

Wet Ponds

Postconstruction Storm Water Management in New Development and Redevelopment

Description

Wet ponds (a.k.a. storm water ponds, retention ponds, wet extended detention ponds) are constructed basins that have a permanent pool of water throughout the year (or at least throughout the wet season). Ponds treat incoming storm water runoff by settling and algal uptake. The primary removal mechanism is settling as storm water runoff resides in this pool, and pollutant uptake, particularly of nutrients, also occurs through biological activity in the pond. Wet ponds are among the most cost-effective and widely used storm water practices. While there are several different versions of the wet pond design, the most common modification is the extended detention wet pond, where storage is provided above the permanent pool in order to detain storm water runoff in order to provide settling.



The primary functions of a wet pond are to detain storm water and facilitate pollutant removal through settling and biological uptake

Applicability

Wet ponds are widely applicable storm water management practices. Although they have limited applicability in highly urbanized settings and in arid climates, they have few other restrictions.

Regional Applicability

Wet extended detention ponds can be applied in most regions of the United States, with the exception of arid climates. In arid regions, it is difficult to justify the supplemental water needed to maintain a permanent pool because of the scarcity of water. Even in semi-arid Austin, Texas, one study found that 2.6 acre-feet per year of supplemental water was needed to maintain a permanent pool of only 0.29 acre-feet (Saunders and Gilroy, 1997). Other modifications and design variations are needed in semi-arid and cold climates, and karst (i.e., limestone) topography.

Ultra-Urban Areas

Ultra-urban areas are densely developed urban areas in which little pervious surface exists. It is difficult to use wet ponds in the ultra-urban environment because of the land area each pond consumes. They can, however, be used in an ultra-urban environment if a relatively large area is available downstream of the site.

Storm Water Hot Spots

Storm water hot spots are areas where land use or activities generate highly contaminated runoff, with concentrations of pollutants in excess of those typically found in storm water. A typical example is a gas station. Wet ponds can accept runoff from storm water hot spots, but need significant separation from ground water if they will be used for this purpose.

Storm Water Retrofit

A storm water retrofit is a storm water management practice (usually structural) put into place after development has occurred, to improve water quality, protect downstream channels, reduce flooding, or meet other specific objectives. Wet ponds are very useful storm water retrofits and have two primary applications as a retrofit design. In many communities, detention ponds have been designed for flood control in the past. It is possible to modify these facilities to develop a permanent wet pool to provide water quality control (see Treatment under Design Considerations), and modify the outlet structure to provide channel protection. Alternatively, wet ponds may be designed in-stream, or in open areas as a part of a retrofit study.

Cold Water (Trout) Streams

Wet ponds pose a risk to cold water systems because of their potential for stream warming. When water remains in the permanent pool, it is heated by the sun. A study in Prince George's County, Maryland, found that storm water wet ponds heat storm water by about 9°F from the inlet to the outlet (Galli, 1990).

Siting and Design Considerations

Siting Considerations

In addition to the restrictions and modifications to adapting wet ponds to different regions and land uses, designers need to ensure that this management practice is feasible at the site in question. The following section provides basic guidelines for siting wet ponds.

Drainage Area

Wet ponds need sufficient drainage area to maintain the permanent pool. In humid regions, this is typically about 25 acres, but a greater area may be needed in regions with less rainfall.

Slope

Wet ponds can be used on sites with an upstream slope up to about 15 percent. The local slope should be relatively shallow, however. Although there is no minimum slope requirement, there does need to be enough elevation drop from the pond inlet to the pond outlet to ensure that water can flow through the system.

Soils / Topography

Wet ponds can be used in almost all soils and geology, with minor design adjustments for regions of karst topography (see Design Considerations).

Ground Water

Unless they receive hot spot runoff, ponds can often intersect the ground water table. However, some research suggests that pollutant removal is reduced when ground water contributes substantially to the pool volume (Schueler, 1997b).

Design Considerations

Specific designs may vary considerably, depending on site constraints or preferences of the designer or community. There are some features, however, that should be incorporated into most wet pond designs. These design features can be divided into five basic categories: pretreatment, treatment, conveyance, maintenance reduction, and landscaping.

Pretreatment

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.

Treatment

Treatment design features help enhance the ability of a storm water management practice to remove pollutants. The purpose of most of these features is to increase the amount of time that storm water remains in the pond.

One technique of increasing the pollutant removal of a pond is to increase the volume of the permanent pool. Typically, ponds are sized to be equal to the water quality volume (i.e., the volume of water treated for pollutant removal). Designers may consider using a larger volume to meet specific watershed objectives, such as phosphorous removal in a lake system. Regardless of the pool size, designers need to conduct a water balance analysis to ensure that sufficient inflow is available to maintain the permanent pool.

Other design features do not increase the volume of a pond, but can increase the amount of time storm water remains in the practice and eliminate short-circuiting. Ponds should always be designed with a length-to-width ratio of at least 1.5:1. In addition, the design should incorporate features to lengthen the flow path through the pond, such as underwater berms designed to create a longer route through the pond. Combining these two measures helps ensure that the entire pond volume is used to treat storm water. Another feature that can improve treatment is to use multiple ponds in series as part of a "treatment train" approach to pollutant removal. This redundant treatment can also help slow the rate of flow through the system.

