

# STREAMBANK AND SHORELINE STABILIZATION

---

- Techniques to Control Erosion and Protect Property -



*Coconut logs, live stakes, toe of slope protection and riparian restoration -  
Photograph courtesy of Register-Nelson Environmental Consultants.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Causes of Erosion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Planning</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Preferred Practices</b>	<b>4</b>
- Live Staking	5
- Live Fascines	5
- Branchpacking	7
- Vegetated Geogrid	8
- Brushmattress	9
- Coconut Fiber Roll	10
- Dormant Post Plantings	11
<b>Acceptable Practices</b>	<b>11</b>
- Joint Planting	11
- Live Cribwall	12
- Vegetated Gabion Baskets	13
- Tree Revements	14
- Log, Rootwad and Boulder Revetments	15
<b>Discouraged Practices</b>	<b>16</b>
- Rock Riprap	16
- Rock Gabions	17
- Bulkheads and Seawalls	17
<b>Summary</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Additional Resources</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix A – Woody Plants</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix B – Cuttings for Live Stakes</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix C – Grasses and Forbs</b>	<b>22</b>

## Introduction

*Appropriate selection and application of streambank or shoreline protection measures should vary in response to specific objectives and site conditions.*

Streambank and shoreline stabilization consists of vegetative, structural and bioengineering methods to stabilize AND protect streambanks and shorelines. This document presents diagrams of the methods and practices listed in the Georgia DNR – Environmental Protection Division’s (EPD) July 2007 “Streambank and Shoreline Stabilization Guidance” document and provides information about preferred riparian vegetation for stabilization projects.

Stabilizing streambanks with natural vegetation has many advantages over hard armoring such as riprap, seawalls and gabions. Streams with well-established vegetation on their banks provide for better water quality and fish and wildlife habitats. Vegetation is extremely important for the biological, chemical and physical health of the stream as well as the stability of the system.

Vegetation is not a panacea for controlling erosion and must be considered in light of site-specific characteristics. When vegetation is combined with low-cost building materials or engineered structures, numerous techniques can be created for streambank erosion control. This document summarizes a number of methods that utilize vegetation and bioengineering.



**Illustrated Streambank Restoration**

**NOTE:** This handbook does not attempt to assume that bioengineering for streambank protection is a cure unto itself. First, streambed stability, another whole subject area, must be achieved before banks are addressed. Therefore, careful study should be made to determine the causes of erosion before bioengineering is considered. If streambeds are not stable, it does little good to attempt streambank stabilization. This document does not attempt to address the details of fluvial geomorphology involved in streambed stabilization.

## Causes of Erosion

Streambank and shoreline erosion is a natural process. Human activities often contribute to or accelerate the natural streambank or shoreline erosion process, exacerbating the negative effects. However, with thought and planning, such activities can be modified to avoid or reduce those effects. Human activities contributing to or accelerating the natural streambank or shoreline erosion process include:

### **Clearing Natural Vegetation**

Often done by landowners to expand views or increase recreational areas, it destroys the roots of plants that provide significant streambank and shoreline stabilization.

### **Construction or Development (Urbanization)**

Construction and development uphill of a streambank or shoreline can result in increased stormwater runoff, resulting in increased pollutant and sediment loads to the waterbody. Urbanization can lead to extensive loss of natural vegetation along the streambanks and shorelines, which increases the rate of erosion.

### **Impervious Surfaces and Structures (Stormwater Runoff)**

Pavement, buildings, roofs, drainage ditches, etc. increase the amount, velocity and energy of stormwater, resulting in more runoff being routed to streams and lakes (and less into the ground), and increasing erosion.

### **Agricultural Practices**

These can modify the rate of erosion and increase levels of nutrients in streams and lakes. Agricultural practices, such as plowing, drainage ditches, irrigation and grazing, can increase the rate of erosion.

### **Streambank or Shoreline Stabilization Projects**

Erecting seawalls and other such projects reduce habitat and commonly affect other properties due to the redirection of waves and energy away from the area in which the seawall was installed.

## Planning a Streambank or Shoreline Stabilization Project

Stream channel and shoreline erosion problems vary widely in type and scale, and there is no one measure that works in all cases. Stabilization structures and vegetative measures should be planned and designed by a design professional with experience in this field. Many of the practices involve the use of manufactured products and should be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. In order to determine what type of streambank or shoreline project needs to be implemented, you should first determine the severity of your erosion problem. *Severe erosion covers a large area of bank (linear extent greater than three times average bank height) and is occurring at a rate in excess of one foot per year or a rate that is unacceptable for safety, environmental or economic reasons.*

If your streambank or shoreline is severely eroded, you will need to stabilize the soil to promote plant growth. There are three general approaches to bank stabilization:

- **Live Planting**
- **Bioengineering**
- **Hard Armoring**

The best method for stabilizing and protecting your streambank or shoreline depends upon your specific situation. Factors to consider include the size and location of your stream or shoreline as well as the cause and severity of the erosion. In many cases, the best approach is to use a combination of methods. Before attempting any streambank or shoreline stabilization activities, you should obtain all applicable permits or approvals.

## **Preferred Practices**

### **Preserving the Natural Streambank or Shoreline**

Stabilization of your streambank or shoreline can be as simple as not mowing the grass or not cutting the trees and shrubs along the edge of the banks. This allows natural vegetation to grow or become re-established. A naturally vegetated shoreline has many benefits. It prevents contaminants or excess nutrients from entering the water; it prevents erosion caused by rain, wind, wave and ice action; and it provides food, shade and cover for fish and wildlife. If some vegetation must be removed, limit the amount. Try to prune trees and shrubs back instead of removing them altogether.

