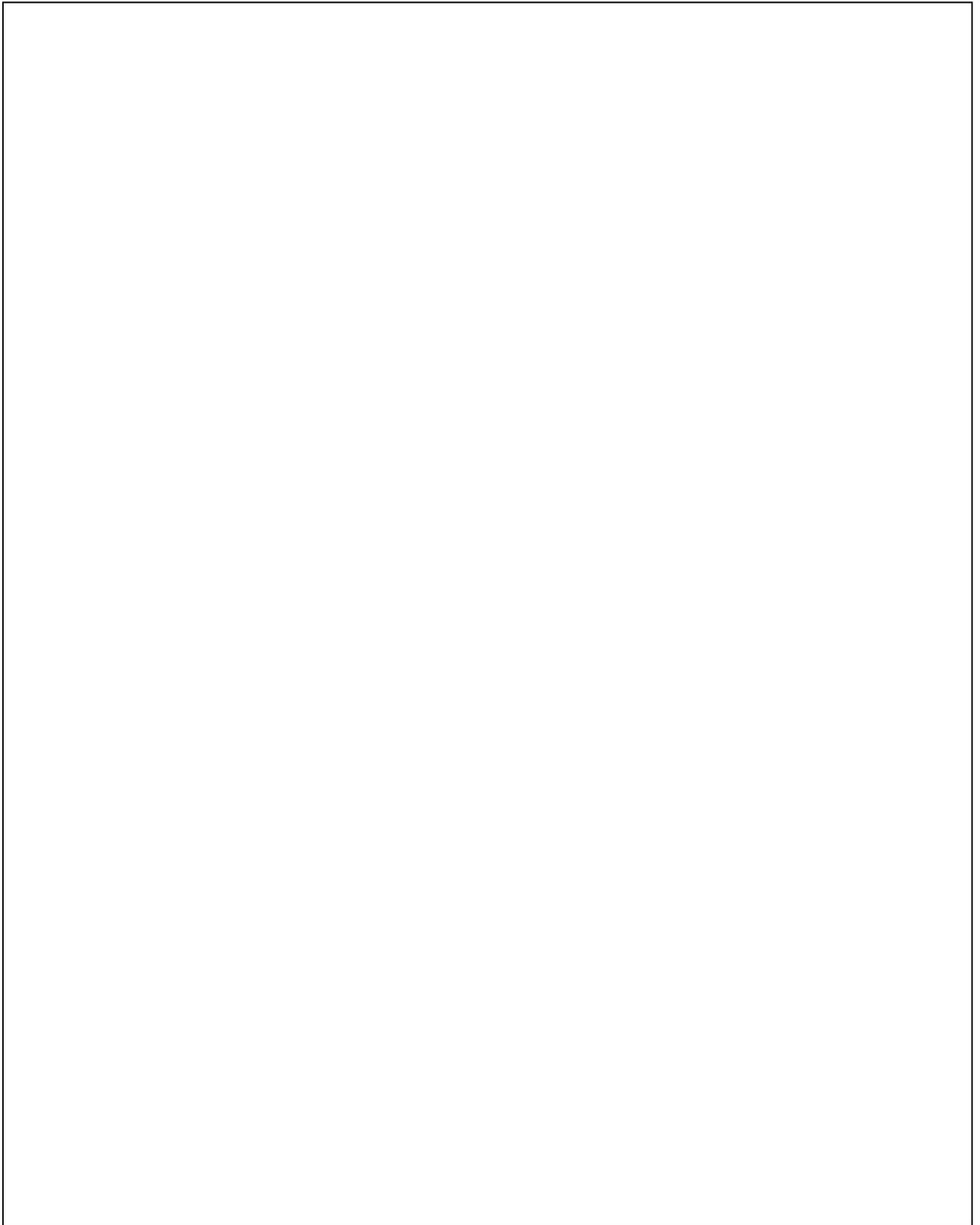
Projected improvement in stream condition with implemented conservation practice/land use change:

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C. Site Diagram: indicate approximate scale, major features, resource concerns etc.



