



## Design Considerations

- Soil for Infiltration
- Tributary Area
- Slope
- Aesthetics
- Environmental Side-effects

## Description

The bioretention best management practice (BMP) functions as a soil and plant-based filtration device that removes pollutants through a variety of physical, biological, and chemical treatment processes. These facilities normally consist of a grass buffer strip, sand bed, ponding area, organic layer or mulch layer, planting soil, and plants. The runoff's velocity is reduced by passing over or through buffer strip and subsequently distributed evenly along a ponding area. Exfiltration of the stored water in the bioretention area planting soil into the underlying soils occurs over a period of days.

## California Experience

None documented. Bioretention has been used as a stormwater BMP since 1992. In addition to Prince George's County, MD and Alexandria, VA, bioretention has been used successfully at urban and suburban areas in Montgomery County, MD; Baltimore County, MD; Chesterfield County, VA; Prince William County, VA; Smith Mountain Lake State Park, VA; and Cary, NC.

## Advantages

- Bioretention provides stormwater treatment that enhances the quality of downstream water bodies by temporarily storing runoff in the BMP and releasing it over a period of four days to the receiving water (EPA, 1999).
- The vegetation provides shade and wind breaks, absorbs noise, and improves an area's landscape.

## Limitations

- The bioretention BMP is not recommended for areas with slopes greater than 20% or where mature tree removal would

## Targeted Constituents

✓	Sediment	■
✓	Nutrients	▲
✓	Trash	■
✓	Metals	■
✓	Bacteria	■
✓	Oil and Grease	■
✓	Organics	■

### Legend (Removal Effectiveness)

- Low
- High
- ▲ Medium



be required since clogging may result, particularly if the BMP receives runoff with high sediment loads (EPA, 1999).

- Bioretention is not a suitable BMP at locations where the water table is within 6 feet of the ground surface and where the surrounding soil stratum is unstable.
- By design, bioretention BMPs have the potential to create very attractive habitats for mosquitoes and other vectors because of highly organic, often heavily vegetated areas mixed with shallow water.
- In cold climates the soil may freeze, preventing runoff from infiltrating into the planting soil.

### **Design and Sizing Guidelines**

- The bioretention area should be sized to capture the design storm runoff.
- In areas where the native soil permeability is less than 0.5 in/hr an underdrain should be provided.
- Recommended minimum dimensions are 15 feet by 40 feet, although the preferred width is 25 feet. Excavated depth should be 4 feet.
- Area should drain completely within 72 hours.
- Approximately 1 tree or shrub per 50 ft<sup>2</sup> of bioretention area should be included.
- Cover area with about 3 inches of mulch.

### **Construction/Inspection Considerations**

Bioretention area should not be established until contributing watershed is stabilized.

### **Performance**

Bioretention removes stormwater pollutants through physical and biological processes, including adsorption, filtration, plant uptake, microbial activity, decomposition, sedimentation and volatilization (EPA, 1999). Adsorption is the process whereby particulate pollutants attach to soil (e.g., clay) or vegetation surfaces. Adequate contact time between the surface and pollutant must be provided for in the design of the system for this removal process to occur. Thus, the infiltration rate of the soils must not exceed those specified in the design criteria or pollutant removal may decrease. Pollutants removed by adsorption include metals, phosphorus, and hydrocarbons. Filtration occurs as runoff passes through the bioretention area media, such as the sand bed, ground cover, and planting soil.

Common particulates removed from stormwater include particulate organic matter, phosphorus, and suspended solids. Biological processes that occur in wetlands result in pollutant uptake by plants and microorganisms in the soil. Plant growth is sustained by the uptake of nutrients from the soils, with woody plants locking up these nutrients through the seasons. Microbial activity within the soil also contributes to the removal of nitrogen and organic matter. Nitrogen is removed by nitrifying and denitrifying bacteria, while aerobic bacteria are responsible for the decomposition of the organic matter. Microbial processes require oxygen and can result in depleted oxygen levels if the bioretention area is not adequately

aerated. Sedimentation occurs in the swale or ponding area as the velocity slows and solids fall out of suspension.

The removal effectiveness of bioretention has been studied during field and laboratory studies conducted by the University of Maryland (Davis et al, 1998). During these experiments, synthetic stormwater runoff was pumped through several laboratory and field bioretention areas to simulate typical storm events in Prince George's County, MD. Removal rates for heavy metals and nutrients are shown in Table 1.