### **Soil Bioengineering Systems**

Projects incorporating bioengineering practices using native riparian vegetation are preferred for streambank and shoreline stabilization. However, certain structural components of stabilization are highly effective and occasionally necessary. Natural approaches seek to restore hydrological and ecological balance by using methods that are structurally sound, economically feasible and ecologically sustainable. While there are many ways to protect an existing streambank/shoreline or restore an eroded one, choosing appropriate materials and design is important. Some methods may include planting native, deep-rooting vegetation, as well as bioengineering. Consult with a plant materials specialist for guidance on plant selection. Species that root easily, such as willows, are required for measures such as live staking and live fascines. Lists of Georgia's native vegetation for soil bioengineering and related systems are provided in the appendices.

### **Planting Densities**

EPD recommends that trees be planted at a density of 10 feet on center (ft o.c.) or 436 trees per acre. If planted alone, shrubs should be planted at an average density of 6 ft o.c. (1210 shrubs per acre) and groundcovers (4" containers) at an average density of 1.5 ft o.c. (19,360 containers per acre). When combined with planting trees, shrubs and/or groundcover may be planted at a density of 774 shrubs per acre and 18,150 containers per acre. Live stakes are typically planted at 2 ft o.c. Please reference <http://www.soundnativeplants.com/calculator.htm> for further planting density information.

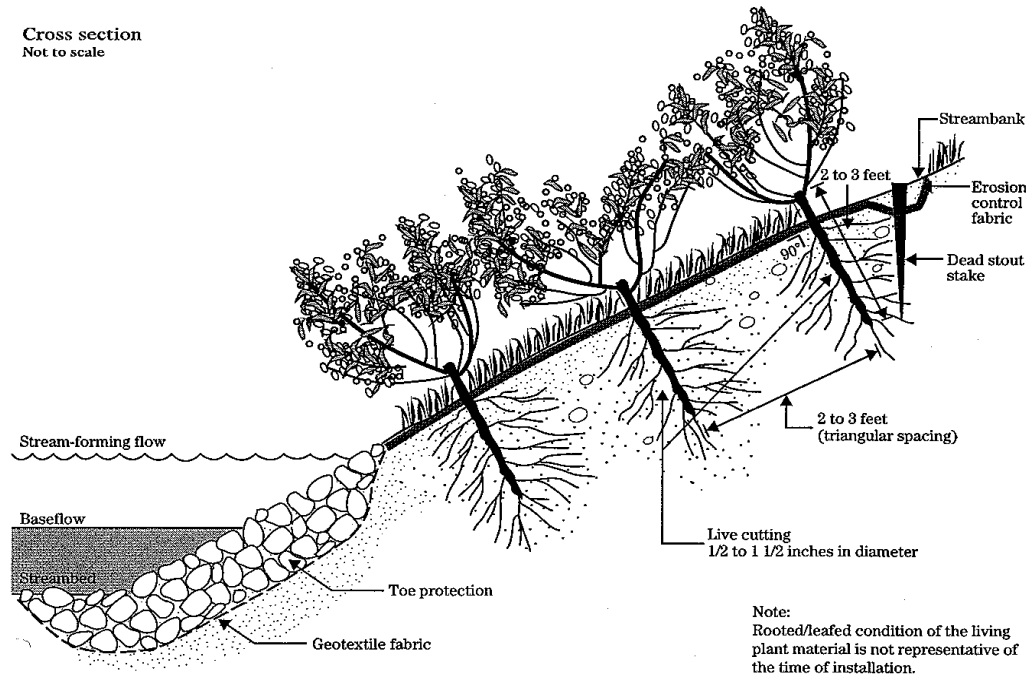
## Soil Bioengineering Systems

Some of the most common and useful soil bioengineering systems for restoration and protection of streambanks and shorelines are described in the following sections.

### Live Staking

Live stakes are living, woody plant cuttings capable of rooted when inserted into the banks. These stakes, commonly willow species, can root and grow into shrubs that overtime will stabilize the streambank or shoreline and provide riparian habitat.

Figure 1. Live stake details



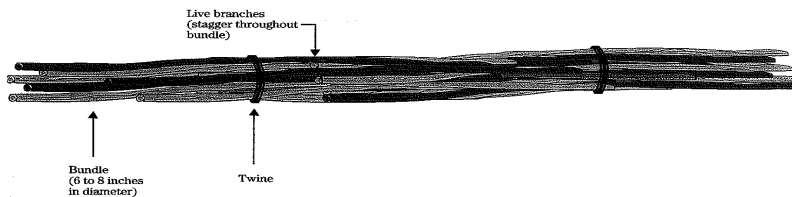
NRCS Engineering Field Handbook

(210-vi-EFH, December 1996)

### Live Fascines (Fascine Rolls/Wattles)

Live fascines are bound bundles of live branch cuttings that are buried onto the bank and staked into place along the slope contour. Willow branches are the most commonly used for this method.