Conveyance

Storm water should be conveyed to and from all storm water management practices safely and to minimize erosion potential. The outfall of pond systems should always be stabilized to prevent scour. In addition, an emergency spillway should be provided to safely convey large flood

events. To help mitigate warming at the outlet channel, designers should provide shade around the channel at the pond outlet.

Maintenance Reduction

In addition to regular maintenance activities needed to maintain the function of storm water practices, some design features can be incorporated to ease the maintenance burden of each practice. In wet ponds, maintenance reduction features include techniques to reduce the amount of maintenance needed, as well as techniques to make regular maintenance activities easier.

One potential maintenance concern in wet ponds is clogging of the outlet. Ponds should be designed with a non-clogging outlet such as a reverse-slope pipe, or a weir outlet with a trash rack. A reverse-slope pipe draws from below the permanent pool extending in a reverse angle up to the riser and establishes the water elevation of the permanent pool. Because these outlets draw water from below the level of the permanent pool, they are less likely to be clogged by floating debris. Another general rule is that no orifice should be less than 3 inches in diameter. (Smaller orifices are more susceptible to clogging).

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 (5–7 year) maintenance activity. In addition, ponds should generally have a pond drain to draw down the pond for the more infrequent dredging of the main cell of the pond.

Landscaping

Landscaping of wet ponds can make them an asset to a community and can also enhance the pollutant removal of the practice. A vegetated buffer should be preserved around the pond to protect the banks from erosion and provide some pollutant removal before runoff enters the pond by overland flow. In addition, ponds should incorporate an aquatic bench (i.e., a shallow shelf with wetland plants) around the edge of the pond. This feature may provide some pollutant uptake, and it also helps to stabilize the soil at the edge of the pond and enhance habitat and aesthetic value.

Design Variations

There are several variations of the wet pond design. Some of these design alternatives are intended to make the practice adaptable to various sites and to account for regional constraints and opportunities.

Wet Extended Detention Pond

The wet extended detention pond combines the treatment concepts of the dry extended detention pond and the wet pond. In this design, the water quality volume is split between the permanent pool and detention storage provided above the permanent pool. During storm events, water is detained above the permanent pool and released over 12 to 48 hours. This design has similar pollutant removal to a traditional wet pond and consumes less space. Wet extended detention ponds should be designed to maintain at least half the treatment volume of the permanent pool. In addition, designers need to carefully select vegetation to be planted in the extended detention zone to ensure that the selected vegetation can withstand both wet and dry periods.

Pocket Pond

In this design alternative, a pond drains a smaller area than a traditional wet pond, and the permanent pool is maintained by intercepting the ground water. While this design achieves less pollutant removal than a traditional wet pond, it may be an acceptable alternative on sites where space is at a premium, or in a retrofit situation.

Water Reuse Pond

Some designers have used wet ponds to act as a water source, usually for irrigation. In this case, the water balance should account for the water that will be taken from the pond. One study conducted in Florida estimated that a water reuse pond could provide irrigation for a 100-acre golf course at about one-seventh the cost of the market rate of the equivalent amount of water (\$40,000 versus \$300,000).

Regional Adaptations

Semi-Arid Climates

In arid climates, wet ponds are not a feasible option (see Applicability), but they may possibly be used in semi-arid climates if the permanent pool is maintained with a supplemental water source, or if the pool is allowed to vary seasonally. This choice needs to be seriously evaluated, however. Saunders and Gilroy (1997) reported that 2.6 acre-feet per year of supplemental water were needed to maintain a permanent pool of only 0.29 acre-feet in Austin, Texas.

Cold Climates

Cold climates present many challenges to designers of wet ponds. The spring snowmelt may have a high pollutant load and a large volume to be treated. In addition, cold winters may cause freezing of the permanent pool or freezing at inlets and outlets. Finally, high salt concentrations in runoff resulting from road salting, and sediment loads from road sanding, may impact pond vegetation as well as reduce the storage and treatment capacity of the pond.

One option to deal with high pollutant loads and runoff volumes during the spring snowmelt is the use of a seasonally operated pond to capture snowmelt during the winter, and retain the permanent pool during warmer seasons. In this option, proposed by Oberts (1994), the pond has two water quality outlets, both equipped with gate valves. In the summer, the lower outlet is closed. During the fall and throughout the winter, the lower outlet is opened to draw down the permanent pool. As the spring melt begins, the lower outlet is closed to provide detention for the melt event. This method can act as a substitute for using a minimum extended detention storage volume. When wetlands preservation is a downstream objective, seasonal manipulation of pond levels may not be desired. An analysis of the effects on downstream hydrology should be conducted before considering this option. In addition, the manipulation of this system requires some labor and vigilance; a careful maintenance agreement should be confirmed.