<b>Pollutant</b>	<b>Removal Rate</b>
Total Phosphorus	70-83%
Metals (Cu, Zn, Pb)	93-98%
TKN	68-80%
Total Suspended Solids	90%
Organics	90%
Bacteria	90%

Results for both the laboratory and field experiments were similar for each of the pollutants analyzed. Doubling or halving the influent pollutant levels had little effect on the effluent pollutants concentrations (Davis et al, 1998).

The microbial activity and plant uptake occurring in the bioretention area will likely result in higher removal rates than those determined for infiltration BMPs.

## **Siting Criteria**

Bioretention BMPs are generally used to treat stormwater from impervious surfaces at commercial, residential, and industrial areas (EPA, 1999). Implementation of bioretention for stormwater management is ideal for median strips, parking lot islands, and swales. Moreover, the runoff in these areas can be designed to either divert directly into the bioretention area or convey into the bioretention area by a curb and gutter collection system.

The best location for bioretention areas is upland from inlets that receive sheet flow from graded areas and at areas that will be excavated (EPA, 1999). In order to maximize treatment effectiveness, the site must be graded in such a way that minimizes erosive conditions as sheet flow is conveyed to the treatment area. Locations where a bioretention area can be readily incorporated into the site plan without further environmental damage are preferred. Furthermore, to effectively minimize sediment loading in the treatment area, bioretention only should be used in stabilized drainage areas.

**Additional Design Guidelines**

The layout of the bioretention area is determined after site constraints such as location of utilities, underlying soils, existing vegetation, and drainage are considered (EPA, 1999). Sites with loamy sand soils are especially appropriate for bioretention because the excavated soil can be backfilled and used as the planting soil, thus eliminating the cost of importing planting soil.

The use of bioretention may not be feasible given an unstable surrounding soil stratum, soils with clay content greater than 25 percent, a site with slopes greater than 20 percent, and/or a site with mature trees that would be removed during construction of the BMP.

Bioretention can be designed to be off-line or on-line of the existing drainage system (EPA, 1999). The drainage area for a bioretention area should be between 0.1 and 0.4 hectares (0.25 and 1.0 acres). Larger drainage areas may require multiple bioretention areas. Furthermore, the maximum drainage area for a bioretention area is determined by the expected rainfall intensity and runoff rate. Stabilized areas may erode when velocities are greater than 5 feet per second (1.5 meter per second). The designer should determine the potential for erosive conditions at the site.

The size of the bioretention area, which is a function of the drainage area and the runoff generated from the area is sized to capture the water quality volume.

The recommended minimum dimensions of the bioretention area are 15 feet (4.6 meters) wide by 40 feet (12.2 meters) long, where the minimum width allows enough space for a dense, randomly-distributed area of trees and shrubs to become established. Thus replicating a natural forest and creating a microclimate, thereby enabling the bioretention area to tolerate the effects of heat stress, acid rain, runoff pollutants, and insect and disease infestations which landscaped areas in urban settings typically are unable to tolerate. The preferred width is 25 feet (7.6 meters), with a length of twice the width. Essentially, any facilities wider than 20 feet (6.1 meters) should be twice as long as they are wide, which promotes the distribution of flow and decreases the chances of concentrated flow.

In order to provide adequate storage and prevent water from standing for excessive periods of time the ponding depth of the bioretention area should not exceed 6 inches (15 centimeters). Water should not be left to stand for more than 72 hours. A restriction on the type of plants that can be used may be necessary due to some plants' water intolerance. Furthermore, if water is left standing for longer than 72 hours mosquitoes and other insects may start to breed.

The appropriate planting soil should be backfilled into the excavated bioretention area. Planting soils should be sandy loam, loamy sand, or loam texture with a clay content ranging from 10 to 25 percent.

Generally the soil should have infiltration rates greater than 0.5 inches (1.25 centimeters) per hour, which is typical of sandy loams, loamy sands, or loams. The pH of the soil should range between 5.5 and 6.5, where pollutants such as organic nitrogen and phosphorus can be adsorbed by the soil and microbial activity can flourish. Additional requirements for the planting soil include a 1.5 to 3 percent organic content and a maximum 500 ppm concentration of soluble salts.