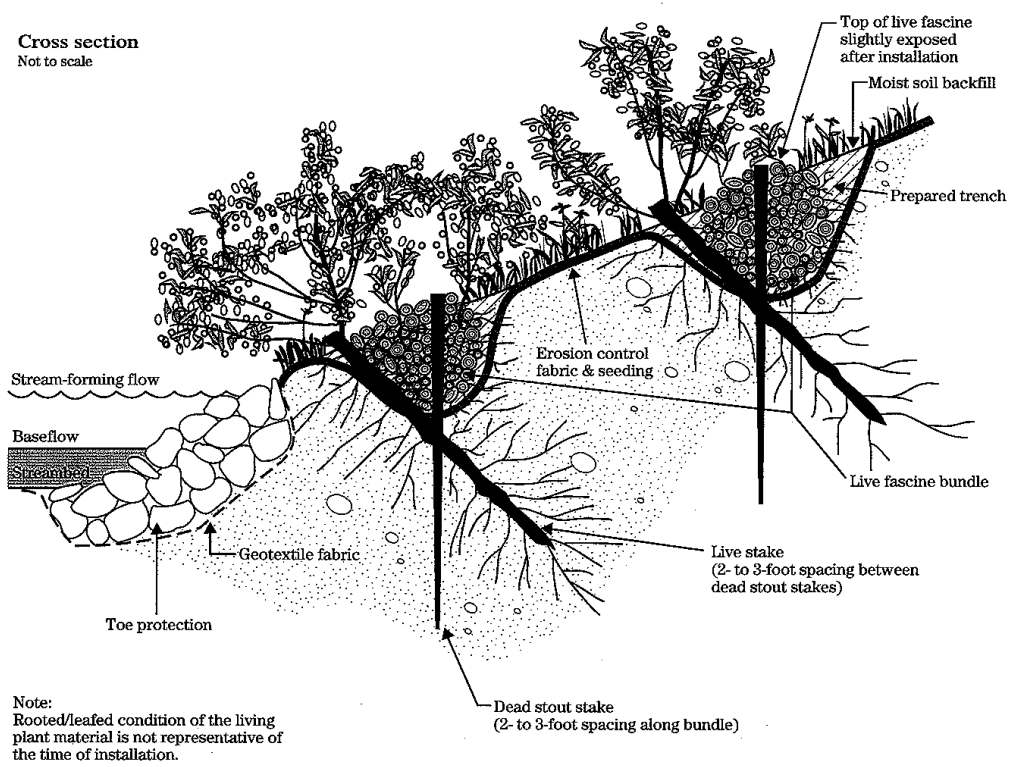
Figure 2. Live fascine details



NRCS Engineering Field Handbook

(210-vi-EFH, December 1996)

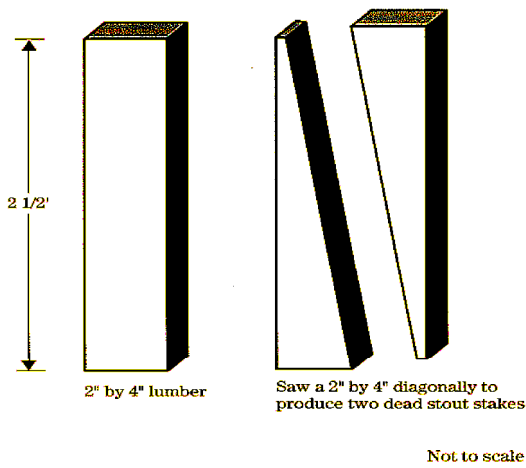
Figure 3. Live fascine details



NRCS Engineering Field Handbook

(210-vi-EFH, December 1996)

Figure 4. Preparation of a dead stout stake



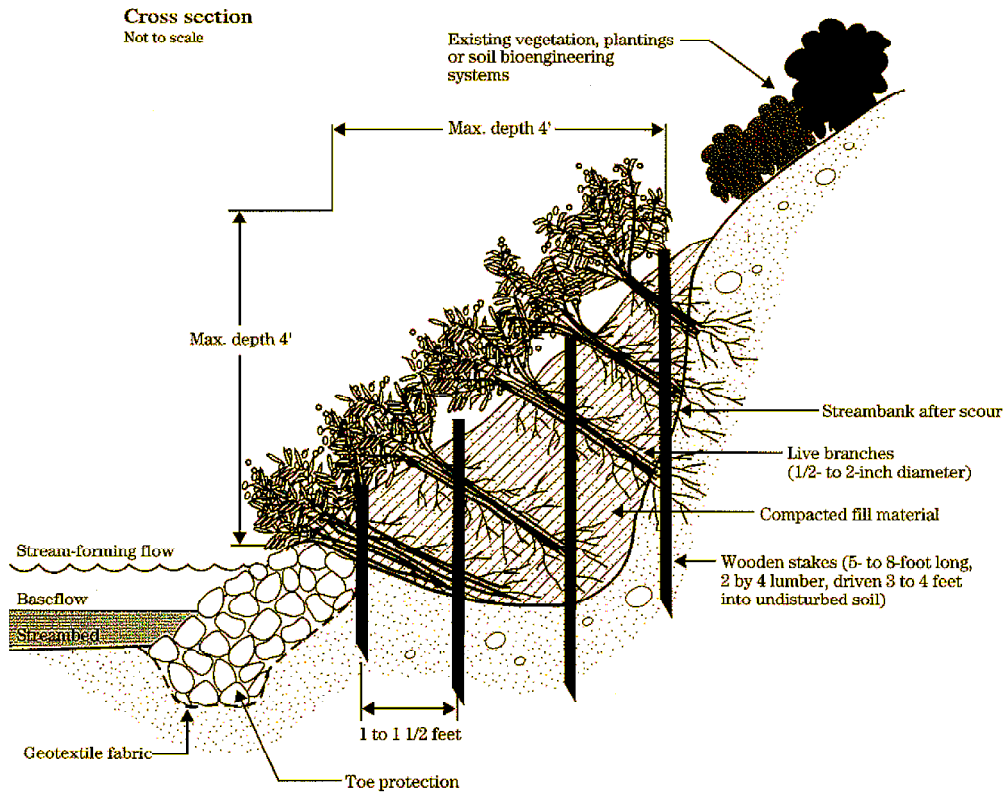
NRCS Engineering Field Handbook

(210-vi-EFH, December 1996)

## Branchpacking

Branchpacking is the process of incorporating alternating layers of live branch cuttings and compacted soils into a hole, gully or slump. This method is used to fill in depressions along the streambank or shoreline.