Several other modifications may help to improve the performance of ponds in cold climates. Designers should consider planting the pond with salt-tolerant vegetation if the facility receives road runoff. In order to counteract the effects of freezing on inlet and outlet structures, the use of inlet and outlet structures that are resistant to frost, including weirs and larger diameter pipes, may be useful. Designing structures on-line, with a continuous flow of water through the pond, will also help prevent freezing of these structures. Finally, since freezing of the permanent pool

can reduce the effectiveness of pond systems, it may be useful to incorporate extended detention into the design to retain usable treatment area above the permanent pool when it is frozen.

Karst Topography

In karst (i.e., limestone) topography, wet ponds should be designed with an impermeable liner to prevent ground water contamination or sinkhole formation, and to help maintain the permanent pool.

Limitations

Limitations of wet ponds include:

- If improperly located, wet pond construction may cause loss of wetlands or forest.
- Although wet ponds consume a small amount of space relative to their drainage areas, they are often inappropriate in dense urban areas because each pond is generally quite large.
- Their use is restricted in arid and semi-arid regions due to the need to supplement the permanent pool.
- In cold water streams, wet ponds are not a feasible option due to the potential for stream warming.
- Wet ponds may pose safety hazards.

Maintenance Considerations

In addition to incorporating features into the pond design to minimize maintenance, some regular maintenance and inspection practices are needed. The table below outlines these practices.

Table 1. Typical maintenance activities for wet ponds (Source: WMI, 1997)

Activity	Schedule
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If wetland components are included, inspect for invasive vegetation. 	Semi-annual inspection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspect for damage. • Note signs of hydrocarbon build-up, and deal with appropriately. • Monitor for sediment accumulation in the facility and forebay. • Examine to ensure that inlet and outlet devices are free of debris and operational. 	Annual inspection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair undercut or eroded areas. 	As needed maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean and remove debris from inlet and outlet structures. • Mow side slopes. 	Monthly maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and harvest wetland plants. 	Annual maintenance (if needed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove sediment from the forebay. 	5- to 7-year maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor sediment accumulations, and remove sediment when the pool volume has become reduced significantly or the pond becomes eutrophic. 	20-to 50-year maintenance

Effectiveness

Structural storm water management practices can be used to achieve four broad resource protection goals. These include flood control, channel protection, ground water recharge, and pollutant removal. Wet ponds can provide flood control, channel protection, and pollutant removal.

Flood Control

One objective of storm water management practices can be to reduce the flood hazard associated with large storm events by reducing the peak flow associated with these storms. Wet ponds can easily be designed for flood control by providing flood storage above the level of the permanent pool.

Channel Protection

When used for channel protection, wet ponds have traditionally controlled the 2-year storm. It appears that this control has been relatively ineffective, and recent research suggests that control of a smaller storm may be more appropriate (MacRae, 1996).

Ground Water Recharge

Wet ponds cannot provide ground water recharge. Infiltration is impeded by the accumulation of debris on the bottom of the pond.

Pollutant Removal

Wet ponds are among the most effective storm water management practices at removing storm water pollutants. A wide range of research is available to estimate the effectiveness of wet ponds. Table 2 summarizes some of the research completed on wet pond removal efficiency. Typical removal rates, as reported by Schueler (1997a) are:

Total Suspended Solids: 67%

Total Phosphorous: 48%

Total Nitrogen: 31%

Nitrate Nitrogen: 24%

Metals: 24–73%

Bacteria: 65%

Table 2. Wet pond percent removal efficiency data

Wet Pond Removal Efficiencies							
Study	TSS	TP	TN	NO ₃	Metals	Bacteria	Practice Type
City of Austin, TX 1991. Woodhollow, TX	54	46	39	45	69–76	46	wet pond
Driscoll 1983. Westleigh, MD	81	54	37	-	26–82	-	wet pond
Dorman et al., 1989. West Pond, MN	65	25	-	61	44–66	-	wet pond
Driscoll, 1983. Waverly Hills, MI	91	79	62	66	57–95	-	wet pond
Driscoll, 1983. Unqua, NY	60	45	-	-	80	86	wet pond
Cullum, 1985. Timber Creek, FL	64	60	15	80	-	-	wet pond
City of Austin, TX 1996. St. Elmo, TX.	92	80	19	-17	2–58	89-91	wet pond
Horner, Guedry, and Kortenhoff, 1990. SR 204, WA	99	91	-	-	88–90	-	wet pond
Horner, Guedry, and Kortenhoff, 1990. Seattle, WA	86.7	78.4	-	-	65–67	-	wet pond
Kantrowitz and Woodham, 1995. Saint Joe's Creek, FL	45	45	-	36	38–82	-	wet pond
Wu, 1989. Runaway Bay, NC	62	36	-	-	32–52	-	wet pond
Driscoll 1983. Pitt-AA, MI	32	18	-	7	13–62	-	wet pond
Bannerman and Dodds, 1992. Monroe Street, WI	90	65	-	-	65–75	70	wet pond
Horner, Guedry, and Kortenhoff, 1990. Mercer, WA	75	67	-	-	23–51	-	wet pond
Oberts, Wotzka, and Hartsoe 1989. McKnight, MN	85	48	30	24	67	-	wet pond
Yousef, Wanielista, and Harper 1986. Maitland, FL	-	-	-	87	77–96	-	wet pond
Wu, 1989. Lakeside Pond, NC	93	45	-	-	80–87	-	wet pond
Oberts, Wotzka, and Hartsoe, 1989. Lake Ridge, MN	90	61	41	10	73	-	wet pond

