



Description

Constructed wetlands are constructed basins that have a permanent pool of water throughout the year (or at least throughout the wet season) and differ from wet ponds primarily in being shallower and having greater vegetation coverage. The schematic diagram is of an on-line pond that includes detention for larger events, but this is not required in all areas of the state.

A distinction should be made between using a constructed wetland for storm water management and diverting storm water into a natural wetland. The latter practice is not recommended and in all circumstances, natural wetlands should be protected from the adverse effects of development, including impacts from increased storm water runoff. This is especially important because natural wetlands provide storm water and flood control benefits on a regional scale.

Wetlands are among the most effective stormwater practices in terms of pollutant removal and they also offer aesthetic value. As stormwater runoff flows through the wetland, pollutant removal is achieved through settling and biological uptake within the wetland. Flow through the root systems forces the vegetation to remove nutrients and dissolved pollutants from the stormwater.

California Experience

The City of Laguna Niguel in Orange County has constructed several wetlands, primarily to reduce bacteria concentrations in dry weather flows. The wetlands have been very successful in this regard. Even though there is not enough perennial flow to maintain the permanent pool at a constant elevation, the wetland vegetation has thrived.

Design Considerations

- Area Required
- Slope
- Water Availability
- Aesthetics
- Environmental Side-effects

Targeted Constituents

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sediment	■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nutrients	▲
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trash	■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Metals	■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bacteria	■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Oil and Grease	■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organics	■

Legend (Removal Effectiveness)

- Low
- ▲ Medium
- High



Advantages

- If properly designed, constructed and maintained, wet basins can provide substantial wildlife and wetlands habitat.
- Due to the presence of the permanent wet pool, properly designed and maintained wet basins can provide significant water quality improvement across a relatively broad spectrum of constituents including dissolved nutrients.
- Widespread application with sufficient capture volume can provide significant control of channel erosion and enlargement caused by changes to flow frequency relationships resulting from the increase of impervious cover in a watershed.

Limitations

- There may be some aesthetic concerns about a facility that looks swampy.
- Some concern about safety when constructed where there is public access.
- Mosquito and midge breeding is likely to occur in wetlands.
- Cannot be placed on steep unstable slopes.
- Need for base flow or supplemental water if water level is to be maintained.
- Require a relatively large footprint
- Depending on volume and depth, pond designs may require approval from the State Division of Safety of Dams

Design and Sizing Guidelines

- Capture volume determined by local requirements or sized to treat 85% of the annual runoff volume.
- Outlet designed to discharge the capture volume over a period of 24 hours.
- Permanent pool volume equal to twice the water quality volume.
- Water depth not to exceed about 4 feet.
- Wetland vegetation occupying no more than 50% of surface area.
- Include energy dissipation in the inlet design and a sediment forebay to reduce resuspension of accumulated sediment and facilitate maintenance.
- A maintenance ramp should be included in the design to facilitate access to the forebay for maintenance activities and for vector surveillance and control.
- To facilitate vector surveillance and control activities, road access should be provided along at least one side of BMPs that are seven meters or less in width. Those BMPs that have shoreline-to-shoreline distances in excess of seven meters should have perimeter road access on both sides or be designed such that no parcel of water is greater than seven meters from the road.

Construction/Inspection Considerations

- In areas with porous soils an impermeable liner may be required to maintain an adequate permanent pool level.
- Outlet structures and piping should be installed with collars to prevent water from seeping through the fill and causing structural failure.
- Inspect facility after first large storm to determine whether the desired residence time has been achieved.

Performance

The processes that impact the performance of constructed wetlands are essentially the same as those operating in wet ponds and similar pollutant reduction would be expected. One concern about the long-term performance of wetlands is associated with the vegetation density. If vegetation covers the majority of the facility, open water is confined to a few well defined channels. This can limit mixing of the stormwater runoff with the permanent pool and reduce the effectiveness as compared to a wet pond where a majority of the area is open water.

