

Conservation Practice Standard Overview

Stream Crossing (578)

A stream crossing is a stabilized area or a structure constructed across a stream to provide a travel way for people, livestock, equipment, or vehicles.

Practice Information

Stream crossings can be used to provide access to another land unit, improve water quality by reducing sediment and nutrient loading of the stream, or reduce streambank and streambed erosion. This practice applies where an intermittent or perennial water course exists and a ford, bridge, or culvert-type crossing is needed.

A ford crossing is best suited for a wide, shallow watercourse with a firm streambed. Typical materials used for a ford crossing are concrete or rock. Ford crossings have the least detrimental effect on water quality when their use is infrequent. If the stream crossing will be used often, as in a dairy operation, a bridge or culvert crossing should be used.

Culverts and bridges work best on sites where the stream channel is relatively narrow or where the banks are steep. Bridges that fully span the stream are preferred where excessive sediment flows or large woody debris is expected. Culvert crossings are usually more economical to install than bridges. However, culverts have some potential to impede passage of fish and other aquatic organisms. This issue is addressed by placing the bottom of at least one culvert at an elevation that is 6 inches below the existing stream bottom.



Evaluate the need for safety features such as guard rails and reflectors on culvert or bridge crossings, and water-depth signage on ford crossings.

This practice has a minimum expected life of 10 years. Operation and maintenance requirements include inspection of the site after storm events, repair of damaged components, removal of debris accumulations, and replacement of surfacing stone, as needed.

Common Associated Practices

Stream Crossing (578) is commonly applied with conservation practices such as Animal Trails and Walkways (575), Access Road (560), and Fence (382).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.