Provide notes related to each element scored on back of site diagram, as needed

## Appendix 1 – Additional References for Further Reading

### Watershed Health and Assessment

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## **Digital Keys to Aquatic Insects**

<http://www.waterbugkey.vcsu.edu/>

## **Riparian Plant Guidebooks**

Common Arizona Riparian Plants

<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/azpmstn7363.pdf>

Field Guide for Identification and Use of Common Riparian Woody Plants of the Intermountain West and Pacific Northwest Regions

<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/idpmcpu7428.pdf>

## Appendix 2 – Glossary

**Active channel width:** The width of the stream at the bankfull discharge. Permanent vegetation generally does not become established in the active channel.

**Active floodplain:** That part of a floodplain that is frequently inundated with water.

**Aggradation:** Geologic process by which a stream bottom or flood plain is raised in elevation by the deposition of material.

**Alluvial:** Deposited by running water, such as sediments.

**Bankfull discharge:** The stream discharge (flow rate, such as cubic feet per second) that forms and controls the shape and size of the active channel and creates the floodplain. This discharge generally occurs once every 1.5 years on average.

**Bankfull flow:** discharge where water just begins to leave the stream channel and spread onto the floodplain. Bankfull flow is roughly equivalent to channel-forming (conceptual) and effective (calculated) discharge for alluvial streams in equilibrium, and generally occurs every one to two years (on average).

**Bankfull stage:** The stage at which water starts to flow over the flood plain; the elevation of the water surface at bankfull discharge

**Baseflow:** The portion of streamflow that is derived from natural storage of precipitation that percolates to ground water and moves slowly through substrate before reaching the channel. Baseflow sustains streamflow during periods of little or no precipitation and is the average stream discharge during low flow conditions.

**Benthos:** Bottom-dwelling or substrate-oriented organisms.

**Boulders:** Large rocks measuring more than 10 inches across.

**Channel:** **With respect to streams, a channel is a** natural depression of perceptible extent that periodically or continuously contains moving water. It has a definite bed and banks that serve to confine the stream's water.

**Channel form:** The morphology of the channel is typically described by (1) thread (single or multiple channels in valley floor), and sinuosity (amount of curvature in the channel).

**Channel roughness:** Physical elements of a stream channel upon which flow energy is expended including coarseness and texture of bed material, the curvature of the channel, and variation in the longitudinal profile.

**Channelization:** Straightening of a stream channel to make water move faster.

**Cobbles:** Medium-sized rocks which measure 2.5 to 10 inches across.

**Confined channel:** A channel that does not have access to a flood plain.

**Concentrated flow:** Undispersed flow, usually flowing directly from an unbuffered area of overland flow; concentrated flow generally contains sediments and/or contaminants from areas beyond the stream corridor.

**Degradation:** Geologic process by which a stream bottom is lowered in elevation due to the net loss of substrate material. Often called downcutting.

**Detritus:** Materials such as leaves, twigs, or branches that enter a stream from the uplands or riparian area.

**Downcutting:** See Degradation.

**Ecoregion:** A geographic area defined by similarity of climate, landform, soil, potential natural vegetation, hydrology, or other ecologically relevant variables.

**Embeddedness:** The degree to which an object is buried in stream sediment.

**Emergent plants:** Aquatic plants that extend out of the water.

**Ephemeral stream:** A stream with a channel that is above the water table at all times and thus carries water only during and immediately after a rain event.

**Floodplain:** The level area of land near a stream channel, constructed by the stream in the present climate, and overflowed during moderate flow events (after Leopold, 1994).

**Flow augmentation:** Artificially adding water to a stream channel with timing and magnitude that disrupts the natural flow regime. Examples include irrigation deliveries, trans-basin diversions, or wastewater from irrigated lands, treatment plants, or commercial facilities.

**Fluvial:** A feature of or pertaining to the action of moving water.

**Forb:** Any broad-leaved herbaceous plant other than those in the Gramineae (Poaceae), Cyperaceae, and Juncaceae families (Society for Range Management 1989).

**Gabions:** A wire basket filled with rocks; used to stabilize streambanks and control erosion.

**Geomorphology:** The study of the evolution, process, and configuration of landforms.

**Glide:** A fast water habitat type that has low to moderate velocities, no surface agitation, and a U-shaped, smooth, wide bottom.

**Gradient:** Slope calculated as the amount of vertical rise over horizontal run expressed as ft/ft or as percent ( $\text{ft/ft} \times 100$ ).

**Grass:** An annual to perennial herb, generally with round erect stems and swollen nodes; leaves are alternate and two-ranked; flowers are in spikelets each subtended by two bracts.

