

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
VIRGINIA CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

WATERING FACILITY

(No.)

CODE 614

**DEFINITION**

A watering facility is a means of providing drinking water to livestock or wildlife.

**PURPOSE**

To store or provide designated access to drinking water for livestock or wildlife to:

- supply daily water requirements
- improve animal distribution
- provide a water source that is an alternative to a sensitive resource

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to all land uses where there is a need for a watering facility for livestock or wildlife, where there is a source of water that is adequate in quantity and quality for the purpose, and where soils and topography are suitable for a facility.

**CRITERIA**

**Capacity.** Identify the type of livestock or wildlife that will be the primary user(s) of the facility. If the watering facility will supply water to different species of animals, provide sufficient water to meet the sum of the seasonal high daily water requirements of all the animals.

Refer to the National Range and Pasture Handbook (Chapter 6), State guidance, Virginia Engineering Design Note 614, or university publications for information on livestock water quantity and quality requirements. For wildlife, base water quantity and quality requirements on targeted species needs.

**User Needs.** Design the watering facility so that access is adequate to accommodate the number of animals that will be drinking at the same time. Include design elements to meet the specific needs of the primary user(s). Examples of specific design needs would include accommodation for species and ingress and egress requirements.

**Materials and Appurtenances.** Construct the watering facility from durable materials that meet or exceed the lifespan of the practice. Follow NRCS design procedures for the selected materials. Use industry standards where NRCS standards do not exist.

**Stabilization of Disturbed Areas.** Vegetate or stabilize areas disturbed by construction in accordance with the planned use of the facility. Use the criteria in Virginia NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) *Critical Area Planting (Code 342)* to establish vegetation. If establishment of vegetation is precluded by site conditions, use the criteria in Virginia NRCS CPS *Mulching (Code 484)*, as appropriate.

**Troughs and Tanks**

**Capacity.** Design the watering facility with the storage volume necessary to provide water between periods of replenishment. Base the additional storage volume on the availability of water, replenishment rate, location, and planned operation.

**Location.** Locate the watering facility to meet the needs of the managed livestock or wildlife species. Select a site that will promote even grazing distribution and reduce grazing pressure on sensitive areas.

Where multiple watering facilities are planned, place the watering facilities at distances that are appropriate for the species that will be

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managed.

When possible, locate the watering facility away from streams, ponds, or riparian areas to minimize chance of contamination from fecal contamination or surface pollution.

When a watering facility is installed adjacent to a well, provide positive drainage away from the well head.

Select a site that is well-drained, where possible. If the site is not well-drained, included drainage measures in the design.

**Foundation.** Install the watering trough or water storage tank on a firm, level foundation that will not settle differentially. Examples of suitable foundation materials are bedrock, concrete, compacted gravel and stable, well-compacted soils. Where necessary, prepare the foundation by removal and disposal of materials that are not adequate to support the design loads.

Anchor or brace the watering facility to prevent overturning by wind and animals, if needed.

**Tanks.** Analyze the foundation conditions and provide a design that will ensure the stability of the storage tank. For a vertical storage tank with a tank height greater than the tank diameter, also analyze the potential for overturning and identify the anchoring requirements.

Use NRCS design procedures or manufacturer's guidelines to ensure that buried tanks will withstand all earth and vehicle loads anticipated for the site.

**Stabilization.** For a fixed trough, protect the area around the watering facility where animal concentrations or overflow from the watering facility will cause resource concerns. Use NRCS CPS *Heavy Use Area Protection (Code 561)* to design the protection.

For a portable facility, move the trough frequently to prevent damage from animal concentrations.

**Appurtenances.** Use the criteria in Virginia NRCS CPS *Livestock Pipeline (Code 516)* to select the components needed to attach the water supply to the trough. Include backflow prevention devices on facilities connected to wells or to domestic or municipal water systems.

Provide a stable outlet for the overflow pipe when an overflow pipe is included in the design. Protect the outlet from damage. Direct overflow from the trough to another beneficial use or to the original watercourse, where possible. Equip the overflow pipe with a trash rack.

