

Grass Waterways: Tips and Tricks for Maintenance and Function

Purposes:

- Reduce erosion in areas of concentrated flow
- Convey runoff water without causing erosion or flooding in cropland
- Vegetation acts as a filter to reduce nutrients and sediment in runoff water
- Conservation buffer to protect and improve water quality
- Smooth crossings for equipment, reducing potential damage that could occur when crossing rougher, eroded areas
- Land utilized for waterways has multiple uses (i.e. forage production, erosion control, wildlife habitat, convey runoff, access for field scouting)



Maintenance Tips:

- Maintain concentrated flow paths in grass waterway
 - By doing so, you will slow down and filter the water flow
- Remove sediment buildup within waterway and at outlets
 - Re-grade outlet area and re-seed so that waterway continues to function properly and convey water away from the field
- Cut and harvest grass from waterways
 - Use grass as a feed source for livestock
- Avoid spraying or tilling waterways
 - Lift implements out of the ground and shut off spray equipment when crossing. Grass waterways filter applied fertilizers and nutrients when rain falls, decrease chance for added pollution.
- Waterways are not field roads
 - If treated as such, could lead to compaction and damage
- Control weeds in grass waterways
 - Once waterway is overtaken by weeds, it's time to re-seed with grass

Before: Concentrated flow channel in pasture



After: Properly constructed & maintained waterway



'Rules of Thumb' for Waterway Construction



Minimum blade width 10' plus 10' on each side for slope = 30'
or wide enough for harvesting equipment and 1' deep



Mulch and seed waterway to reduce erosion



Maintain your new waterway to maximize the positive impact on water and soil quality

Repairing Waterways:

- Stay off waterway when soil is wet
 - Avoid disturbing land when it is already vulnerable to erosion
 - Consider best times of year to repair
 - Spring/Fall pros & cons
- Seed grass, Mulch Immediately
 - Determine best grass seed type and rate
 - In steep slopes, consider using erosion control blanket
- Repair any damage immediately
 - Be proactive in damage control, regular maintenance is better than major repair
- Plant and till perpendicular to the waterway to avoid gullies alongside grassed areas
 - It's better to plant perpendicular so that rows drain into the waterway
- Maintain the width of the grass area when tilling and planting surrounding fields.
 - This is your buffer zone, keep this intact for maximum water quality benefits

Get Started:

Erosion control is a requirement of USDA programs and can significantly impact sediment and nutrient loss from fields. Consider these options to get started:

- Take baby steps, begin with easy fixes, not largest projects
- Take ownership
 - Maintain your own waterways, with no cost share assistance
 - No additional requirements involved with project if self-funded
 - Work with experienced earth movers who can provide all the technical assistance needed
- Cost sharing
 - Available for constructing new waterways to stop erosion
 - County staff will provide a design and oversee construction

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