Figure 5. Branchpacking details



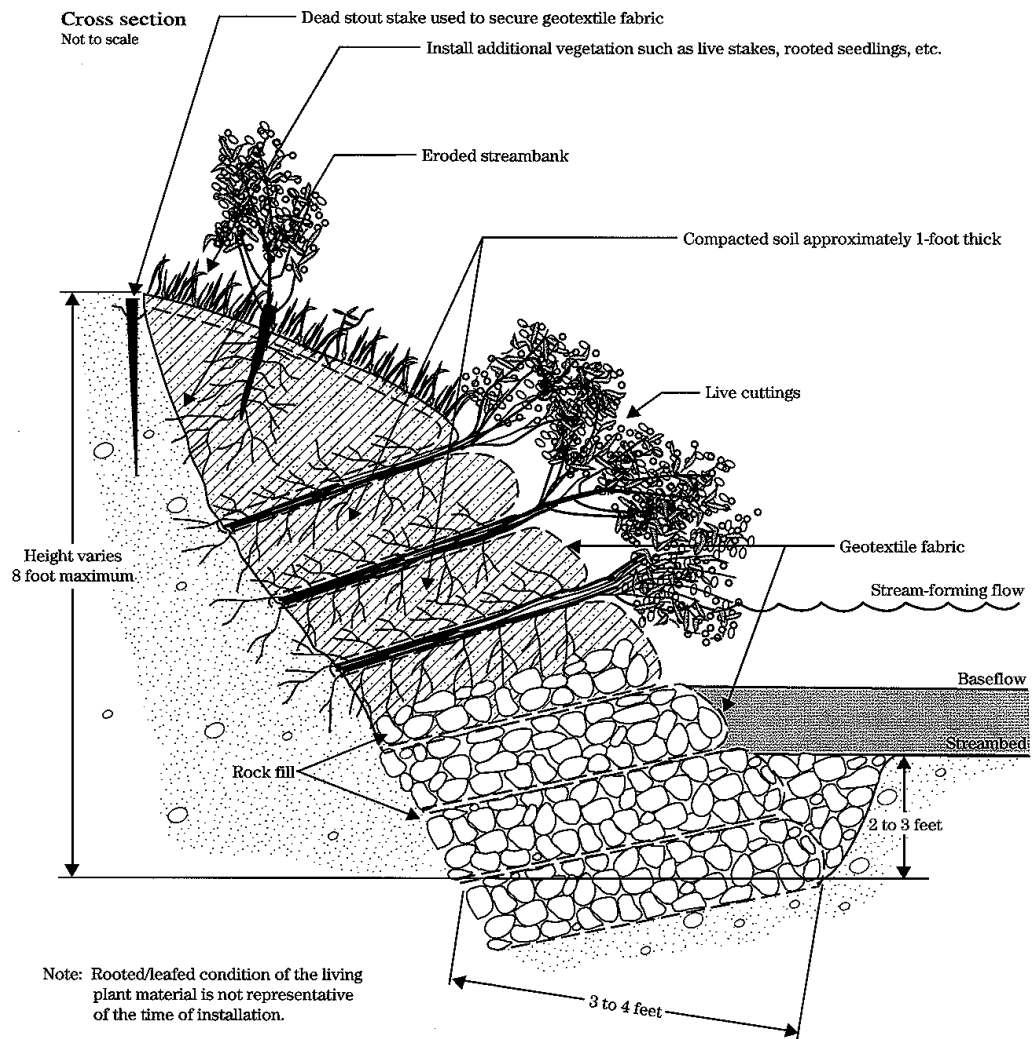
Note:  
Root/leafed condition of the living plant material is not representative of the time of installation



## Vegetated Geogrid

Vegetated geogrids are similar to branchpacking except that natural or synthetic geotextile materials are wrapped around each soil lift between the layers of live branch cuttings.

