

BIO-2: Vegetated Swale

Vegetated swale filters (vegetated swales) are open, shallow channels with low-lying vegetation covering the side slopes and bottom that collect and slowly convey runoff flow to downstream discharge points. Vegetated swales provide pollutant removal through settling and filtration in the vegetation (usually grasses) lining the channels. In addition, they provide the opportunity for volume reduction through infiltration and ET, and reduce the flow velocity in addition to conveying storm water runoff. Where soil conditions allow, volume reduction in vegetated swales can be enhanced by adding a gravel drainage layer underneath the swale allowing additional flows to be retained and infiltrated. Where slopes are shallow and soil conditions limit or prohibit infiltration, an underdrain system or low flow channel for dry weather flows may be required to minimize ponding and convey treated and/or dry weather flows to an acceptable discharge point. An effective vegetated swale achieves uniform sheet flow through a densely vegetated area for a period of several minutes. The vegetation in the swale can vary depending on its location within the project area and is generally the choice of the designer, subject to the design criteria outlined in this section.

<i>Also known as:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Bioswale</i> ➤ <i>Biofiltration swale</i> ➤ <i>Grass swale</i>

<p>Vegetated Swale Source: Geosyntec Consultants</p>

Feasibility Screening Considerations

- Swales may cause incidental infiltration; however, infiltration is not a mandatory mechanism for pollutant removal for swales and it may create hazards in some circumstances. Therefore, conditions should be evaluated to determine whether circumstances require an impermeable liner to avoid infiltration into the subsurface.

Opportunity Criteria

- Open areas are needed for vegetated swales, including, but not limited to, road shoulders, road medians, parks and athletic fields and can be constructed in residential or commercial areas.
- Site slope is less than 10 percent.
- Drainage area is ≤ 5 acres.
- Vegetated swales must not interfere with flood control functions of existing conveyance and detention structures.

OC-Specific Design Criteria and Considerations

- Swales should have a minimum bottom width of 2 feet and a maximum bottom width of 10 feet. Swale dividers should be used if the bottom width must exceed 10 feet to promote even distribution of flow across the swale. Local jurisdictions may require larger minimum widths based on maintenance requirements.
- The channel side slope should not exceed 2:1 (H:V) for a total swale depth of 1 foot or less. For deeper swales or mowed grass swales, the maximum channel side slope should be 3:1. Where space is constrained, swales may have vertical concrete or block walls provided that slope

stability, maintenance access and public safety considerations are met.

- The minimum swale length for biotreatment applications is 100 feet. The minimum residence time for flows in the swale is 10 minutes.
- If slope is less than 1.5%, underdrains should be provided for the length of the swale
- A gravel blanket or bedding is required around the underdrain pipe(s). At least 0.5 feet of washed aggregate must be placed below, to the top, and to the sides of the underdrain pipe(s).
- If an underdrain is included, an amended soil layer of 1 foot minimum thickness must be provided above the underdrain meeting the specifications of MISC-1: Planting/Storage Media.
- The maximum bed slope in flow direction should not exceed 6% (unless check dams are provided).
- The maximum flow velocity should not exceed 1.0 ft/sec for water quality treatment swales.
- For infrequently mowed swales, a maximum flow depth of 4 inches should be implemented. For frequently mowed turf swales, the maximum flow depth is 2 inches.
- The vegetation height should be maintained between 4 to 6 inches.
- Gradual meandering bends in the swale are desirable for aesthetic purposes and to promote slower flow and particulate settling.
- Blockages in the swale that result in uneven flow distribution and points of concentrated flow should be avoided. Blockages that should be avoided include trees, bushes, light pole piers, and utility vaults or pads.

Sizing Method for Vegetated Swales

The Design Capture Method for Flow-based BMPs should be used to determine the design flowrate for a vegetated swale. The user then selects the design flow depth and longitudinal slope and uses the sizing steps below to determine the length and width of the swale. The sizing steps are as follows:

Step 1: Determine Design Flowrate (Q)

Calculate the Design Flowrate (Q) using the Capture Efficiency Method for Flow-based BMPs (See [Appendix III.3.3](#)). Inputs include the time of concentration of the catchment (T_c) and the capture efficiency achieved upstream by HSCs or other BMPs.

Step 2: Estimate the Swale Bottom Width

For shallow flow depths, channel side slopes can be ignored and the bottom width can be calculated using a simplified form of Manning's formula:

$$b = (Q \times n_{wQ}) / (1.49 \times y^{1.67} \times s^{0.5})$$

Where:

b = estimated swale bottom width, ft

Q = design flowrate, cfs

n_{wQ} = Manning's roughness coefficient for shallow flow conditions, use 0.2 unless other information is available

y = design flow depth, ft (not to exceed 4 inches or 0.33 ft)

s = longitudinal slope in flow direction, ft/ft (not to exceed 0.06)

If b is between 2 and 10 feet, proceed to step 3.

