SOIL INFILTRATION TESTING PROTOCOL

Purpose of this Protocol

The soil infiltration testing protocol describes evaluation and field testing procedures to determine if infiltration BMPs are suitable at a site, as well as to obtain the required data for infiltration BMP design.

When to Conduct Testing

It is recommended that soil evaluation and investigation be conducted following development of a concept plan or early in the development of a preliminary plan.

Who Should Conduct Testing

Soil evaluation and investigation may be conducted by soil scientists, design engineers, professional geologists, and other qualified professionals and technicians. The stormwater designer is *strongly* encouraged to directly observe the testing process to obtain a first-hand understanding of site conditions.

Importance of Stormwater BMP Areas

Sites are often defined as unsuitable for infiltration BMPs and soil-based BMPs due to proposed grade changes (excessive cut or fill) or lack of suitable areas. Many sites will be constrained and unsuitable for infiltration BMPs. However, if suitable areas exist, these areas should be identified early in the design process and should not be subject to a building program that precludes infiltration BMPs. When pursuing the LID/GI Approach, full build-out of site areas otherwise deemed to be suitable for infiltration should not provide an exemption or waiver for adequate storm-water volume control or groundwater recharge.

Safety

As with all field work and testing, attention to all applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations and local guidelines related to earthwork and excavation is required. Digging and excavation should never be conducted without adequate notification through the. Indiana Underground Plant Protection Service (IUPPS) at www.IUPSS.org. Excavations should never be left unsecured and unmarked, and all applicable authorities should be notified prior to any work.

Infiltration Testing: A Multi-Step Process

Infiltration testing is a four-step process to obtain the necessary data for the design of the stormwater management plan. The four steps include:

1. **Background evaluation**
   - Based on available published and site specific data
   - Includes consideration of proposed development plan
   - Used to identify potential BMP locations and testing locations
   - Prior to field work (desktop)
2. **Test pit (deep hole) observations**
   - Includes multiple testing locations
   - Provides an understanding of sub-surface conditions
   - Identifies limiting conditions
3. **Infiltration testing**
   - Must be conducted onsite
   - Different testing methods available
4. **Design considerations**
   - Determine suitable infiltration rate for design calculations
   - Consider BMP drawdown
   - Consider peak rate attenuation

Step 1. Background evaluation

Prior to performing testing and developing a detailed site plan, existing conditions at the site should be inventoried and mapped including, but not limited to:

- Existing mapped soils and USDA Hydrologic Soil Group classifications.
- Existing geology, including depth to bedrock, karst conditions, or other features of note.
- Existing streams (perennial and intermittent, including intermittent swales), water bodies, wetlands, hydric soils, floodplains, alluvial soils, stream classifications, headwaters, and first order streams.
- Existing topography, slope, drainage patterns, and watershed boundaries.
- Existing land use conditions.

- Other natural or man-made features or conditions that may impact design, such as past uses of site, existing nearby structures (buildings, walls), abandoned wells, etc.

- A concept plan or preliminary layout plan for development should be evaluated, including:
    - Preliminary grading plan and areas of cut and fill,
    - Location of all existing and proposed water supply sources and wells,
    - Location of all former, existing, and proposed onsite wastewater systems,
    - Location of other features of note such as utility rights-of-way, water and sewer lines, etc.,
    - Existing data such as structural borings, and
    - Proposed location of development features (buildings, roads, utilities, walls, etc.).

In Step 1, the designer should determine the potential location of infiltration BMPs. The approximate location of these BMPs should be on the proposed development plan and serve as the basis for the location and number of tests to be performed onsite.

Important: If the proposed development is located on areas that may otherwise be a suitable BMP location, or if the proposed grading plan is such that potential BMP locations are eliminated, the designer is *strongly* encouraged to revisit the proposed layout and grading plan and adjust the development plan as necessary. Full build-out of areas suitable for infiltration BMPs should *not* preclude the use of BMPs for runoff volume reduction and groundwater recharge.

Step 2. Test pits (deep holes)

A test pit (deep hole) allows visual observation of the soil horizons and overall soil conditions both horizontally and vertically in that portion of the site. An extensive number of test pit observations can be made across a site at a relatively low cost and in a short time period. The use of soil borings as a substitute for test pits is strongly discouraged, as visual observation is narrowly limited in a soil boring and the soil horizons cannot be observed in-situ, but must be observed from the extracted borings.