**Gravel:** Small rocks measuring 0.825 to 2.5 inches across.

**Habitat:** The area or environment in which an organism lives.

**Herbaceous:** Plants with non-woody stems.

**Hydrology:** The study of the properties, distribution, and effects of water on the Earth's surface, soil, and atmosphere.

**Hyporheic:** Below the surface of the streambed, including interstitial spaces.

**Incised channel:** A channel with a streambed lower in elevation than its historic elevation in relation to the flood plain.

**Intermittent stream:** A stream that flows only certain times of the year, such as when it receives water from springs, groundwater or surface runoff.

**Lateral migration:** The adjustment of a stream channel from side to side often involving the recession of a streambank. In a braided river system both streambanks may be recessing due to excessive channel filling and limited bedload transport capabilities, e.g. Photo 15.

**Macrophyte bed:** A dense mat of aquatic plants.

**Macrotopography:** Depositional features within a floodplain developed by water flow and greater than 6 inches than the average land surface of the floodplain.

**Microtopography:** Features within a floodplain developed by water flow and less than 6 inches than the average land surface of the floodplain.

**Meander:** A winding section of stream with many bends that is at least 1.2 times longer, following the channel, than its straight-line distance. A single meander generally comprises two complete opposing bends, starting from the relatively straight section of the channel just before the first bend to the relatively straight section just after the second bend.

**Macroinvertebrate:** A spineless animal visible to the naked eye or larger than 0.5 mm.

**Natural flow regime:** the full range of daily, monthly, and annual streamflows critical to sustaining native biodiversity and integrity in a freshwater ecosystem. Important flow regime characteristics include natural variations in streamflow magnitude, timing, duration, frequency, and rates of change (see Poff et al. 1997 for further detail).

**Nickpoint:** The point where a stream is actively eroding (downcutting) to a new base elevation. Nickpoints migrate upstream (through a process called headcutting).

**Oligotrophic:** Having little or no nutrients and thus low primary production.

**Perennial stream:** A stream that typically flows continuously throughout the year.

**Point bar:** A gravel or sand deposit on the inside of a meander; actively mobile deposits.

**Pool:** Deeper area of a stream with slow-moving water.

**Reach:** A section of stream (defined in a variety of ways, such as the section between tributaries or a section with consistent characteristics).

**Riffle:** A shallow section in a stream where water is breaking over rocks, wood, or other partly submerged debris and producing surface agitation.

**Riparian Areas:** Riparian areas are transitional areas between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and are distinguished by gradients in biophysical conditions, ecological processes, and biota. They are areas through which surface and subsurface hydrology connect waterbodies with their adjacent uplands. They include those portions of terrestrial ecosystems that significantly influence exchanges of energy and matter with aquatic ecosystems.

**Riprap:** Rock material of varying size used to stabilize streambanks and other slopes.

**Run:** A fast-moving section of a stream with a defined thalweg and little surface agitation.

**Scouring:** The erosive removal of material from the stream bottom and banks.

**Sedge:** A grass-like, fibrous-rooted herb with a triangular to round stem and leaves that are mostly three-ranked and with close sheaths; flowers are in spikes or spikelets.

**Stormwater runoff:** overland runoff from a precipitation event not absorbed by soil, vegetation, or other natural means.

**Substrate:** The mineral or organic material that forms the bed of the stream; the surface on which aquatic organisms live.

**Surface fines:** That portion of streambed surface consisting of sand/silt (less than 6 mm).

**Thalweg:** The line followed by most of the streamflow. The line that connects the lowest or deepest points along the streambed.

**Turbidity:** Murkiness of water caused by particles, such as fine sediment and algae.

**Water control structures:** any physical feature located in or adjacent to a stream used to control the direction, magnitude, timing, and frequency of water for instream or out-of-stream uses. Examples include dams, pumps, water treatment or power plant outfalls, gated culverts, standpipes, subsurface drains, and ring wells.

**Watershed:** A ridge of high land dividing two areas that are drained by different river systems. The land area draining to a waterbody or point in a river system; catchment area, drainage basin, drainage area.

### **Appendix 3: Technical Information to Support Implementation of SVAP2**

This appendix provides documentation to support the use of the Stream Visual Assessment Protocol.2 (SVAP2). The topics covered in this section include (1) a summary of changes from SVAP Version 1 and development of SVAP2, (2) context for use with other methods of stream assessment, (3) summary of results of a validation study of the SVAP2, and (4) instructions for modifying the protocol.