Table 2. (continued)

Wet Pond Removal Efficiencies							
Study	TSS	TP	TN	NO ₃	Metals	Bacteria	Practice Type
Driscoll, 1983. Lake Ellyn, IL	84	34	-	-	71-78	-	wet pond
Dorman et al., 1989. I-4, FL	54	69	-	97	47-74	-	wet pond
Martin, 1988. Highway Site, FL	83	37	30	28	50-77	-	wet pond
Driscoll, 1983. Grace Street, MI	32	12	6	-1	26	-	wet pond
Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory, 1983. Farm Pond, VA	85	86	34	-	-	-	wet pond
Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory, 1983. Burke, VA	-33.3	39	32	-	38-84	-	wet pond
Dorman et al., 1989. Buckland, CT	61	45	-	22	-25 to -51	-	wet pond
Holler, 1989. Boynton Beach Mall, FL	91	76	-	87	-	-	wet pond
Urbonas, Carlson, and Vang 1994. Shop Creek, CO	78	49	-12	-85	51-57	-	wet pond
Oberts and Wotzka, 1988. McCarrons, MN	91	78	85	-	90	-	wet pond
Gain, 1996. FL	54	30	16	24	42-73	-	wet pond
Ontario Ministry of the Environment, 1991. Uplands, Ontario	82	69	-	-	-	97	wet extended detention pond
Borden et al., 1996. Piedmont, NC	19.6	36.5	35.1	65.9	-4 to-97	-6	wet extended detention pond
Holler, 1990. Lake Tohopekaliga District, FL	-	85	-	-	-	-	wet extended detention pond
Ontario Ministry of the Environment 1991. Kennedy-Burnett, Ontario	98	79	54	-	21-39	99	wet extended detention pond
Ontario Ministry of the Environment 1991. East Barrhaven, Ontario	52	47	-	-	-	56	wet extended detention pond
Borden et al., 1996. Davis, NC	60.4	46.2	16	18.2	15-51	48	wet extended detention pond

There is considerable variability in the effectiveness of ponds, and it is believed that properly designing and maintaining ponds may help to improve their performance. The siting and design criteria presented in this sheet reflect the best current information and experience to improve the performance of wet ponds. A recent joint project of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and the USEPA Office of Water may help to isolate specific design features that can improve performance. The National Stormwater Best Management Practice (BMP) database is a compilation of storm water practices which includes both design information and performance data for various practices. As the database expands, inferences about the extent to which specific design criteria influence pollutant removal may be made. More information on this database is available from the ASCE web page at www.asce.org.

Cost Considerations

Wet ponds are relatively inexpensive storm water practices. The construction costs associated with these facilities range considerably. A recent study (Brown and Schueler, 1997) estimated the cost of a variety of storm water management practices. The study resulted in the following cost equation, adjusting for inflation:

$$C = 24.5V^{0.705}$$

where:

C = Construction, design and permitting cost;

V = Volume in the pond to include the 10-year storm (ft³).

Using this equation, typical construction costs are:

\$45,700 for a 1 acre-foot facility

\$232,000 for a 10 acre-foot facility

\$1,170,000 for a 100 acre-foot facility

Ponds do not consume a large area (typically 2–3 percent of the contributing drainage area). Therefore, the land consumed to design the pond will not be very large. It is important to note, however, that these facilities are generally large. Other practices, such as filters or swales, may be "squeezed" into relatively unusable land, but ponds need a relatively large continuous area.

For ponds, the annual cost of routine maintenance is typically estimated at about 3 to 5 percent of the construction cost. Alternatively, a community can estimate the cost of the maintenance activities outlined in the maintenance section. Ponds are long-lived facilities (typically longer than 20 years). Thus, the initial investment into pond systems may be spread over a relatively long time period.

In addition to the water resource protection benefits of wet ponds, there is some evidence to suggest that they may provide an economic benefit by increasing property values. The results of one study suggest that "pond front" property can increase the selling price of new properties by about 10 percent (USEPA, 1995). Another study reported that the perceived value (i.e., the value estimated by residents of a community) of homes was increased by about 15 to 25 percent when located near a wet pond (Emmerling-Dinovo, 1995).