If b is less than 2 feet, increase b to 2 feet and recalculate design flow depth using the following:

$$y = ((Q \times n_{WQ}) / (1.49 \times b \times s^{0.5}))^{0.6}$$

If b is greater than 10 feet, one of the following steps is necessary:

- Increase longitudinal slope to a maximum of 6% or 0.06, and recalculate b
- Increase design flow depth to a maximum of 4 inches or 0.33 ft, and recalculate b
- Install a divider lengthwise along swale bottom at least three-quarters of the swale length, beginning at the inlet. The swale width can be increased to 16 feet if a divider is provided.

Step 3: Determine Design Flow Velocity

Calculate the design flow velocity using the following equation:

$$V_{WQ} = Q / A_{WQ}$$

Where:

V_{WQ} = design flow velocity, fps

Q = design flowrate, cfs

$A_{WQ} = by + Zy^2$, cross sectional area of flow at design depth

Z = side slope length per unit height

If the design flow velocity exceeds 1 foot per second, design parameters in Step 2 should be adjusted (slope, bottom width, or design flow depth) until V_{WQ} is equal or less than 1 fps.

Step 4: Calculate Swale Length

Calculate the swale length needed to achieve a minimum hydraulic residence time of 10 minutes using the following equation:

$$L = 60 \times t_{HR} \times V_{WQ}$$

Where:

L = swale length, ft

t_{HR} = hydraulic residence time, min (minimum 10 minutes)

V_{WQ} = design flow velocity, fps

Step 5: If Needed, Adjust Swale Length to Site Constraints

Note that oftentimes swale length can be accommodated by providing a meandering swale. However, if swale length is too large for the site, the length can be adjusted as follows:

- Calculate the swale treatment top area (A_{TOP}), based on the swale length calculated in Step 4:

$$A_{TOP} = (b_i + b_{SLOPE}) \times L_i$$

Where:

A_{TOP} = top area (ft²) at the design treatment depth

b_i = bottom width (ft), calculated in Step 2

b_{SLOPE} = the additional top width (ft) above the side slope for the design water depth (for 3:1 side slopes and a 4-inch water depth, $b_{slope} = 2$ feet)

L_i = initial length (ft) calculated in Step 4

- Use the swale top area and a reduced swale length (L_f) to increase the bottom width, using the following equation:

$$L_f = A_{TOP} / (b_f + b_{SLOPE})$$

Where:

L_F = reduced swale length (ft)

b_F = increased bottom width (ft)

- Recalculate V_{WQ} according to Step 3 using the revised cross-sectional area A_{WQ} based on the increased bottom width (b_F). Revise the design as necessary if the design flow velocity exceeds 1 foot per second.
- Recalculate to ensure that the 10 minute retention time is retained.

Configuration for Use in a Treatment Train

- Vegetated swales can be incorporated in a treatment train to provide enhanced water quality treatment and reductions in runoff volume and rate. For example, if a vegetated swale is placed upgradient of a dry extended detention (ED) basin, the rate and volume of water flowing to the dry ED basin can be reduced and the water quality enhanced. As another example, dry ED basins may be placed upstream a vegetated swale to reduce the size of the vegetated swale.
- Vegetated swales can be used as pretreatment for infiltration BMPs.
- If designed with an infiltration sump, vegetated “bioinfiltration” swales can provide retention and biotreatment capacity.

Additional References for Design Guidance

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Stormwater Technical Manual, Chapter 4:

http://www.laschools.org/employee/design/fs-studies-and-reports/download/white_paper_report_material/Storm_Water_Technical_Manual_2009-opt-red.pdf?version_id=76975850

Santa Barbara BMP Guidance Manual, Chapter 6:

http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/NR/rdonlyres/91D1FA75-C185-491E-A882-49EE17789DF8/0/Manual_071008_Final.pdf

- County of San Diego Drainage Design Manual for design criteria, Section 5.5:
<http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/dpw/floodcontrol/floodcontrolpdf/drainage-designmanual05.pdf>

County of Los Angeles Low Impact Development Standards Manual, Chapter 5:

http://dpw.lacounty.gov/wmd/LA_County_LID_Manual.pdf

- Los Angeles County Stormwater BMP Design and Maintenance Manual:
http://dpw.lacounty.gov/DES/design_manuals/StormwaterBMPDesignandMaintenance.pdf