Where water is supplied under pressure to the watering facility, use automatic water level controls or float valves to control the flow of water to the facility in order to reduce energy use and prevent overflows.

As needed, install a float valve on a gravity-fed trough or reservoir to avoid draining the water source.

Protect valves and controls from damage by livestock, wildlife, freezing, and ice.

**Escape Features.** Install escape features where local knowledge and experience indicate that wildlife may be at risk of drowning.

An effective escape device must:

- Meet the inside wall of the tank or trough
- Reach to the bottom of the trough or tank
- Be firmly secured to the trough rim
- Be built of durable material with a rough surface animals can grip
- Have a slope no steeper than 45 degrees
- Be located to cause minimal interference with livestock

Provide one escape device for every 30 linear feet of rim.

Refer to *Water for Wildlife – A Handbook for Ranchers and Range Managers*, Bat Conservation International, for additional information on escape features.

### **Watering Ramps**

Where livestock or wildlife will drink directly from a pond or stream, use a watering ramp to provide a stabilized access to the water. Evaluate the existing and proposed fences, grazing patterns, shoreline slope, and water depth when choosing the optimum location for the ramp.

**Width.** Make the ramp wide enough to accommodate the expected usage but not less than 12 feet.

Length. Extend the ramp into the stream or pond far enough to achieve the desired depth during the driest times of the year.

Surface drainage. Divert surface runoff from the approach to the ramp.

Slope. Make the slope of the watering ramp consistent with planned animal usage but not steeper than 3:1.

Side slopes. Make all side slope cuts and fills stable for the soil materials on the site. Make the side slopes of cuts or fills in soil materials no steeper than 2 horizontal to 1 vertical (2:1). Make rock cuts or fills no steeper than 1.5 horizontal to 1 vertical (1.5:1).

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

Surface material. Use the criteria in NRCS CPS *Heavy Use Area Protection (Code 561)* to design the ramp surface. The selected material must be of adequate quality to withstand underwater conditions.

Access. Use fencing or other barriers to delineate the boundaries of the ramp. Use Virginia NRCS CPS *Fence (Code 382)* for the design and construction of a fence. Barriers must be of sufficient size, strength, and quality to meet the intended use of the facility. Do not use electric fencing in the area immediately adjacent to the water.

Ramps in Streams. Use the criteria in Virginia NRCS CPS *Stream Crossing (Code 578)* for the design and construction of a ford crossing except as noted above.

Locate the watering ramp so that it does not impede the movement of aquatic organisms in the stream.

Ramps in Ponds. A minimum water depth of 3 feet, measured from the designed permanent water level, is recommended. Where the pond depth is greater than 3 feet at the ramp location, it may be necessary to excavate the ramp into the pond bank to provide a stable base at the lower end. Extend the ramp a minimum of 0.5 feet above the designed permanent water level.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Not all species need or benefit from supplemental water. Consider impacts to both target and non-target wildlife species before installation of a watering facility. Observed or documented use of a facility by wildlife does not necessarily indicate net benefits. Introducing a new water source within an ecosystem can have effects such as the concentration of grazing, predation, entrapment, drowning, disease transmission, and expansion of the wildlife populations beyond the carrying capacity of the available habitat. Providing a water source for wildlife could enhance the habitat for species that compete with or prey on at-risk species.

Design fences associated with the watering facility to allow safe ingress and egress for area wildlife species. To protect species that access water by skimming across the surface, make fencing materials highly visible with appropriate openings. Add permanent streamers or coverings to wire fences that extend across a watering facility to make them more visible to skimmers.

Consider designing the facility to benefit wildlife. Such designs would include providing ground-level access to water for species that cannot use raised structures such as troughs. Ground-level access can be provided through creation of an overflow collection area or a secondary ground-level water source. Depending on the target species, planners may want to consider protecting these areas through the use of suitable fencing (marked as needed) that excludes livestock and larger wildlife species while allowing access of the site to small ground-dwelling species.

Consideration should also be given to prevention of disease transmission at watering facilities. Suitable controls/treatments for water-transmissible diseases and parasites should be considered if they are a problem locally.