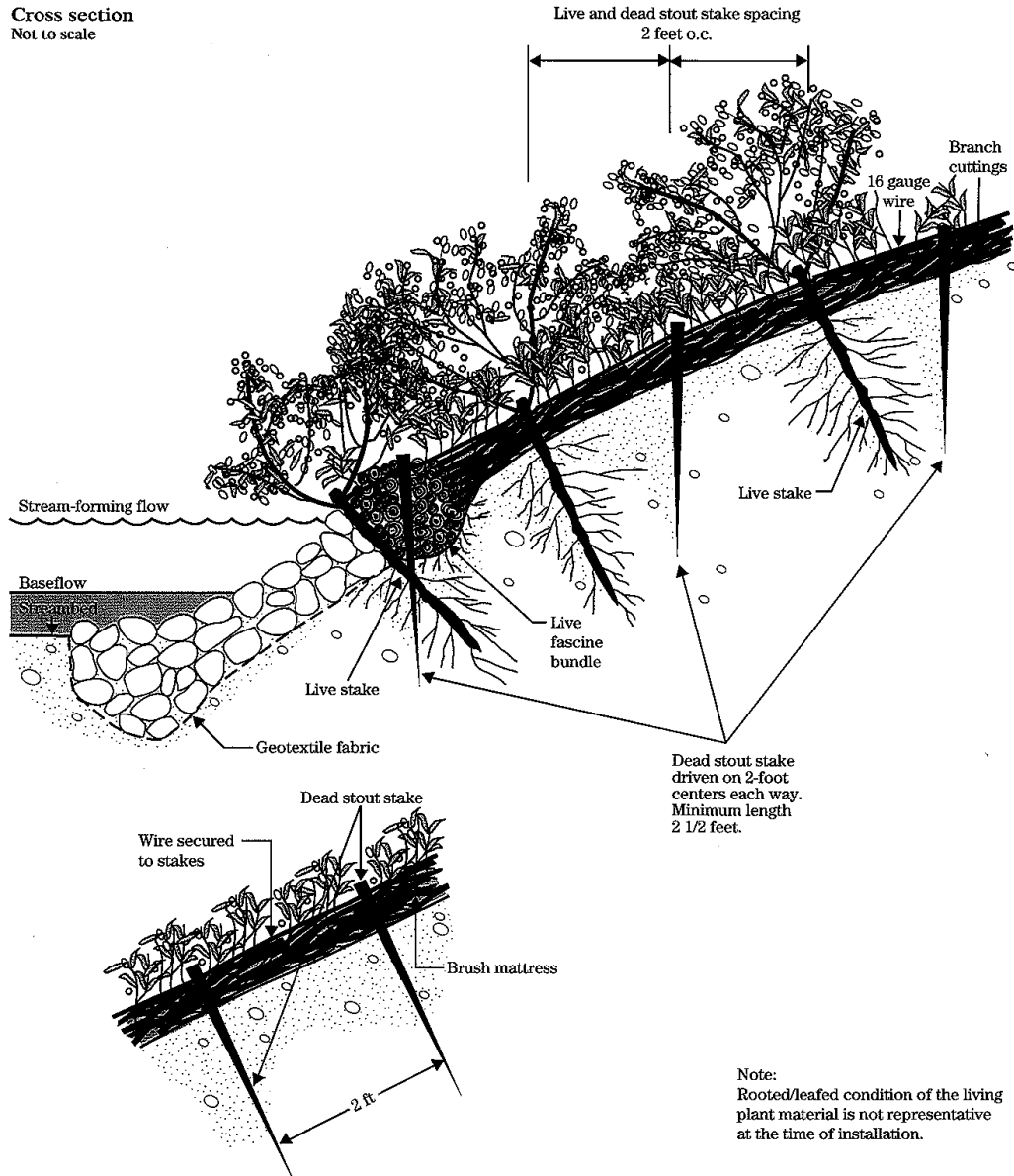
Figure 6. Vegetated geogrid details



## Brushmattress

A brushmattress system consists of live branch cuttings, live stakes, and live fascines installed to cover and stabilize the entire streambank/shoreline and secured in place. This method is installed above the normal stream flow and provides immediate protective coverage of the bank.

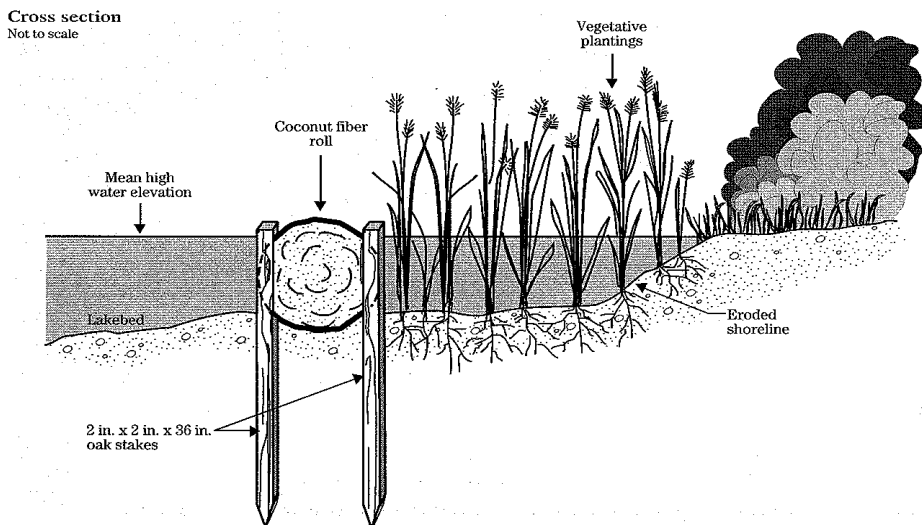
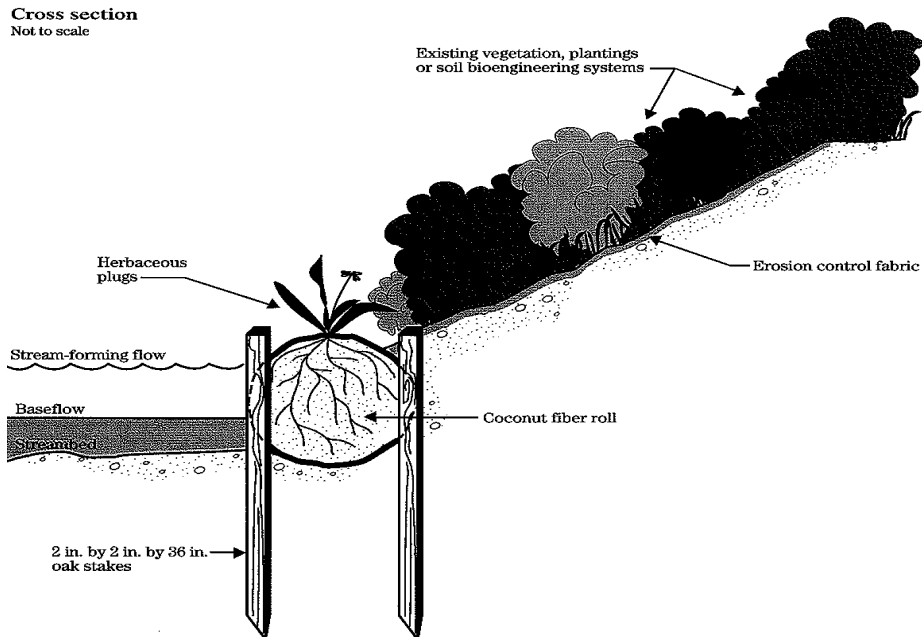
Figure 7. Brushmattress details



### Coconut Fiber Roll

A coconut fiber roll is a flexible “log” made from coconut hull fibers, staked at the toe of the bank. The technique is often used in conjunction with native plants to trap sediment and encourage plant growth.