A test pit (deep hole) consists of a backhoe-excavated trench, 2½-3 feet wide, to a depth of 6-7½ feet, or until bedrock or fully saturated conditions are encountered. The trench should be benched at a depth of 2-3 feet for access and/or infiltration testing.

At each test pit, the following conditions are to be noted and described. Depth measurements should be described as depth below the ground surface:

- Soil horizons (upper and lower boundary),
- Soil texture, structure, and color for each horizon,
- Color patterns (mottling) and observed depth,
- Depth to water table,
- Depth to bedrock,
- Observance of pores or roots (size, depth),
- Estimated type and percent coarse fragments,
- Hardpan or limiting layers,
- Strike and dip of horizons (especially lateral direction of flow at limiting layers), and
- Additional comments or observations.

The Sample Soil Log Form at the end of this protocol may be used for documenting each test pit.

At the designer's discretion, soil samples may be collected at various horizons for additional analysis. Following testing, the test pits should be refilled with the original soil and the topsoil replaced. A test pit should *never* be accessed if soil conditions are unsuitable or unstable for safe entry, or if site constraints preclude entry. OSHA regulations should always be observed.

It is important that the test pit provide information related to conditions at the bottom of the proposed infiltration BMP. If the BMP depth will be greater than 90 inches below existing grade, deeper excavation of the test pit will be required. The designer is cautioned regarding the proposal of systems that are significantly deeper than the existing topography, as the suitability for infiltration is likely to decrease. The design engineer is encouraged to consider reducing grading and earthwork as needed to reduce site disturbance and provide greater opportunity for stormwater management.

The number of test pits varies depending on site conditions and the proposed development plan. General guidelines are as follows:

- For single-family residential subdivisions with on-lot infiltration BMPs, one test pit per lot is recommended, preferably within 100 feet of the proposed BMP area.

- For multi-family and high-density residential developments, one test pit per BMP area or acre is recommended.
- For large infiltration areas (basins, commercial, institutional, industrial, and other proposed land uses), multiple test pits should be evenly distributed at the rate of four to six pits per acre of BMP area.

The recommendations above are guidelines. Additional tests should be conducted if local conditions indicate significant variability in soil types, geology, water table levels, depth and type of bedrock, topography, etc. Similarly, uniform site conditions may indicate that fewer test pits are required. Excessive testing and disturbance of the site prior to construction is not recommended.

Step 3. Infiltration tests

A variety of field tests exists for determining the infiltration capacity of a soil. Laboratory tests are not recommended, as a homogeneous laboratory sample does not represent field conditions. Infiltration tests should be conducted in the field. Infiltration tests should not be conducted in the rain, within 24 hours of significant rainfall events (> 0.5 inches), or when the temperature is below freezing.

At least one test should be conducted at the proposed bottom elevation of an infiltration BMP, and a minimum of two tests per test pit are recommended. Based on observed field conditions, the designer may elect to modify the proposed bottom elevation of a BMP. Personnel conducting infiltration tests should be prepared to adjust test locations and depths depending on observed conditions.

Methodologies discussed in this protocol include:

- Double-ring infiltrometer tests.
- Percolation tests (such as for onsite wastewater systems).

There are differences between the two methods. A double-ring infiltrometer test estimates the vertical movement of water through the bottom of the test area. The outer ring helps to reduce the lateral movement of water in the soil from the inner ring. A percolation test allows water movement through both the bottom and sides of the test area. For this reason, the measured rate of water level drop in a percolation test must be adjusted to represent the discharge that is occurring on both the bottom and sides of the percolation test hole.

Other testing methodologies and standards that are available but not discussed in detail in this protocol include (but are not limited to):

- Constant head double-ring infiltrometer.
- Testing as described in the *Maryland Stormwater Manual*, Appendix D.1, using five-inch diameter casing.
- ASTM 2003 Volume 4.08, Soil and Rock (I): Designation D 3385-03, Standard Test Method for Infiltration Rate of Soils in Field Using a Double-Ring Infiltrometer.
- ASTM 2002 Volume 4.09, Soil and Rock (II): Designation D 5093-90, Standard Test Method for Field Measurement of Infiltration Rate Using a Double-Ring Infiltrometer with a Sealed-Inner Ring.
- Guelph permeameter.
- Constant head permeameter (Amoozemeter).

Methodology for double-ring infiltrometer field test

A double-ring infiltrometer consists of two concentric metal rings. The rings are driven into the ground and filled with water. The outer ring helps to prevent divergent flow. The drop-in water level or volume in the inner ring is used to calculate an infiltration rate. The infiltration rate is the amount of water per surface area and time unit which penetrates the soils. The diameter of the inner ring should be approximately 50-70 percent of the diameter of the outer ring, with a minimum inner ring size of four inches. Double-ring infiltrometer testing equipment designed specifically for that purpose may be purchased. However, field testing for storm-water BMP design may also be conducted with readily available materials.

