

IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

EASEMENT SITE INSPECTION

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A. GENERAL

The primary reason for performing inspections of easement lands is to ensure that the landowner is fulfilling easement terms. The site inspection also affords the SWCD and the landowner an opportunity to discuss progress of conservation practice installation and establishment. The reviewer can identify needed maintenance requirements with the landowner for specific practice areas as identified on the conservation plan map. The reviewer can also determine if changes to the conservation plan are needed. Plans need to reflect what is actually on the land and as easement lands change over time, the plan should be updated. Examples of this may be where trees have taken over a grass planting or where a native grass planting was never satisfactorily established and the stand is now predominantly introduced species.

A.1 SITE INSPECTION TIMELINE

Easement site inspections are required for the five consecutive years beginning the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, inspections will be performed every three years.

A.2 TIMELINE EXAMPLE

1997 Easement recorded (anytime during calendar year)

<u>First 5 years</u>	<u>Begin 3 Year Rotation</u>
1998 - first site inspection	2003 - no inspection
1999 - second site inspection	2004 - no inspection
2000 - third site inspection	2005 - inspection required
2001 - fourth site inspection	2006 - no inspection
2002 - fifth site inspection	2007 - no inspection
	2008 - inspection required

A.3 NOTIFICATION OF EASEMENTS SCHEDULED FOR INSPECTION

The BWSR will annually notify SWCDs of those easements which are due for inspection that year. Lists will be sent in late winter or early spring. We recognize that some problem or sensitive sites may require more frequent inspections than the proposed schedule. These sites may include those with structures that require close monitoring such as wetland restoration sites or those with recent noncompliance or violation problems. If you have reason to monitor these sites more frequently, use the Site Inspection Form to aid in associated reporting, as appropriate.

B. COMPLETING THE SITE INSPECTION FORM

B.1 PROCEDURE

Site inspections must be completed on the *Conservation Easement Site Inspection Form*. Inspections should be performed sometime during May through August, with May and June being the optimum time. This allows time to take corrective actions if any are needed (e.g. control noxious weeds before they go to seed). Completed inspection forms are due in the BWSR central office by the date given in the inspection list cover memo, usually the end of August. A copy of the inspection form must also be sent to the landowner.

When doing site inspections, make an attempt to meet with the landowner. This can be especially important on those easements where maintenance of conservation practices is clearly needed, or in cases where conservation plans need to be updated. Meeting with the landowner or operator facilitates needed conservation practice maintenance discussions, or decisions to amend plans.

B.2 INSPECTION GUIDELINES

Use the following information as a guide when performing site inspections and completing the site inspection form.

- ❖ Some minor adjustments to conservation plans of older easements may be needed to fit the site inspection reporting process; e.g., field numbers are now called practice areas.
- ❖ Only primary conservation practices should appear on the site inspection form.
- ❖ Any practice marked as “N/E” (not established yet) or “Poor” requires a comment from the SWCD (use the space at the bottom of the form or attach additional sheets as necessary). A condition marked as “Poor” could potentially be in noncompliance with easement terms and conditions and could lead to a violation. Therefore, thoroughly document your findings and plan of action.
- ❖ Answer the ten questions on the back of the form as best you can to help remind the landowner of the easement terms and conditions.
- ❖ Remember to sign the inspection and include the date you inspected the site.

B.3 POSSIBLE VIOLATIONS

If a possible violation is discovered while performing the site inspection, refer to the *Non-compliance/Violations Procedures subsection* of the Implementation Stage section of the handbook for specific instructions on how to proceed.