Soil tests should be performed for every 500 cubic yards (382 cubic meters) of planting soil, with the exception of pH and organic content tests, which are required only once per bioretention area (EPA, 1999). Planting soil should be 4 inches (10.1 centimeters) deeper than the bottom of the largest root ball and 4 feet (1.2 meters) altogether. This depth will provide adequate soil for the plants' root systems to become established, prevent plant damage due to severe wind, and provide adequate moisture capacity. Most sites will require excavation in order to obtain the recommended depth.

Planting soil depths of greater than 4 feet (1.2 meters) may require additional construction practices such as shoring measures (EPA, 1999). Planting soil should be placed in 18 inches or greater lifts and lightly compacted until the desired depth is reached. Since high canopy trees may be destroyed during maintenance the bioretention area should be vegetated to resemble a terrestrial forest community ecosystem that is dominated by understory trees. Three species each of both trees and shrubs are recommended to be planted at a rate of 2500 trees and shrubs per hectare (1000 per acre). For instance, a 15 foot (4.6 meter) by 40 foot (12.2 meter) bioretention area (600 square feet or 55.75 square meters) would require 14 trees and shrubs. The shrub-to-tree ratio should be 2:1 to 3:1.

Trees and shrubs should be planted when conditions are favorable. Vegetation should be watered at the end of each day for fourteen days following its planting. Plant species tolerant of pollutant loads and varying wet and dry conditions should be used in the bioretention area.

The designer should assess aesthetics, site layout, and maintenance requirements when selecting plant species. Adjacent non-native invasive species should be identified and the designer should take measures, such as providing a soil breach to eliminate the threat of these species invading the bioretention area. Regional landscaping manuals should be consulted to ensure that the planting of the bioretention area meets the landscaping requirements established by the local authorities. The designers should evaluate the best placement of vegetation within the bioretention area. Plants should be placed at irregular intervals to replicate a natural forest. Trees should be placed on the perimeter of the area to provide shade and shelter from the wind. Trees and shrubs can be sheltered from damaging flows if they are placed away from the path of the incoming runoff. In cold climates, species that are more tolerant to cold winds, such as evergreens, should be placed in windier areas of the site.

Following placement of the trees and shrubs, the ground cover and/or mulch should be established. Ground cover such as grasses or legumes can be planted at the beginning of the growing season. Mulch should be placed immediately after trees and shrubs are planted. Two to 3 inches (5 to 7.6 cm) of commercially-available fine shredded hardwood mulch or shredded hardwood chips should be applied to the bioretention area to protect from erosion.

## Maintenance

The primary maintenance requirement for bioretention areas is that of inspection and repair or replacement of the treatment area's components. Generally, this involves nothing more than the routine periodic maintenance that is required of any landscaped area. Plants that are appropriate for the site, climatic, and watering conditions should be selected for use in the bioretention cell. Appropriately selected plants will aid in reducing fertilizer, pesticide, water, and overall maintenance requirements. Bioretention system components should blend over time through plant and root growth, organic decomposition, and the development of a natural

soil horizon. These biologic and physical processes over time will lengthen the facility's life span and reduce the need for extensive maintenance.

Routine maintenance should include a biannual health evaluation of the trees and shrubs and subsequent removal of any dead or diseased vegetation (EPA, 1999). Diseased vegetation should be treated as needed using preventative and low-toxic measures to the extent possible. BMPs have the potential to create very attractive habitats for mosquitoes and other vectors because of highly organic, often heavily vegetated areas mixed with shallow water. Routine inspections for areas of standing water within the BMP and corrective measures to restore proper infiltration rates are necessary to prevent creating mosquito and other vector habitat. In addition, bioretention BMPs are susceptible to invasion by aggressive plant species such as cattails, which increase the chances of water standing and subsequent vector production if not routinely maintained.

In order to maintain the treatment area's appearance it may be necessary to prune and weed. Furthermore, mulch replacement is suggested when erosion is evident or when the site begins to look unattractive. Specifically, the entire area may require mulch replacement every two to three years, although spot mulching may be sufficient when there are random void areas. Mulch replacement should be done prior to the start of the wet season.