#### **1. Summary of Changes in SVAP2**

Applications and uses of the Stream Visual Assessment Protocol Version 1 (SVAP) evolved as more NRCS personnel became familiar with it. Most importantly, field and state office personnel were asked to utilize SVAP for (1) determination of eligibility for fish and wildlife resource conservation in Farm Bill programs, (2) evaluation of the level at which aquatic habitat is being achieved in an RMS, (3) preliminary evaluation of streams where restoration actions were being considered, and (4) documentation of trends after stream and riparian project implementation. The uses for the protocol thus expanded beyond the original intent of the SVAP. Revisions are now made to allow field personnel to assess conditions relatively quickly and with a reasonable degree of accuracy and repeatability. Because SVAP Version 1 was designed for landowners to learn about streams with assistance from field office personnel, the cadre of specialists retained this objective in the development of SVAP2.

The following concerns of field users of SVAP Version 1 were addressed in the revision and are reflected in SVAP2:

1. Revise SVAP to be congruent with existing Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guides. A value of .5 is the threshold/difference between source and sink habitat for terrestrial wildlife. Using SVAP2, a score of 5 or above for a stream meets Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) quality criteria for stream habitat for fish and wildlife.
2. Revise wording and protocol elements to assure better consistency among and between states, to allow repeat assessments over time.
3. Revise critical scoring elements to better reflect the current state of the art and NRCS emphasis on stream corridor conservation. These elements are: Channel Condition, Hydrological Alteration, Riparian Quality, Riparian Quantity, and Bank Condition.

The SVAP Version 1 and SVAP2 were developed by combining parts of several existing assessment procedures. Many of these sources are listed in the references section. Three drafts of SVAP2 were developed and reviewed by the workgroup and others between the fall of 2006 and the spring of 2008. During the summer of 2007, the workgroup conducted a field trial evaluation of the third draft. Subsequently, additional revisions were made, and the fourth draft was sent to all NRCS state offices, selected Federal agencies, and other partners for review and comment during the spring of 2008. Comments were received from eight NRCS state offices, the Bureau of Land Management, and several NRCS national specialists. Comments were, for the most part, uniformly supportive of the need for user guidance and for the document as drafted. Many reviewers provided suggestions that improved explanatory text

for the supporting descriptions accompanying the assessment elements. Most of the suggested revisions were incorporated into the final draft of the protocol.

## **2. Context for use of SVAP2**

The Stream Visual Assessment Protocol 2, like its predecessor, is intended to be a relatively simple, yet comprehensive assessment of stream condition that maximizes ease of use. It is suitable as a *general approximation* of stream condition at the time in which the protocol is used. It can also be used to identify the need for more precise quantitative assessment methods that focus on a particular aspect of the aquatic system. These would include geomorphic analysis, quantitative habitat condition, and biological surveys. The SVAP2 is applicable nationwide because it utilizes ecological and physical factors that are least sensitive to regional differences. However, regional differences are a significant aspect of stream assessment, and therefore the protocol's scoring elements are expected to be modified to reflect regional differences in physical landscape features and weather patterns. The national SVAP2 is viewed as a framework that will evolve over time to better reflect State or within-State regional differences. Instructions for modification are provided later in this document.

The SVAP is issued as a national product. States are encouraged to incorporate it within the Field Office Technical Guide. The document may be modified by States. The electronic file for the document may be downloaded from the NRCS website at:

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## **3. Summary of Validation Study of SVAP2**

SVAP2 was field tested regionally and nationally, along with three alternative protocols designed to evaluate physical habitat condition of streams. The protocols evaluated were NRCS' Stream Visual Assessment Protocol-Version 2 (SVAP2), the Ohio EPA's Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (QHEI), the USEPA's Rapid Bioassessment Protocol (EPA-RBP), and a quantitative protocol developed by USEPA's Environmental Monitoring & Assessment Program (EMAP-QTPH). The contractors sampled one site on each of 51 wadeable agricultural streams in the summer of 2007. Sites were distributed throughout the USA, except for the deep south because of high waters, and they included 8 sites in California (Central Valley), 10 in Oregon (Willamette Valley), 4 in North Dakota (Northern Plains), 8 in South Dakota (Northern Plains), 4 in Nebraska (Western Corn Belt), 5 in Iowa (Western Corn Belt), 2 in Minnesota (Western Corn Belt), 6 in Pennsylvania (Ridge & Valley), 3 in Maryland (Ridge & Valley), and 1 in West Virginia (Ridge & Valley).