<u>Equipment for double-ring infiltrometer test:</u>
Two concentric cylinder rings six inches or greater in height. Inner ring diameter equal to 50-70 percent of outer ring diameter (i.e., an 8-inch ring and a 12-inch ring). Material typically available at a hardware store may be acceptable.

- Water supply,
- Stopwatch or timer,
- Ruler or metal measuring tape,
- Flat wooden board for driving cylinders uniformly into soil,

- Rubber mallet, and
- Log sheets for recording data.

Procedure for double-ring infiltrometer test

- Prepare level testing area.
- Place outer ring in place; place flat board on ring and drive ring into soil to a minimum depth of two inches.
- Place inner ring in center of outer ring; place flat board on ring and drive ring into soil a minimum of two inches. The bottom rim of both rings should be at the same level.
- The test area should be presoaked immediately prior to testing. Fill both rings with water to water level indicator mark or rim at 30-minute intervals for one hour. The minimum water depth should be four inches. The drop in the water level during the last 30 minutes of the presoaking period should be applied to the following standard to determine the time interval between readings:

    - If water level drop is two inches or more, use 10-minute measurement intervals.
    - If water level drop is less than two inches, use 30-minute measurement intervals.

- Obtain a reading of the drop in water level in the center ring at appropriate time intervals. After each reading, refill both rings to water level indicator mark or rim. Measurement to the water level in the center ring should be made from a fixed reference point and should continue at the interval determined until a minimum of eight readings are completed or until a stabilized rate of drop is obtained, whichever occurs first. A stabilized rate of drop means a difference of ¼-inch or less of drop between the highest and lowest readings of four consecutive readings.
- The drop that occurs in the center ring during the final period or the average stabilized rate, expressed as inches per hour, should represent the infiltration rate for that test location.

Methodology for percolation test

Equipment for percolation test

- Post hole digger or auger,
- Water supply,
- Stopwatch or timer,
- Ruler or metal measuring tape,
- Log sheets for recording data,
- Knife blade or sharp-pointed instrument (for soil scarification),
- Course sand or fine gravel, and
- Object for fixed-reference point during measurement (nail, toothpick, etc.).

Procedure for percolation test

This percolation test methodology is based largely on the criteria for onsite sewage investigation of soils. A 24-hour pre-soak is generally not required as infiltration systems, unlike wastewater systems, will not be continuously saturated.

- Prepare level testing area.
- Prepare hole having a uniform diameter of 6-10 inches and a depth of 8-12 inches. The bottom and sides of the hole should be scarified with a knife blade or sharp-pointed instrument to completely remove any smeared soil surfaces and to provide a natural soil interface into which water may percolate. Loose material should be removed from the hole.
- (Optional) Two inches of coarse sand or fine gravel may be placed in the bottom of the hole to protect the soil from scouring and clogging of the pores.
- Test holes should be presoaked immediately prior to testing. Water should be placed in the hole to a minimum depth of six inches over the bottom and readjusted every 30 minutes for one hour.
- The drop in the water level during the last 30 minutes of the final presoaking period should be applied to the following standard to determine the time interval between readings for each percolation hole:
    - If water remains in the hole, the interval for readings during the percolation test should be 30 minutes.
    - If no water remains in the hole, the interval for readings during the percolation test may be reduced to 10 minutes.
- After the final presoaking period, water in the hole should again be adjusted to a minimum depth of six inches and readjusted when necessary after each reading. A nail or marker should be placed at a fixed reference point to indicate the water refill level. The water level depth and hole diameter should be recorded.
- Measurement to the water level in the individual percolation holes should be made from a fixed reference point and should continue at the interval determined from the previous step for each

individual percolation hole until a minimum of eight readings are completed or until a stabilized rate of drop is obtained, whichever occurs first. A stabilized rate of drop means a difference of ¼ inch or less of drop between the highest and lowest readings of four consecutive readings.

- The drop that occurs in the percolation hole during the final period, expressed as inches per hour, should represent the percolation rate for that test location.
- The average measured rate must be adjusted to account for the discharge of water from both the sides and bottom of the hole and to develop a representative infiltration rate. The average/final percolation rate should be adjusted for each percolation test according to the following formula:

Infiltration Rate = (Percolation Rate)/ (Reduction Factor)

Where the Reduction Factor is given by[#]:

$$R_f = \frac{2d_i - \Delta d}{DIA} + 1$$

With:

d_i = Initial Water Depth (in.)
$\triangle$d = Average/Final Water Level Drop (in.)
DIA = Diameter of the Percolation Hole (in.)