Siting Criteria

Wet ponds are a widely applicable stormwater management practice and can be used over a broad range of storm frequencies and sizes, drainage areas and land use types. Although they have limited applicability in highly urbanized settings and in arid climates, they have few other restrictions. Constructed wetlands may be constructed on- or off-line and can be sited at feasible locations along established drainage ways with consistent base flow. An off-line design is preferred. Constructed wetlands are often utilized in smaller sub-watersheds and are particularly appropriate in areas with residential land uses or other areas where high nutrient loads are considered to be potential problems (e.g., golf courses).

Wetlands generally consume a fairly large area (typically 4-6 percent of the contributing drainage area), and these facilities are generally larger than wet ponds because the average depth is less.

Wet basin application is appropriate in the following settings: (1) where there is a need to achieve a reasonably high level of dissolved contaminant removal and/or sediment capture; (2) in small to medium-sized regional tributary areas with available open space and drainage areas greater than about 10 ha (25 ac.); (3) where base flow rates or other channel flow sources are relatively consistent year-round; (4) in settings where wildlife habitat benefits can be appreciated.

Additional Design Guidelines

Constructed wetlands generally feature relatively uniformly vegetated areas with depths of one foot or less and open water areas (25-50% of the total area) no more than about 1.2 m (4 feet) deep, although design configuration options are relatively flexible. Wetland vegetation is comprised generally of a diverse, local aquatic plant species. Constructed wetlands can be designed on-line or off-line and generally serve relatively smaller drainage areas than wet ponds, although because of the shallow depths, the footprint of the facility will be larger than a wet pond serving the same tributary area.

The extended detention shallow wetland combines the treatment concepts of the dry extended detention pond and the constructed wetland. In this design, the water quality volume is detained above the permanent pool and released over 24 hours. In addition to increasing the residence time, which improves pollutant removal, this design also attenuates peak runoff rates. Consequently, this design alternative is recommended.

Pretreatment incorporates design features that help to settle out coarse sediment particles. By removing these particles from runoff before they reach the large permanent pool, the maintenance burden of the pond is reduced. In ponds, pretreatment is achieved with a sediment forebay. A sediment forebay is a small pool (typically about 10 percent of the volume of the permanent pool). Coarse particles remain trapped in the forebay, and maintenance is performed on this smaller pool, eliminating the need to dredge the entire pond.

Effective wetland design displays "complex microtopography." In other words, wetlands should have zones of both very shallow (<6 inches) and moderately shallow (<18 inches) wetlands incorporated, using underwater earth berms to create the zones. This design will provide a longer flow path through the wetland to encourage settling, and it provides two depth zones to encourage plant diversity.

There are a variety of sizing criteria for determining the volume of the permanent pool, mostly related to the water quality volume (i.e., the volume of water treated for pollutant removal) or the average storm size in a particular area. In addition, several theoretical approaches to determination of permanent pool volume have been developed. However, there is little empirical evidence to support these designs. Consequently, a simplified method (i.e., permanent pool volume equal to twice the water quality volume) is recommended.

Design features are also incorporated to ease maintenance of both the forebay and the main pool of ponds. Ponds should be designed with a maintenance access to the forebay to ease this relatively routine (every 5–7 year) maintenance activity. In addition, ponds should generally have a drain to draw down the pond for vegetation harvesting or the more infrequent dredging of the main cell of the pond.

Summary of Design Recommendations

- (1) Facility Sizing – The basin should be sized to hold the permanent pool as well as the required water quality volume. The volume of the permanent pool should equal twice the water quality volume.
- (2) Pond Configuration - The wet basin should be configured as a two stage facility with a sediment forebay and a main pool. The basins should be wedge-shaped, narrowest at the inlet and widest at the outlet. The minimum length to width ratio should be 1.5 where feasible. The depth in the center of the basin should be about 4 feet deep to prevent vegetation from encroaching on the pond open water surface.
- (3) Pond Side Slopes - Side slopes of the basin should be 3:1 (H:V) or flatter for grass stabilized slopes. Slopes steeper than 3:1 should be stabilized with an appropriate slope stabilization practice.
- (4) Sediment Forebay - A sediment forebay should be used to isolate gross sediments as they enter the facility and to simplify sediment removal. The sediment forebay

should consist of a separate cell formed by an earthen berm, gabion, or loose riprap wall. The forebay should be sized to contain 15 to 25% of the permanent pool volume and should be at least 3 feet deep. Exit velocities from the forebay should not be erosive. Direct maintenance access should be provided to the forebay. The bottom of the forebay may be hardened (concrete) to make sediment removal easier. A fixed vertical sediment depth marker should be installed in the forebay to measure sediment accumulation.