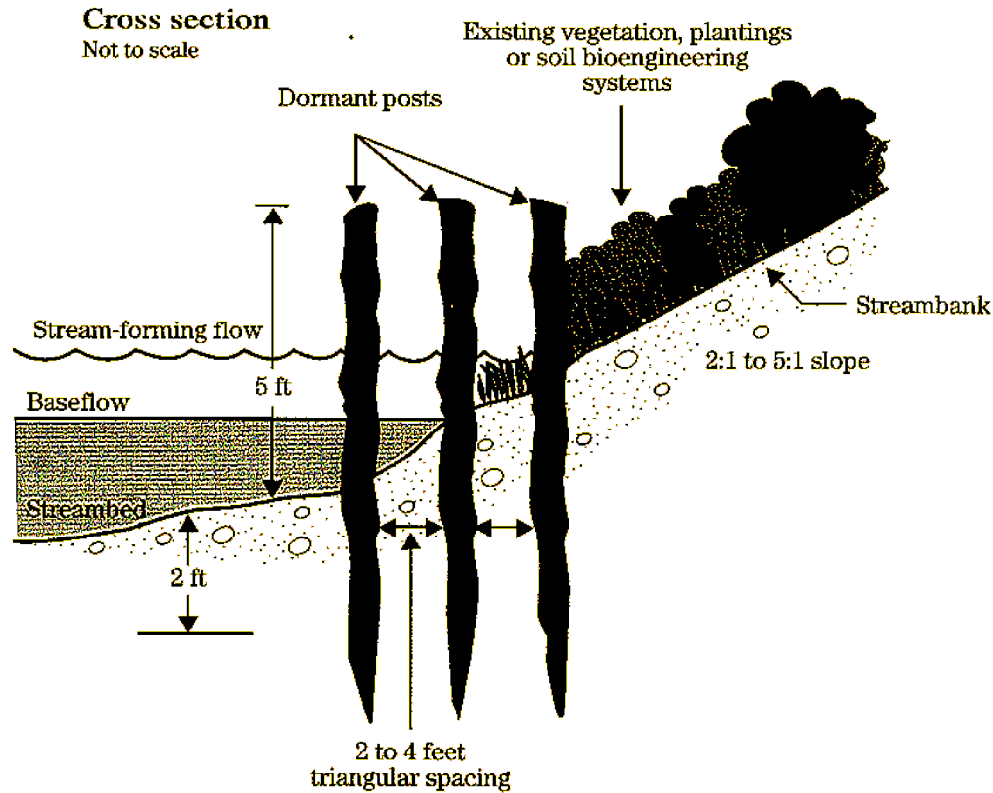
Figure 8. Coconut fiber rolls detail



### Dormant Post Plantings (Live Posts)

Dormant post plantings form a permeable revetment that is constructed from rootable vegetative material placed along streambanks in a square or triangular pattern.

Figure 9. Dormant post details



## Acceptable Practices

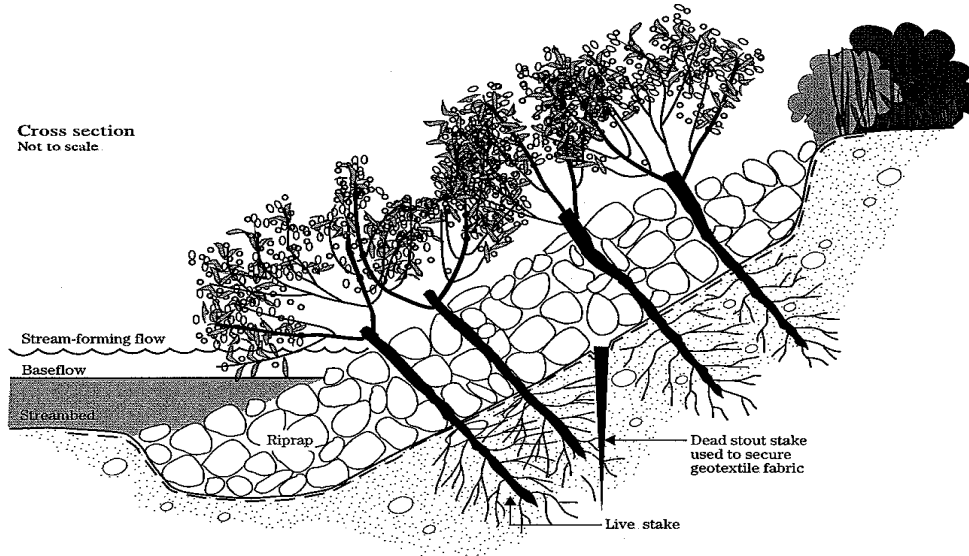
### Integrated Bioengineering Practices

Acceptable stabilization methods are integrated bioengineering with one or more structural component useful in areas with higher velocity flows and/or wave action. This is most often appropriate at the “toe” of the bank or shoreline to prevent additional bank slumping. Structural components should be minimal and only used when necessary to ensure long-term success of the stabilization efforts.

### Joint Planting

Joint planting or vegetated riprap involves tamping live stakes into joints or open spaces in rocks that have been placed on a slope. Vegetation, especially deep rooting species, planted above and immediately behind the rock will greatly increase the stability of the slope

Figure 10. Joint planting details



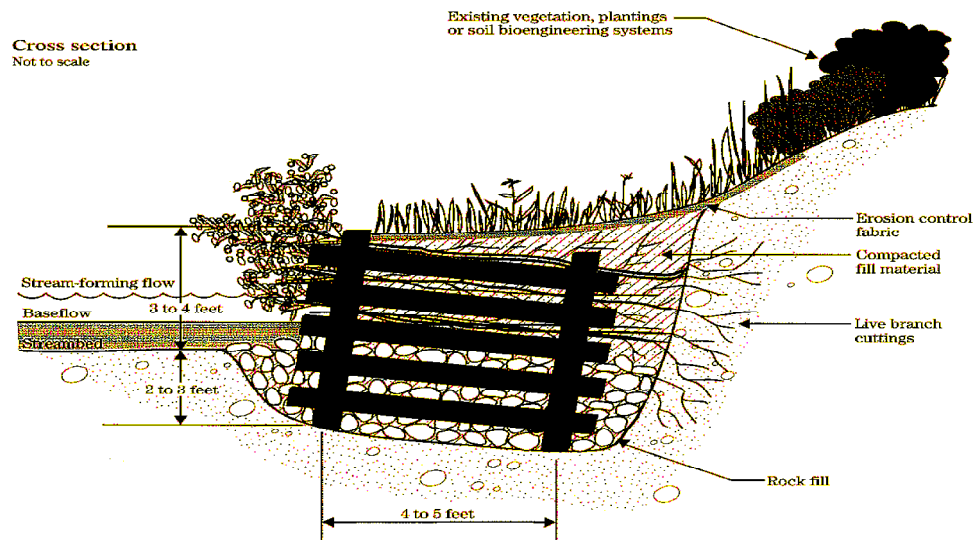
NRCS Engineering Field Handbook

(210-vi-EFH, December 1996)

### Live Cribwall

A live cribwall is a box-like structure with a framework of logs or timbers, rock and live cuttings that can protect eroding streambanks or shorelines. Once live cuttings become established, mature vegetation gradually takes over the structural functions of the logs or timbers.