New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection states in their bioretention systems standards that accumulated sediment and debris removal (especially at the inflow point) will normally be the primary maintenance function. Other potential tasks include replacement of dead vegetation, soil pH regulation, erosion repair at inflow points, mulch replenishment, unclogging the underdrain, and repairing overflow structures. There is also the possibility that the cation exchange capacity of the soils in the cell will be significantly reduced over time. Depending on pollutant loads, soils may need to be replaced within 5-10 years of construction (LID, 2000).

## **Cost**

### ***Construction Cost***

Construction cost estimates for a bioretention area are slightly greater than those for the required landscaping for a new development (EPA, 1999). A general rule of thumb (Coffman, 1999) is that residential bioretention areas average about \$3 to \$4 per square foot, depending on soil conditions and the density and types of plants used. Commercial, industrial and institutional site costs can range between \$10 to \$40 per square foot, based on the need for control structures, curbing, storm drains and underdrains.

Retrofitting a site typically costs more, averaging \$6,500 per bioretention area. The higher costs are attributed to the demolition of existing concrete, asphalt, and existing structures and the replacement of fill material with planting soil. The costs of retrofitting a commercial site in Maryland, Kettering Development, with 15 bioretention areas were estimated at \$111,600.

In any bioretention area design, the cost of plants varies substantially and can account for a significant portion of the expenditures. While these cost estimates are slightly greater than those of typical landscaping treatment (due to the increased number of plantings, additional soil excavation, backfill material, use of underdrains etc.), those landscaping expenses that would be required regardless of the bioretention installation should be subtracted when determining the net cost.

Perhaps of most importance, however, the cost savings compared to the use of traditional structural stormwater conveyance systems makes bioretention areas quite attractive financially. For example, the use of bioretention can decrease the cost required for constructing stormwater conveyance systems at a site. A medical office building in Maryland was able to reduce the amount of storm drain pipe that was needed from 800 to 230 feet - a cost savings of \$24,000 (PGDER, 1993). And a new residential development spent a total of approximately \$100,000 using bioretention cells on each lot instead of nearly \$400,000 for the traditional stormwater ponds that were originally planned (Rappahanock, ). Also, in residential areas, stormwater management controls become a part of each property owner's landscape, reducing the public burden to maintain large centralized facilities.

### ***Maintenance Cost***

The operation and maintenance costs for a bioretention facility will be comparable to those of typical landscaping required for a site. Costs beyond the normal landscaping fees will include the cost for testing the soils and may include costs for a sand bed and planting soil.

### **References and Sources of Additional Information**

Coffman, L.S., R. Goo and R. Frederick, 1999: Low impact development: an innovative alternative approach to stormwater management. Proceedings of the 26th Annual Water Resources Planning and Management Conference ASCE, June 6-9, Tempe, Arizona.

Davis, A.P., Shokouhian, M., Sharma, H. and Minami, C., "Laboratory Study of Biological Retention (Bioretention) for Urban Stormwater Management," *Water Environ. Res.*, 73(1), 5-14 (2001).

Davis, A.P., Shokouhian, M., Sharma, H., Minami, C., and Winogradoff, D. "Water Quality Improvement through Bioretention: Lead, Copper, and Zinc," *Water Environ. Res.*, accepted for publication, August 2002.

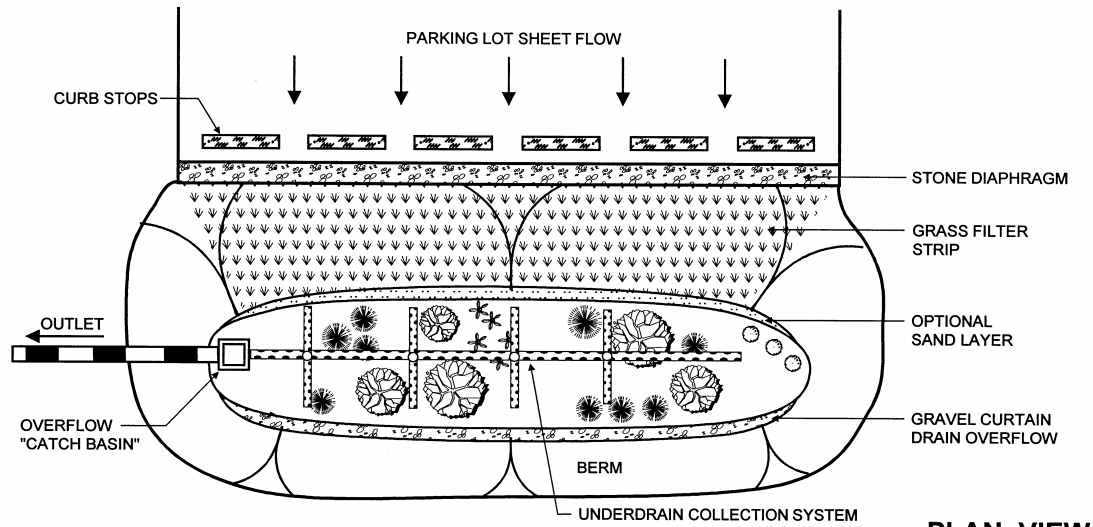
Kim, H., Seagren, E.A., and Davis, A.P., "Engineered Bioretention for Removal of Nitrate from Stormwater Runoff," *WEFTEC 2000 Conference Proceedings on CDROM Research Symposium, Nitrogen Removal*, Session 19, Anaheim CA, October 2000.