- (5) Splitter Box - When the pond is designed as an off-line facility, a splitter structure is used to isolate the water quality volume. The splitter box, or other flow diverting approach, should be designed to convey the 25-year event while providing at least 1.0 foot of freeboard along pond side slopes.
- (6) Vegetation - A plan should be prepared that indicates how aquatic and terrestrial areas will be vegetatively stabilized. Wetland vegetation elements should be placed along the aquatic bench or in the shallow portions of the permanent pool. The optimal elevation for planting of wetland vegetation is within 6 inches vertically of the normal pool elevation. A list of some wetland vegetation native to California is presented in the wet pond fact sheet.

Maintenance

The amount of maintenance required for a constructed wetland is highly dependent on local regulatory agencies, particular health and vector control agencies. These agencies are often extremely concerned about the potential for mosquito breeding that may occur in the permanent pool.

Routine harvesting of vegetation may increase nutrient removal and prevent the export of these constituents from dead and dying plants falling in the water. A previous study (Faulkner and Richardson, 1991) documented dramatic reductions in nutrient removal after the first several years of operation and related it to the vegetation achieving a maximum density. Vegetation harvesting in the summer is recommended.

Typical maintenance activities and frequencies include:

- Schedule semiannual inspections for burrows, sediment accumulation, structural integrity of the outlet, and litter accumulation.
- Remove accumulated trash and debris in the basin at the middle and end of the wet season. The frequency of this activity may be altered to meet specific site conditions and aesthetic considerations.
- Where permitted by the Department of Fish and Game or other agency regulations, stock wet ponds/constructed wetlands regularly with mosquito fish (*Gambusia spp.*) to enhance natural mosquito and midge control.
- Introduce mosquito fish and maintain vegetation to assist their movements to control mosquitoes, as well as to provide access for vector inspectors. An annual vegetation harvest in summer appears to be optimum, in that it is after the bird breeding season, mosquito fish can provide the needed control until vegetation reaches late summer density, and there is

time for re-growth for runoff treatment purposes before the wet season. In certain cases, more frequent plant harvesting may be required by local vector control agencies.

- Maintain emergent and perimeter shoreline vegetation as well as site and road access to facilitate vector surveillance and control activities.
- Remove accumulated sediment in the forebay and regrade about every 5-7 years or when the accumulated sediment volume exceeds 10 percent of the basin volume. Sediment removal may not be required in the main pool area for as long as 20 years.

Cost

Construction Cost

Wetlands are relatively inexpensive storm water practices. Construction cost data for wetlands are rare, but one simplifying assumption is that they are typically about 25 percent more expensive than storm water ponds of an equivalent volume. Using this assumption, an equation developed by Brown and Schueler (1997) to estimate the cost of wet ponds can be modified to estimate the cost of storm water wetlands using the equation:

$$C = 30.6V^{0.705}$$

where:

C = Construction, design, and permitting cost;

V = Wetland volume needed to control the 10-year storm (ft³).

Using this equation, typical construction costs are the following:

\$ 57,100 for a 1 acre-foot facility

\$ 289,000 for a 10 acre-foot facility

\$ 1,470,000 for a 100 acre-foot facility

Wetlands consume about 3 to 5 percent of the land that drains to them, which is relatively high compared with other storm water management practices. In areas where land value is high, this may make wetlands an infeasible option.

Maintenance Cost

For ponds, the annual cost of routine maintenance has typically been estimated at about 3 to 5 percent of the construction cost; however, the published literature is almost totally devoid of actual maintenance costs. Since ponds are long-lived facilities (typically longer than 20 years), major maintenance activities are unlikely to occur during a relatively short study.

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