References

- Bannerman, R., and R. Dodds. 1992. Unpublished data. Bureau of Water Resources Management, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, WI.
- Borden, R. C., J.L. Dorn, J.B. Stillman, and S.K. Liehr. 1996. *Evaluation of Ponds and Wetlands For Protection of Public Water Supplies*. Draft Report. Water Resources Research Institute of the University of North Carolina, Department of Civil Engineering, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.
- Brown, W., and T. Schueler. 1997. *The Economics of Stormwater BMPs in the Mid-Atlantic Region*. Prepared for the Chesapeake Research Consortium, Edgewater, MD, by the Center for Watershed Protection, Ellicott City, MD.
- City of Austin, TX. 1991. *Design Guidelines for Water Quality Control Basins*. Public Works Department, Austin, TX.
- City of Austin, TX. 1996. Evaluation of Non-Point Source Controls: A 319 Grant Project. Draft Water Quality Report Series, Public Works Department, Austin, TX.
- Cullum, M. 1985. Stormwater Runoff Analysis at a Single Family Residential Site. Publication 85-1. University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL. pp. 247–256.
- Dorman, M.E., J. Hartigan, R.F. Steg, and T. Quasebarth. 1989. *Retention, Detention and Overland Flow for Pollutant Removal From Highway Stormwater Runoff*. Vol. 1 Research Report. FHWA/RD 89/202. Federal Highway Administration, Washington, DC.
- Driscoll, E.D. 1983. *Performance of Detention Basins for Control of Urban Runoff Quality*. Presented at the 1983 International Symposium on Urban Hydrology, Hydraulics and Sedimentation Control, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.
- Emmerling-Dinovo, C. 1995. Stormwater detention basins and residential locational decisions. *Water Resources Bulletin*, 31(3):515–52.
- Gain, W.S. 1996. *The Effects of Flow Path Modification on Water Quality Constituent Retention in an Urban Stormwater Detention Pond and Wetland System*. Water Resources Investigations Report 95-4297. U.S. Geological Survey, Tallahassee, FL.
- Galli, F. 1990. *Thermal Impacts Associated with Urbanization and Stormwater Best Management Practices*. Prepared for the Maryland Department of the Environment, Baltimore, MD, by the Metropolitan Council of Governments, Washington, DC.
- Holler, J.D. 1989. Water quality efficiency of an urban commercial wet detention stormwater management system at Boynton Beach Mall in South Palm Beach County, FL. *Florida Scientist* 52(1):48–57.
- Holler, J.D. 1990. Nonpoint source phosphorous control by a combination wet detention/filtration facility in Kissimmee, FL. *Florida Scientist* 53(1):28–37.
- Horner, R.R., J. Guedry, and M.H. Kortenhoff. 1990. *Improving the Cost Effectiveness of Highway Construction Site Erosion and Pollution Control*. Final Report. Washington State Transportation Commission, Olympia, WA.

References (continued)

- Kantrowitz, I., and W. Woodham. 1995. *Efficiency of a Stormwater Detention Pond in Reducing Loads of Chemical and Physical Constituents in Urban Streamflow, Pinellas County, Florida*. Water Resources Investigations Report 94-4217. U.S. Geological Survey, Tallahassee, FL.
- Martin, E. 1988. Effectiveness of an urban runoff detention pond/wetland system. *Journal of Environmental Engineering* 114(4):810–827.
- Oberts, G.L. 1994. Performance of stormwater ponds and wetlands in winter. *Watershed Protection Techniques* 1(2):64–68.
- Oberts, G.L., P.J. Wotzka, and J.A. Hartsoe. 1989. *The Water Quality Performance of Select Urban Runoff Treatment Systems*. Publication No. 590-89-062a. Prepared for the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, Metropolitan Council, St. Paul, MN.
- Oberts, G.L., and L. Wotzka. 1988. The water quality performance of a detention basin wetland treatment system in an urban area. In *Nonpoint Source Pollution: Economy, Policy, Management and Appropriate Technology*. American Water Resources Association, Middleburg, VA.
- Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory. 1983. Metropolitan Washington Urban Runoff Project. Final Report. Prepared for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Washington, DC, by the Occoquan Watershed Monitoring Laboratory, Manassas, VA.
- Ontario Ministry of the Environment. 1991. *Stormwater Quality Best Management Practices*. Marshall Macklin Monaghan Limited, Toronto, Ontario.
- Saunders, G. and M. Gilroy. 1997. *Treatment of Nonpoint Source Pollution With Wetland/Aquatic Ecosystem Best Management Practices*. Texas Water Development Board, Lower Colorado River Authority, Austin, TX.
- Schueler, T. 1997a. Comparative pollutant removal capability of urban BMPs: A reanalysis. *Watershed Protection Techniques* 2(4):515–520.
- Schueler, T. 1997b. Influence of groundwater on performance of stormwater ponds in Florida. *Watershed Protection Techniques* 2(4):525–528.
- Urbonas, B., J. Carlson, and B. Vang. 1994. Joint Pond-Wetland System in Colorado. Denver Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, Denver, CO.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 1995. *Economic Benefits of Runoff Controls*. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, Washington, DC.
- Watershed Management Institute (WMI). 1997. *Operation, Maintenance, and Management of Stormwater Management Systems*. Prepared for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Washington, DC, by the Watershed Management Institute, Ingleside, MD.
- Wu, J. 1989. Evaluation of Detention Basin Performance in the Piedmont Region of North Carolina. Report No. 89-248. North Carolina Water Resources Research Institute, Raleigh, NC.