Precision was assessed through use of scatter plots, coefficients of variation, and a signal/noise test (among-site variance/within-site observer variance) for all four protocols. Results indicated high precision among field technicians for all qualitative protocols, but greater precision for the quantitative protocol. Overall, all four methods produced similar assessment precision results, although SVAP2 elements Riffle Embeddedness and Nutrient Enrichment demonstrated low observer precision. Depending on the purpose for completing the SVAP2, a simple *quantitative* assessment of these elements such as pebble counts or water quality testing for Total Phosphorus may be warranted if element scores are lower than 5. Salinity and Macroinvertebrate Elements were not included in the study.

Accuracy of SVAP2 was determined by comparing (1) qualitative index scores against a quantitative physical habitat index (EMAP-QTPH); (2) qualitative metric scores against quantitative (EMAP-QTPH) metric scores; and (3) qualitative & quantitative habitat index scores against quantitative biological index scores (fish assemblage tolerance index, fish IBI, macroinvertebrate EPT, macroinvertebrate IBI). The results indicated acceptable levels of accuracy for all four habitat indices, but greater accuracy for the quantitative protocol. Also, comparisons between each of the 4 habitat indexes and the biological indexes were only weakly correlated. These comparisons were likely confounded by other stressors, such as water quality or landscape-scale perturbances and their effects on aquatic biota.

Four SVAP2 elements (Channel Condition, Hydrological Alteration, Water Appearance, and Nutrient Enrichment) were found to be less accurate in characterizing these stream features than the quantitative EMAP metrics. However, the EMAP metric used to make 3 of these comparisons (Hydrological Alteration, Water Appearance, Nutrient Enrichment) were, at best, only weakly comparable, which may explain some of the variation between the two methods. The comparison of the EMAP metric (bed stability) to the SVAP2 Channel Condition was relatively comparable, and so the lack of strong correlation between these two methods is likely due to the complexity of visually assessing these stream features (Table 2). This finding reinforces the need to complete a quantitative assessment of channel condition if SVAP 2 scores for this element are lower than 5.

Table 2. Correlations Between Qualitative SVAP Metrics and Quantitative EMAP Metrics. Individual observers combined, n=102 (LRBS data were missing for 22 sites).

SVAP Metric	EMAP Metric*	Pearson Correlation	Spearman Correlation
Channel Condition	LRBS (n=80)	0.27	0.29
Hydrologic Alteration	LRBS (n=80)	0.16	0.13
Bank Condition (Left/Right)	XGB	-0.50 / -0.51	-0.44 / -0.44
Riparian Area Quantity (Left / Right)	XCMGW	0.54 / 0.64	0.48 / 0.52
Riparian Area Quality (Left / Right)	XCMG	0.52 / 0.56	0.47 / 0.52
Canopy Cover	XCDENMID	0.76	0.74
Water Appearance	XFCALG+XFCAQM	-0.14	-0.05
Nutrient Enrichment	Log10 Total P	-0.10	-0.07
Manure	W1H_PSTR	-0.73	-0.60
Pools	RPGT20	0.64	0.66
Barriers	PCT_DRS	-0.48	-0.43
Invertebrate Habitat	PCT_FN	-0.61	-0.66
Fish Habitat	SDDEPTH	0.61	0.55
Embeddedness	PCT_FN	-0.61	-0.69

\*LRBS: log<sub>10</sub> relative bed stability; XGB: sum of riparian bare ground cover;

XCMGW: sum of woody canopy, mid-layer & ground vegetation cover

XCMG: sum of canopy, mid-layer & ground vegetation cover

XCDENMID: mean % canopy midstream

XFCALG+XFCAQM: % areal cover of filamentous algae & aquatic macrophytes

LOG10 TOTAL P: log<sub>10</sub> of total phosphorus; W1H\_PSTR: sum of riparian pasture, hay