When windmill, solar, or other potentially unreliable power source is used, supply additional daily water storage volume (3-5 days), provide a battery back-up system or provide an alternate water source. Use of a float valve on a system with one of these types of power supply may not be practical.

Consider the effects of water development on the balance or budget of water resources in the area of the new project. In some settings, this could be important and may result in effects to adjacent or associated habitats and species.

If there is the potential for small livestock, such as lambs or kids, to fall into the trough, provide a ledge or similar structure in the trough to provide an escape route or provide a second trough that has a shorter height.

Debris and algae can collect in watering facilities resulting in the need for frequent cleaning.

Where debris or algae is a problem, reduce the chances of clogging by increasing pipe sizes for inlets and outlets or by installing a feature such as an inverted elbow at the inlet to the overflow pipe. Maintenance of a watering facility can be made easier by providing a method to completely drain the watering facility. Protect the outlet of a drain from erosion.

Consider installation of a permanent means of ingress and egress for maintenance of a storage tank, if needed.

A watering facility located on a steep slope can have erosion problems from the animal traffic. The steep slopes may also cause problems with piping and valves from excess pressure. Choose the location of the watering facility to minimize problems caused by steep topography.

**Watering ramps.** Where livestock exclusion from a stream is part of the planned installation, consider installing a watering ramp that can be used if emergency access to water is needed. Use a gate to restrict access to the ramp.

The slope of the ramp can influence animal behavior. Steeper slopes tend to discourage loitering in the ramp area.

Select a surface material for the ramp that will discourage loitering but still provide a stable footing. The larger stone will make the hoof contact slightly uncomfortable.

Avoid locating watering ramps in shady places where possible.

It is difficult to put a fence in the middle of a stream. Where possible, extend the fence

completely across the stream. Swinging gates can be used to restrict animal movement.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Provide plans and specifications that describe the requirements for applying this practice to achieve its intended purpose.

Record all required information in an engineer field book, on a plan sheet or design computation sheet, or in another appropriate location. As a minimum, include:

### DESIGN DATA

1. Completed Environmental Evaluation and subsequent requirements.
2. Soils investigation.
3. Survey and plot data: profile, cross-sections, as needed.
4. Design computations, including purpose of practice and references used.
  - a. Type and number of animals expected to use the facility.
  - b. Special conditions for access, as needed
  - c. Foundation stability requirements.
5. Plan view of site with existing and planned features, including dimensions, distances, any associated pipelines etc.
6. Site-specific detail drawings showing the facility and necessary appurtenances (foundations, pipes and valves, escape features, anchoring, etc.) and stabilization of any areas disturbed by the installation of the facility.
7. Standard Cover Sheet (VA-SO-100).
8. Materials and quantities needed. Identify borrow material and/or spoil area, as needed.
9. Vegetation and/or ground cover requirements.
10. Identification of needed Erosion & Sediment Control measures.
11. Supplemental practices required, including fencing.

12. Virginia Conservation Practice Specifications (700 Series).
13. Operation and Maintenance Plan

#### CHECK DATA

1. As-built survey.
2. As-built plans including dimensions, types and quantities of materials installed, and variations from design. Include justification for variations.
3. Locations of appurtenant practices.
4. Adequacy of vegetation and/or ground cover.
5. Complete as-built section of Cover Sheet.

#### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Prepare an operation and maintenance plan and review it with the operator. The plan will describe the actions that must be taken to ensure that the facility functions properly for its design life. As a minimum, include the following items:

- Regularly check for damage to the facility. Check for leaks, site erosion, and damage to fences, heavy use areas, and appurtenances associated with the watering facility. Repair or replace damaged components, as needed.
- Check the performance of the automatic water level device, if present.
- Ensure that the outlet pipe is freely operating and is not causing erosion.
- Regularly clean the facility.
- Maintain the facility to ensure that there is adequate inflow and outflow.
- Prepare the facility for winter as dictated by the climate. This may include draining supply pipes, emptying tanks, or ensuring that float valves will not be damaged by ice.
- For a portable facility, include the plan for moving the facility and for monitoring/repair of the areas around the facility.

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#### REFERENCES

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