References (continued)

Yousef, Y., M. Wanielista, and H. Harper. 1986. Design and Effectiveness of Urban Retention Basins. In *Urban Runoff Quality—Impact and Quality Enhancement Technology*. B. Urbonas and L.A. Roesner (Eds.). American Society of Civil Engineering, New York, New York. pp. 338–350.

Information Resources

Center for Watershed Protection (CWP). 1995. *Stormwater Management Pond Design Example for Extended Detention Wet Pond*. Center for Watershed Protection, Ellicott City, MD.

Center for Watershed Protection (CWP). 1997. *Stormwater BMP Design Supplement for Cold Climates*. Prepared for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, Washington, DC, by the Center for Watershed Protection, Ellicott City, MD.

Denver Urban Drainage and Flood Control District. 1992. *Urban Storm Drainage Criteria Manual—Volume 3: Best Management Practices*. Denver Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, Denver, CO.

Galli, J. 1992. *Preliminary Analysis of the Performance and Longevity of Urban BMPs Installed in Prince George's County, Maryland*. Prince George's County, Maryland, Department of Natural Resources, Largo, MD.

MacRae, C. 1996. Experience from Morphological Research on Canadian Streams: Is Control of the Two-Year Frequency Runoff Event the Best Basis for Stream Channel Protection? In *Effects of Watershed Development and Management on Aquatic Ecosystems*. American Society of Civil Engineers. Snowbird, UT. pp. 144–162.

Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). 2000. *Maryland Stormwater Design Manual*. [<http://www.mde.state.md.us/environment/wma/stormwatermanual>]. Accessed May 22, 2001.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. 1989. *Protecting Water Quality in Urban Areas: Best Management Practices*. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minneapolis, MN.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 1993. *Guidance Specifying Management Measures for Sources of Nonpoint Pollution in Coastal Waters*. EPA-840-B-92-002. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Washington, DC.

Infiltration practices

Infiltration Basin

Postconstruction Storm Water Management in New Development and Redevelopment

Description

An infiltration basin is a shallow impoundment which is designed to infiltrate storm water into the ground water. This practice is believed to have a high pollutant removal efficiency and can also help recharge the ground water, thus restoring low flows to stream systems. Infiltration basins can be challenging to apply on many sites, however, because of soils requirements. In addition, some studies have shown relatively high failure rates compared with other management practices.



Infiltration basins are designed to collect storm water from impervious areas and provide pollutant removal benefits through detention and filtration

Applicability

Infiltration basins have select applications. Their use is often sharply restricted by concerns over ground water contamination, soils, and clogging at the site.

Regional Applicability

Infiltration basins can be utilized in most regions of the country, with some design modifications in cold and arid climates. In regions of karst (i.e., limestone) topography, these storm water management practices may not be applied due to concerns of sink hole formation and ground water contamination.

Ultra-Urban Areas

Ultra-urban areas are densely developed urban areas in which little pervious surface exists. In these areas, few storm water practices can be easily applied due to space limitations. Infiltration basins can rarely be applied in the ultra-urban environment. Two features that can restrict their use are the potential of infiltrated water to interfere with existing infrastructure, and the relatively poor infiltration capacity of most urban soils. In addition, while they consume only the space of the infiltration basin site itself, they need a continuous, relatively flat area. Thus, it is more difficult to fit them into small unusable areas on a site.

Storm Water Hot Spots

A storm water hot spot is an area where land use or activities generate highly contaminated runoff, with concentrations of pollutants in excess of those typically found in storm water. Infiltration basins should never receive runoff from storm water hot spots, unless the storm water

has already been treated by another practice. This caution is due to potential ground water contamination.

Storm Water Retrofit

A storm water retrofit is a storm water practice (usually structural) put into place after development has occurred, to improve water quality, protect downstream channels, reduce flooding, or meet other specific objectives. Infiltration basins have limited applications as a storm water retrofit. Their use is restricted by three factors. First, infiltration basins should be used to treat small sites (less than 5 acres). Practices that are applied to small sites, such as infiltration basins, are generally a high-cost retrofit option in terms of construction cost and the maintenance burden associated with the large number of practices needed to retrofit a watershed. Second, it is often difficult to find areas where soils are appropriate for infiltration in an already urban or suburban environment. Finally, infiltration basins are best applied to small sites, yet need a flat, relatively continuous area. It is often difficult to find sites with this type of area available.

Cold Water (Trout) Streams

Infiltration basins are an excellent option for cold water streams because they encourage infiltration of storm water and maintain dry weather flow. Because storm water travels underground to the stream, it has little opportunity to increase in temperature.

Siting and Design Considerations

When designing infiltration basins, designers need to carefully consider both the restrictions on the site and design features to improve the long-term performance of the practice.

Siting Considerations

Infiltration practices need to be located extremely carefully. In particular, designers need to ensure that the soils on the site are appropriate for infiltration, and that designs minimize the potential for ground water contamination and long-term maintenance problems.

Drainage Area

Infiltration basins have historically been used as regional facilities, serving for both quantity and quality control. In some regions of the country, this practice is feasible, particularly if the soils are particularly sandy. In most areas, however, infiltration basins experience high rates of failure when used in this manner. In general, the practice is best applied to relatively small drainage areas (i.e., less than 10 acres).