RPGT20: number of residual pools >20 cm deep

PCT\_DRS: % stream dry stream bed

PCT\_FN: % silt, clay & muck; SDDEPTH: standard deviation of thalweg depth

**3. Instructions for modification of SVAP2 to better reflect local conditions.** The NRCS Stream Visual Assessment Protocol 2 may be used in many locales without modification when the objective of the user is to learn about features that determine overall stream and riparian conditions. As its predecessor, SVAP2 was designed to use assessment elements that are the least sensitive to regional differences. Nonetheless, when using the tool to evaluate trends in stream corridor habitat conditions over time, the elements and scoring categories should be calibrated to reflect conditions characteristic of the geographic area. If narrative descriptions of scoring elements match local features and hydrologic regimes the SVAP2 will:

- be easier to use locally,
- be more responsive to changes in local stream condition over time, and
- be more precise and accurate

Two parts of the SVAP2 may be modified—the individual elements and their narrative descriptions, and the rating scale for assigning an overall condition rating. The simplest approach to modifying the SVAP2 is based on professional experience and judgment. Under this approach an interdisciplinary team should be assembled to develop proposed revisions. Revisions should then be evaluated by conducting comparison assessments at sites representing a range of conditions and evaluating accuracy (correlation between different assessment methods), precision (reproducibility among different users), and ease of use.

***Step 1 Decide on tentative number of versions.***

Do you want to develop a revised version for your state, for each ecoregion within your state, or for several stream classes within each ecoregion?

***Step 2 Develop a tentative stream classification.***

If you are developing protocols by stream class, you need to develop a tentative classification system. (If you are interested in a statewide or ecoregion protocol, go to step 3.) You might develop a classification system based on stream order, elevation, or landscape character. Do not create too many categories. The greater the number of categories, the more assessment work will be needed to modify the protocol and the more you will be accommodating degradation within the evaluation system. As an extreme example of the latter problem, you would not want to create a stream class consisting of those streams that have bank-to-bank cropping and at least one sewage outfall.

***Step 3 Assess sites.***

Assess a series of sites representing a range of conditions from highly impacted sites to least impacted sites. Try to have at least 10 sites in each of your tentative classes. Those sites should include several potential “least impacted reference sites.” Try to use sites that have been assessed by other assessment methods (such as sites assessed by state agencies or universities). As part of the assessments, be sure to record information on potential classification factors and if any particular elements are difficult to score. Take notes so that future revisions of the elements can be rescored without another site visit.

***Step 4 Rank the sites.***

Begin your data analysis by ranking all the sites from most impacted to least impacted. Rank sites according to the independent assessment results (preferred) or by the SVAP scores.

Initially, rank all of the sites in the state data set. You will test classifications in subsequent iterations.

***Step 5 Display scoring data.***

Prepare a chart of the data from all sites in your state. The columns are the sites arranged by the ranking. The rows are the assessment elements, the overall numerical score, and the narrative rating. If you have independent assessment data, create a second chart by plotting the overall SVAP scores against the independent scores.

***Step 6 Evaluate responsiveness.***

Does the SVAP score change in response to the condition gradient represented by the different sites? Are the individual element scores responding to key resource problems? Were users comfortable with all elements? If the answers are yes, do not change the elements and proceed to step 7. If the answers are no, isolate which elements are not responsive. Revise the narrative descriptions for those elements to better respond to the observable conditions. Conduct a "desktop" reassessment of the sites with the new descriptions, and return to step 4.

***Step 7 Evaluate the narrative rating breakpoints.***

Do the breakpoints for the narrative rating correspond to other assessment results? The excellent range should encompass only reference sites. If not, you should reset the narrative rating breakpoints. Set the excellent breakpoint based on the least impacted reference sites. You must use judgment to set the other breakpoints.

***Step 8 Evaluate tentative classification systems.***

Go back to step 4 and display your data this time by the tentative classes (ecoregions or stream classes). In other words, analyze sites from each ecoregion or each stream class separately. Repeat steps 5 through 7. If the responsiveness is significantly different from the responsiveness of the statewide data set or the breakpoints appear to be significantly different, adopt the classification system and revise the protocol for each ecoregion or stream class. If not, a single statewide protocol is adequate. After the initial modification of the SVAP, the state may want to set up a process to consider future revisions. Field offices should be encouraged to locate and assess least impacted reference sites to build the data base for interpretation and future revisions. Ancillary data should be collected to help evaluate whether a potential reference site should be considered a reference site. Caution should be exercised when considering future revisions. Revisions complicate comparing SVAP scores determined before and after the implementation of conservation practices if the protocol is substantially revised in the intervening period. Developing information to support refining the SVAP can be carried out by research partners working cooperatively with NRCS.