Hsieh, C.-h. and Davis, A.P. "Engineering Bioretention for Treatment of Urban Stormwater Runoff," *Watersheds 2002, Proceedings on CDROM Research Symposium*, Session 15, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, Feb. 2002.

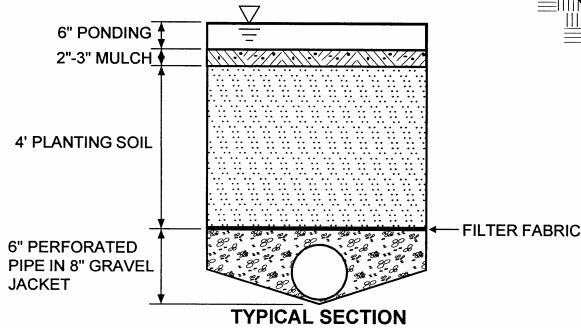
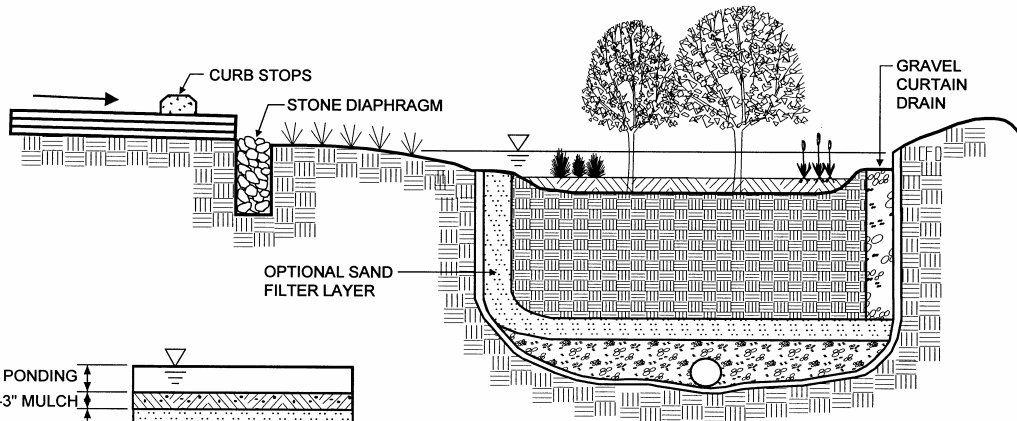
Prince George's County Department of Environmental Resources (PGDER), 1993. Design Manual for Use of *Bioretention in Stormwater Management*. Division of Environmental Management, Watershed Protection Branch. Landover, MD.

U.S. EPA Office of Water, 1999. Stormwater Technology Fact Sheet: Bioretention. EPA 832-F-99-012.

Weinstein, N. Davis, A.P. and Veeramachaneni, R. "Low Impact Development (LID) Stormwater Management Approach for the Control of Diffuse Pollution from Urban Roadways," *5th International Conference Diffuse/Nonpoint Pollution and Watershed Management Proceedings*, C.S. Melching and Emre Alp, Eds. 2001 International Water Association



PLAN VIEW



TYPICAL SECTION

PROFILE

Schematic of a Bioretention Facility (MDE, 2000)