Slope

The bottom of infiltration basins needs to be completely flat to allow infiltration throughout the entire basin bottom.

Soils/Topography

Soils and topography are strongly limiting factors when locating infiltration practices. Soils must be significantly permeable to ensure that the practice can infiltrate quickly enough to reduce the potential for clogging, and soils that infiltrate too rapidly may not provide sufficient treatment,

creating the potential for ground water contamination. The infiltration rate should range between 0.5 and 3 inches per hour. In addition, the soils should have no greater than 20 percent clay content, and less than 40 percent silt/clay content (MDE, 2000). Finally, infiltration basins may not be used in regions of karst topography, due to the potential for sinkhole formation or ground water contamination.

Ground Water

Designers always need to provide significant separation distance (2 to 5 feet) from the bottom of the infiltration basin and the seasonally high ground water table, to reduce the risk of contamination. Infiltration practices should also be separated from drinking water wells.

Design Considerations

Specific designs may vary considerably, depending on site constraints or preferences of the designer or community. There are some features, however, that should be incorporated into most infiltration basin designs. These design features can be divided into five basic categories: pretreatment, treatment, conveyance, maintenance reduction, and landscaping.

Pretreatment

Pretreatment refers to design features that provide settling of large particles before runoff reaches a management practice, easing the long-term maintenance burden. Pretreatment is important for all structural management practices, but it is particularly important for infiltration practices. In order to ensure that pretreatment mechanisms are effective, designers should incorporate "multiple pretreatment," using practices such as grassed swales, sediment basins, and vegetated filter strips in series.

Treatment

Treatment design features enhance the pollutant removal of a practice. For infiltration practices, designers need to stabilize upland soils to ensure that the basin does not become clogged with sediment. In addition, the facility needs to be sized so that the volume of water to be treated infiltrates through the bottom in a given amount of time. Because infiltration basins are designed in this manner, infiltration basins designed on less permeable soils should be significantly larger than those designed on more permeable soils.

Conveyance

Storm water needs to be conveyed through storm water management practices safely and in a way that minimizes erosion. Designers need to be particularly careful in ensuring that channels leading to an infiltration practice are designed to minimize erosion. In general, infiltration basins should be designed to treat only small storms (i.e., only for water quality). Thus, these practices should be designed "off-line," using a flow separator to divert only small flows to the practice.

Maintenance Reduction

In addition to regular maintenance activities, designers also need to incorporate features into the design to ensure that the maintenance burden of a practice is reduced. These features can make regular maintenance activities easier or reduce the need to perform maintenance. In infiltration basins, designers need to provide access to the basin for regular maintenance activities. Where

possible, a means to drain the basin, such as an underdrain, should be provided in case the bottom becomes clogged. This feature allows the basin to be drained and accessed for maintenance in the event that the water has ponded in the basin bottom or the soil is saturated.

Landscaping

Landscaping can enhance the aesthetic value of storm water practices or improve their function. In infiltration basins, the most important purpose of vegetation is to reduce the tendency of the practice to clog. Upland drainage needs to be properly stabilized with a thick layer of vegetation, particularly immediately following construction. In addition, providing a thick turf at the basin bottom helps encourage infiltration and prevent the formation of rills in the basin bottom.

Design Variations

Some modifications may be needed to ensure the performance of infiltration basins in arid and cold climates.

Arid or Semi-Arid Climates

In arid regions, infiltration practices are often highly recommended because of the need to recharge the ground water. In arid regions, designers need to emphasize pretreatment even more strongly to ensure that the practice does not clog, because of the high sediment concentrations associated with storm water runoff in areas such as the Southwest. In addition, the basin bottom may be planted with drought-tolerant species and/or covered with an alternative material such as sand or gravel.

Cold Climates

In extremely cold climates (i.e., regions that experience permafrost), infiltration basins may be an infeasible option. In most cold climates, infiltration basins can be a feasible practice, but there are some challenges to its use. First, the practice may become inoperable during some portions of the year when the surface of the basin becomes frozen. Other design features also may be incorporated to deal with the challenges of cold climates. One such challenge is the volume of runoff associated with the spring snowmelt event. The capacity of the infiltration basin might be increased to account for snowmelt volume.

Another option is the use of a seasonably operated facility (Oberts, 1994). A seasonally operated infiltration/detention basin combines several techniques to improve the performance of infiltration practices in cold climates. Two features, the underdrain system and level control valves, are useful in cold climates. These features are used as follows: At the beginning of the winter season, the level control valve is opened and the soil is drained. As the snow begins to melt in the spring, the underdrain and the level control valves are closed. The snowmelt is infiltrated until the capacity of the soil is reached. Then, the facility acts as a detention facility, providing storage for particles to settle.

Other design features can help to minimize problems associated with winter conditions, particularly concerns that chlorides from road salting may contaminate ground water. The basin may be disconnected during the winter to ensure that chlorides do not enter the ground water in areas where this is a problem, or if the basin is used to treat roadside runoff. Designers may also want to reconsider application of infiltration practices on parking lots or roads where deicing is used, unless it is confirmed that the practice will not cause elevated chloride levels in the ground

water. If the basin is used for snow storage, or to treat roadside or parking lot runoff, the basin bottom should be planted with salt-tolerant vegetation.

