

Description

Protection of existing vegetation on a construction site can be accomplished through installation of a construction fence around the area requiring protection. In cases where upgradient areas are disturbed, it may also be necessary to install perimeter controls to minimize sediment loading to sensitive areas such as wetlands. Existing vegetation may be designated for protection to maintain a stable surface cover as part of construction phasing, or vegetation may be protected in areas designated to remain in natural condition under post-development conditions (e.g., wetlands, mature trees, riparian areas, open space).



Photograph PV-1. Protection of existing vegetation and a sensitive area. Photo courtesy of CDOT.

Appropriate Uses

Existing vegetation should be preserved for the maximum practical duration on a construction site through the use of effective construction phasing. Preserving vegetation helps to minimize erosion and can reduce revegetation costs following construction.

Protection of wetland areas is required under the Clean Water Act, unless a permit has been obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) allowing impacts in limited areas.

If trees are to be protected as part of post-development landscaping, care must be taken to avoid several types of damage, some of which may not be apparent at the time of injury. Potential sources of injury include soil compaction during grading or due to construction traffic, direct equipment-related injury such as bark removal, branch breakage, surface grading and trenching, and soil cut and fill. In order to minimize injuries that may lead to immediate or later death of the tree, tree protection zones should be developed during site design, implemented at the beginning of a construction project, as well as continued during active construction.

Design and Installation

General

Once an area has been designated as a preservation area, there should be no construction activity allowed within a set distance of the area. Clearly mark the area with construction fencing. Do not allow stockpiles, equipment, trailers or parking within the protected area. Guidelines to protect various types of existing vegetation follow.

Protection of Existing Vegetation	
Functions	
Erosion Control	Yes
Sediment Control	Moderate
Site/Material Management	Yes

Surface Cover During Phased Construction

Install construction fencing or other perimeter controls around areas to be protected from clearing and grading as part of construction phasing.

Maintaining surface cover on steep slopes for the maximum practical duration during construction is recommended.

Open Space Preservation

Where natural open space areas will be preserved as part of a development, it is important to install construction fencing around these areas to protect them from compaction. This is particularly important when areas with soils with high infiltration rates are preserved as part of LID designs. Preserved open space areas should not be used for staging and equipment storage.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas

Install a construction fence around the perimeter of the wetland or riparian (streamside vegetation) area to prevent access by equipment. In areas downgradient of disturbed areas, install a perimeter control such as silt fence, sediment control logs, or similar measure to minimize sediment loading to the wetland.

Tree Protection¹

- Before beginning construction operations, establish a tree protection zone around trees to be preserved by installing construction fences. Allow enough space from the trunk to protect the root zone from soil compaction and mechanical damage, and the branches from mechanical damage (see Table PV-1). If low branches will be kept, place the fence outside of the drip line. Where this is not possible, place fencing as far away from the trunk as possible. In order to maintain a healthy tree, be aware that about 60 percent of the tree's root zone extends beyond the drip line.

Table PV-1
Guidelines for Determining the Tree Protection Zone
 (Source: Matheny and Clark, 1998; as cited in GreenCO and WWE 2008)

Species Tolerance to Damage	Distance from Trunk (ft) per inch of DBH		
	Young	Mature	Over mature
Good	0.5'	0.75'	1.0'
Moderate	0.75'	1.0'	1.25'
Poor	1.0'	1.25'	1.5'

Notes: DBH = diameter at breast height (4.5 ft above grade); Young = <20% of life expectancy; Mature = 20%-80% of life expectancy; Over mature =>80% of life expectancy

- Most tree roots grow within the top 12 to 18 inches of soil. Grade changes within the tree protection zone should be avoided where possible because seemingly minor grade changes can either smother

¹ Tree Protection guidelines adapted from GreenCO and WWE (2008). *Green Industry Best Management Practices (BMPs) for the Conservation and Protection of Water Resources in Colorado: Moving Toward Sustainability, Third Release*. See www.greenco.org for more detailed guidance on tree preservation.

roots (in fill situations) or damage roots (in cut situations). Consider small walls where needed to avoid grade changes in the tree protection zone.

- Place and maintain a layer of mulch 4 to 6-inch thick from the tree trunk to the fencing, keeping a 6-inch space between the mulch and the trunk. Mulch helps to preserve moisture and decrease soil compaction if construction traffic is unavoidable. When planting operations are completed, the mulch may be reused throughout planting areas.
- Limit access, if needed at all, and appoint one route as the main entrance and exit to the tree protection zone. Within the tree protection zone, do not allow any equipment to be stored, chemicals to be dumped, or construction activities to take place except fine grading, irrigation system installation, and planting operations. These activities should be conducted in consultation with a landscaping professional, following Green Industry BMPs.
- Be aware that soil compaction can cause extreme damage to tree health that may appear gradually over a period of years. Soil compaction is easier to prevent than repair.

Maintenance and Removal

Repair or replace damaged or displaced fencing or other protective barriers around the vegetated area.

If damage occurs to a tree, consult an arborist for guidance on how to care for the tree. If a tree in a designated preservation area is damaged beyond repair, remove and replace with a 2-inch diameter tree of the same or similar species.

Construction equipment must not enter a wetland area, except as permitted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Inadvertent placement of fill in a wetland is a 404 permit violation and will require notification of the USACE.

If damage to vegetation occurs in a protected area, reseed the area with the same or similar species, following the recommendations in the USDCM *Revegetation* chapter.