The percolation rate is simply divided by the reduction factor as calculated above or shown in Table 1 below to yield the representative infiltration rate. In most cases, the reduction factor varies from about two to four depending on the percolation hole dimensions and water level drop – wider and shallower tests have lower reduction factors because proportionately less water exfiltrates through the sides.

 # The area reduction factor accounts for the exfiltration occurring through the sides of percolation hole. It assumes that the percolation rate is affected by the depth of water in the hole and that the percolating surface of the hole is in uniform soil. If there are significant problems with either of these assumptions then other adjustments may be necessary.

Step 4. Use design considerations provided in the infiltration BMP.

Perc. Hole Diameter, DIA (in.)	Initial Water Depth, d_i (in.)	Ave./Final Water Level Drop, Δd (in.)	Reduction Factor, R_f
6	6	0.1	3.0
		0.5	2.9
		2.5	2.6
	8	0.1	3.7
		0.5	3.6
		2.5	3.3
	10	0.1	4.3
		0.5	4.3
		2.5	3.9
8	6	0.1	2.5
		0.5	2.4
		2.5	2.2
	8	0.1	3.0
		0.5	2.9
		2.5	2.7
	10	0.1	3.5
		0.5	3.4
		2.5	3.2
10	6	0.1	2.2
		0.5	2.2
		2.5	2.0
	8	0.1	2.6
		0.5	2.6
		2.5	2.4
	10	0.1	3.0
		0.5	3.0
		2.5	2.8

Table 1 Sample Percolation Rate Adjustments

Additional Potential Testing – Bulk Density

Bulk density tests measure the level of compaction of a soil, which is an indicator of a soil's ability to absorb rainfall. Developed and urbanized sites often have very high bulk densities and, therefore, possess limited ability to absorb rainfall (and have high rates of stormwater runoff). Vegetative and soil improvement programs can lower the soil bulk density and improve the site's ability to absorb rainfall and reduce runoff.

Macropores occur primarily in the upper soil horizons and are formed by plant roots (both living and decaying), soil fauna such as insects, the weathering processes caused by movement of water, the freeze-thaw cycle, soil shrinkage due to desiccation of clays, chemical processes, and other mechanisms. These macropores provide an important mechanism for infiltration prior to development, extending vertically and horizontally for considerable distances. It is the intent of good engineering and design practice to maintain these macropores when installing infiltration BMPs as much as possible. Bulk density tests can help determine the relative compaction of soils before and after site disturbance and/or restoration and should be used at the discretion of the designer/reviewer.

Soil Test Pit Log Sheet

Project: ______________________________________ Date: ____________________________
Name:_______________________________________ Soil Series: ________________________
Location: ____________________________________ Other: ____________________________
Test Pit #: ___________________________________

Horizon	Depth (in.)	Color	Redox Features	Texture	Notes (if applicable)	Boundary

Notes:

REDOX FEATURES
Abundance
Few……..< 2%
Common..2-20%
Many…….>20%
Contrast
faint
hue and chroma of matrix and redox are closely related
distinct
matrix & redox features vary 1-2 units of hue and several units of chroma & value
prominent
Matrix & redox features vary several units in hue, value & chroma

COARSE FRAGMENTS (% of profile)

15-35%	35-65%	>65%
gravelly	very gravelly	extremely gravelly
channery	very channery	extremely channery
cobbly	very cobbly	extremely cobbly
flaggy	very flaggy	extremely flaggy
stony	very stony	extremely stony

BOUNDARY
Distinctness
abrupt… < 1" (thick) *gradual…2.5" – 5"*
clear…. 1" – 2.5" *diffuse… > 5"*

HORIZONS
O – organic layers of decaying plant and animal tissue (must be greater than 12-18% organic carbon, excluding live roots)
A (topsoil) – mineral horizon at or near the surface in which an accumulation of humified organic matter is mixed with the mineral material
E – mineral horizon which the main feature is loss of silicate clay, iron, aluminum. Must be underlain by B (alluvial) horizon.
B (subsoil) – mineral horizon with evidence of pedogenesis or illuviation (movement into the horizon)
C (substratum) – the un-weathered geologic material the soil formed in. Shows little or no sign of soil formation

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