Limitations

Although infiltration basins can be useful practices, they have several limitations. Infiltration basins are not generally aesthetic practices, particularly if they clog. If they clog, the soils become saturated, and the practice can be a source of mosquitoes. In addition, these practices are challenging to apply because of concerns over ground water contamination and sufficient soil infiltration. Finally, maintenance of infiltration practices can be burdensome, and they have a relatively high rate of failure.

Maintenance Considerations

Regular maintenance is critical to the successful operation of infiltration basins (see Table 1). Historically, infiltration basins have had a poor track record. In one study conducted in Prince George's County, Maryland (Galli, 1992), all of the infiltration basins investigated clogged within 2 years. This trend may not be the same in soils with high infiltration rates, however. A study of 23 infiltration basins in the Pacific Northwest showed better long-term performance in an area with highly permeable soils (Hilding, 1996). In this study, few of the infiltration basins had failed after 10 years.

Table 1. Typical maintenance activities for infiltration basins (Source: Modified from WMI, 1997)

Activity	Schedule
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspect facility for signs of wetness or damage to structures • Note eroded areas. • If dead or dying grass on the bottom is observed, check to ensure that water percolates 2–3 days following storms. • Note signs of petroleum hydrocarbon contamination and handle properly. 	Semi-annual inspection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mow and remove litter and debris. • Stabilize of eroded banks. • Repair undercut and eroded areas at inflow and outflow structures. 	Standard maintenance (as needed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disc or otherwise aerate bottom. • Dethatch basin bottom. 	Annual maintenance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrape bottom and remove sediment. Restore original cross-section and infiltration rate. • Seed or sod to restore ground cover. 	5-year maintenance

Effectiveness

Structural management practices can be used to achieve four broad resource protection goals. These include flood control, channel protection, ground water recharge, and pollutant removal. Infiltration basins can provide ground water recharge and pollutant removal.

Ground Water Recharge

Infiltration basins recharge the ground water because runoff is treated for water quality by filtering through the soil and discharging to ground water.

Pollutant Removal

Very little data are available regarding the pollutant removal associated with infiltration basins. It is generally assumed that they have very high pollutant removal because none of the storm water entering the practice remains on the surface. Schueler (1987) estimated pollutant removal for infiltration basins based on data from land disposal of wastewater. The average pollutant removal, assuming the infiltration basin is sized to treat the runoff from a 1-inch storm, is:

TSS 75%

Phosphorous 60–70%

Nitrogen 55–60%

Metals 85–90%

Bacteria 90%

These removal efficiencies assume that the infiltration basin is well designed and maintained. The information in the Siting and Design Considerations and Maintenance Considerations sections represent the best available information on how to properly design these practices. The design references below also provide additional information.

Cost Considerations

Infiltration basins are relatively cost-effective practices because little infrastructure is needed when constructing them. One study estimated the total construction cost at about \$2 per ft³ (adjusted for inflation) of storage for a 0.25-acre basin (SWRPC, 1991). Infiltration basins typically consume about 2 to 3 percent of the site draining to them, which is relatively small. Maintenance costs are estimated at 5 to 10 percent of construction costs.

One cost concern associated with infiltration practices is the maintenance burden and longevity. If improperly maintained, infiltration basins have a high failure rate (see Maintenance Considerations). Thus, it may be necessary to replace the basin after a relatively short period of time.

References

- Galli, J. 1992. *Analysis of Urban BMP Performance and Longevity in Prince George's County, Maryland*. Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Washington, DC.
- Hilding, K. 1996. Longevity of infiltration basins assessed in Puget Sound. *Watershed Protection Techniques* 1(3):124–125.
- Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). 2000. *Maryland Stormwater Design Manual*. [<http://www.mde.state.md.us/environment/wma/stormwatermanual>]. Accessed May 22, 2001.
- Oberts, G. 1994. Performance of Stormwater Ponds and Wetlands in Winter. *Watershed Protection Techniques* 1(2): 64–68.
- Schueler, T. 1987. *Controlling Urban Runoff: A Practical Manual for Planning and Designing Urban BMPs*. Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Washington, DC.
- Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC). 1991. *Costs of Urban Nonpoint Source Water Pollution Control Measures*. Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Waukesha, WI.
- Watershed Management Institute (WMI). 1997. *Operation, Maintenance, and Management of Stormwater Management Systems*. Prepared for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water, Washington, DC.
- ## Information Resources
- Center for Watershed Protection (CWP). 1997. *Stormwater BMP Design Supplement for Cold Climates*. Prepared for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds. Washington, DC.
- Ferguson, B.K., 1994. *Stormwater Infiltration*. CRC Press, Ann Arbor, MI.
- USEPA. 1993. *Guidance to Specify Management Measures for Sources of Nonpoint Pollution in Coastal Waters*. EPA-840-B-92-002. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Washington, DC.