Figure 11. Live cribwall details



Note:  
Rooted/leafed condition of the living plant material is not representative of the time of installation.

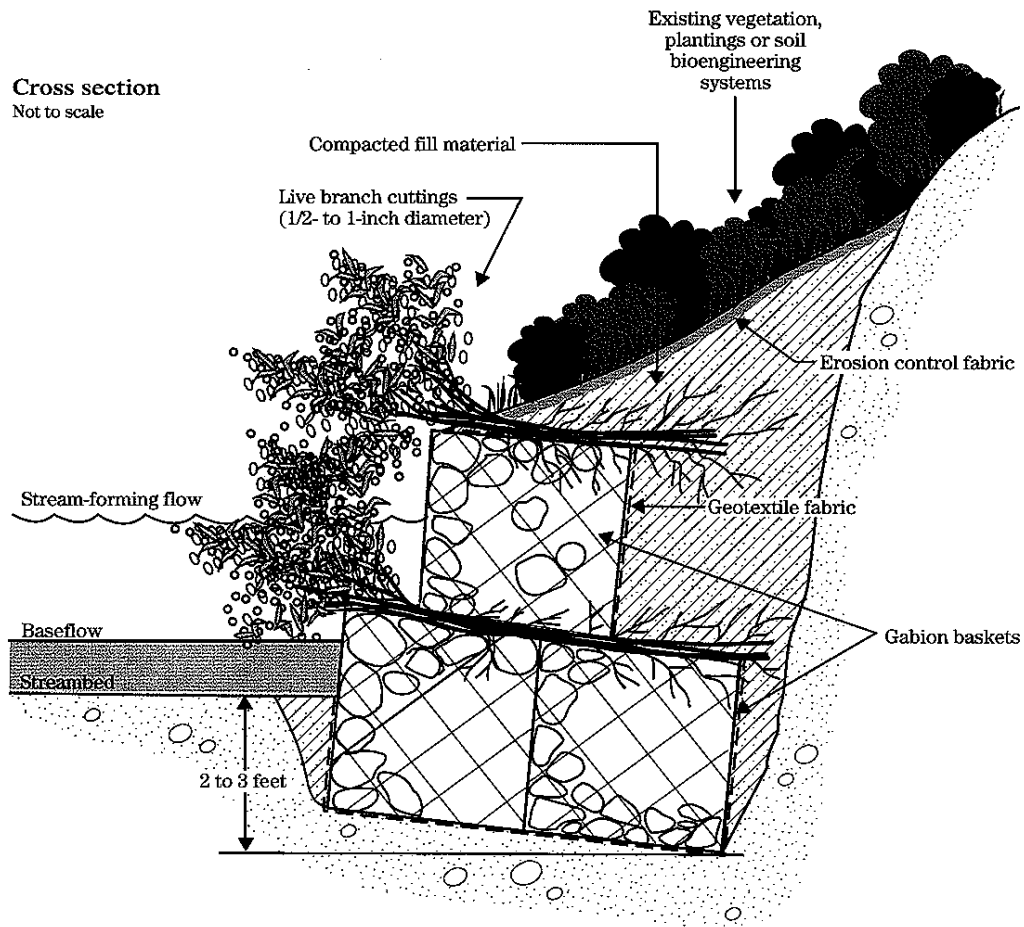
NRCS Engineering Field Handbook

(210-vi-EFH, December 1996)

## Vegetated Rock Gabions

Gabion baskets are rectangular containers fabricated from a heavily galvanized steel wire or triple twisted hexagonal mesh. These empty gabions are placed in position, wired to adjoining gabions, filled with stones, and then wired shut. Vegetation is incorporated into rock gabions by placing live branches on each consecutive layer between the rock filled baskets.

