

Aquatic Organism Passage

What is Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP)? This identifies whether aquatic animals such as fish, turtles or amphibians can pass through a stream crossing without restrictions such as:

- A large vertical drop between the crossing and the stream (known as a perched culvert).
- Water in the crossing that is either too shallow or too fast.
- Physical barriers that block the crossing inlet or outlet.
- A lack of natural substrate in the crossing.



Culverts can block access to important aquatic habitats!

Just like we need roads to get us places, aquatic animals require a connected stream network to get around!

How do we know if a culvert is a barrier to animals?

Information is collected on the culvert and river channel in the field and the data is used to assign a score.

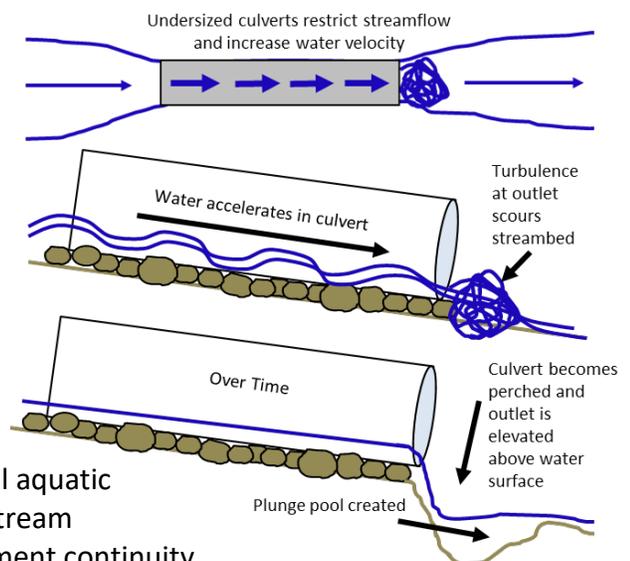
Full Passage – The crossing functions like the natural stream for all aquatic organisms, maintaining a connection between the up- and downstream environment without changes in slope, a drop in height, and sediment continuity.

Reduced Passage – The crossing can have any of the following conditions: (1) the stream cascades over steep rocks on the downstream side; (2) consists of multiple culverts; (3) an obstruction at the entrance; or (4) the structure lacks natural sediment. These conditions limit AOP for some species or life stages, but may allow strong and moderate swimming fish to pass.

Passage Only for Adult Trout – The crossing is perched with a vertical drop of ≤ 1 foot to the water surface and there is a >1 foot deep plunge pool immediately downstream. Only strong swimming and leaping fish such as Eastern Brook Trout and other salmonids can pass these crossings.

No Passage – The crossing is perched with a >1 foot drop to the water surface, or the drop is <1 foot and no downstream pool is present or the depth of water in the culvert is <0.3 feet.

How a culvert becomes perched



Fish-friendly culvert



For more information on the **Stream Crossing Initiative** contact at NHDES:

Shane Csiki: Shane.Csiki@des.nh.gov, (603) 271-2876

Cheryl Bondi: Cheryl.Bondi@des.nh.gov, (603) 271-0727