Figure 12. Vegetated gabion details

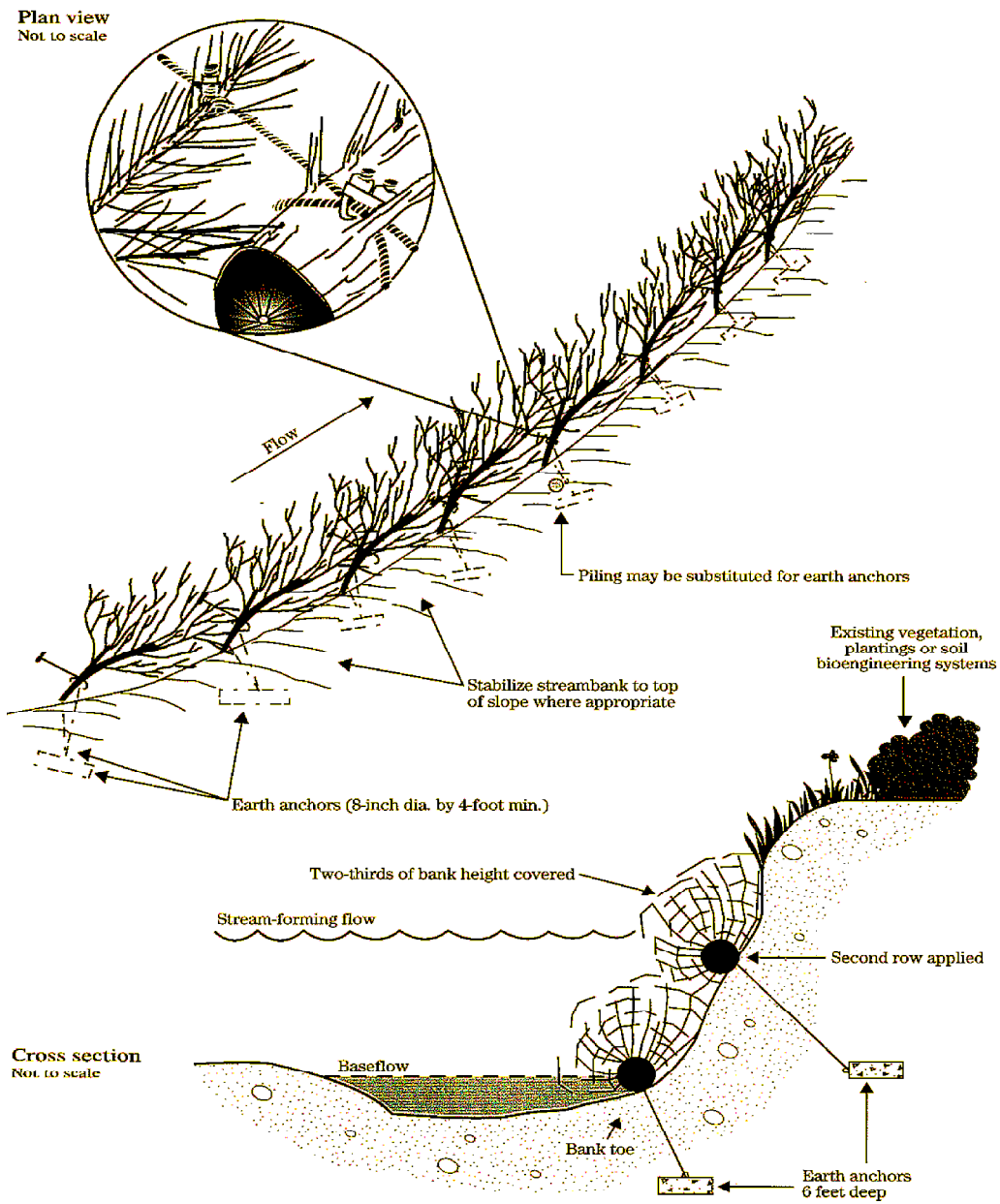


Note:  
Rooted/leafed condition of the living plant material is not representative of the time of installation.

## Tree Revetments

Tree revetments are rows of cut trees anchored to the toe of the bank. This is a low cost method, often used for toe protection with other bioengineering techniques.

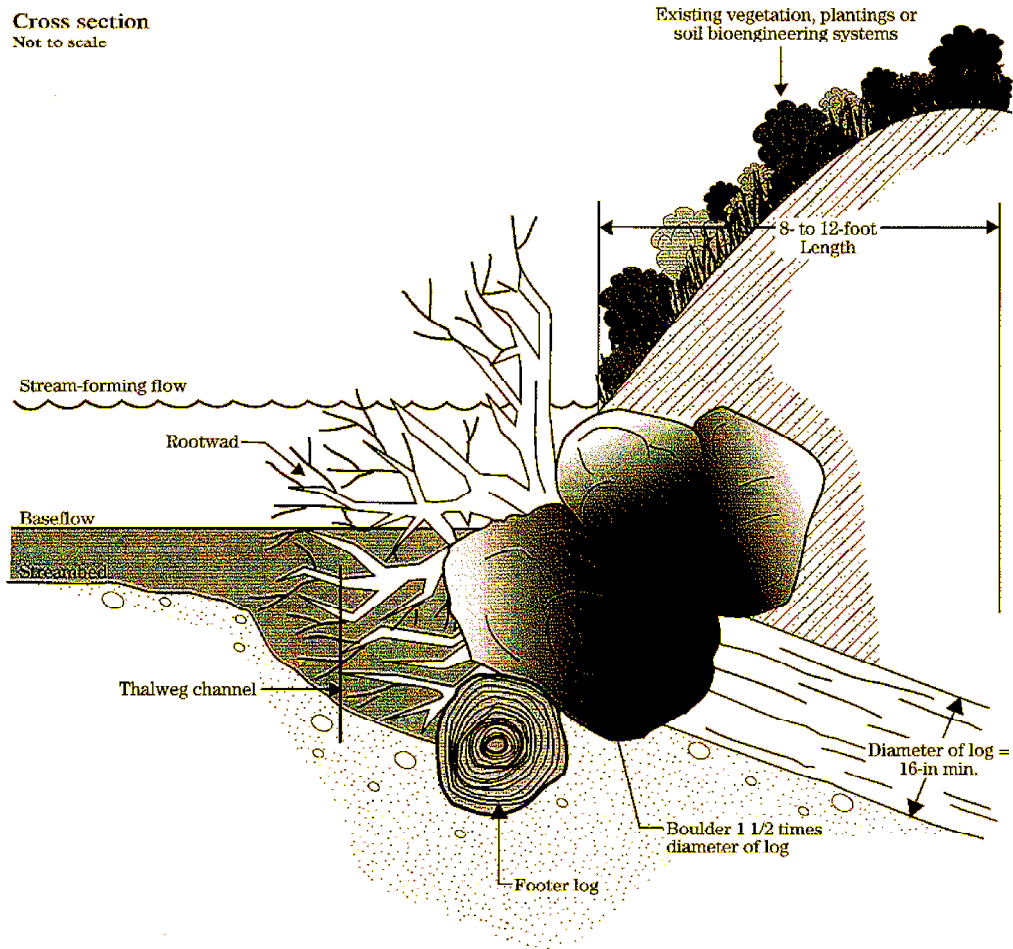
Figure 13. Tree revetment details



## Log, Rootwad, and Boulder Revetments

These revetments are systems composed of logs, rootwads, and boulders selectively placed in and on streambanks.

Figure 14. Log, rootwad, and boulder revetment details





## Discouraged Practices

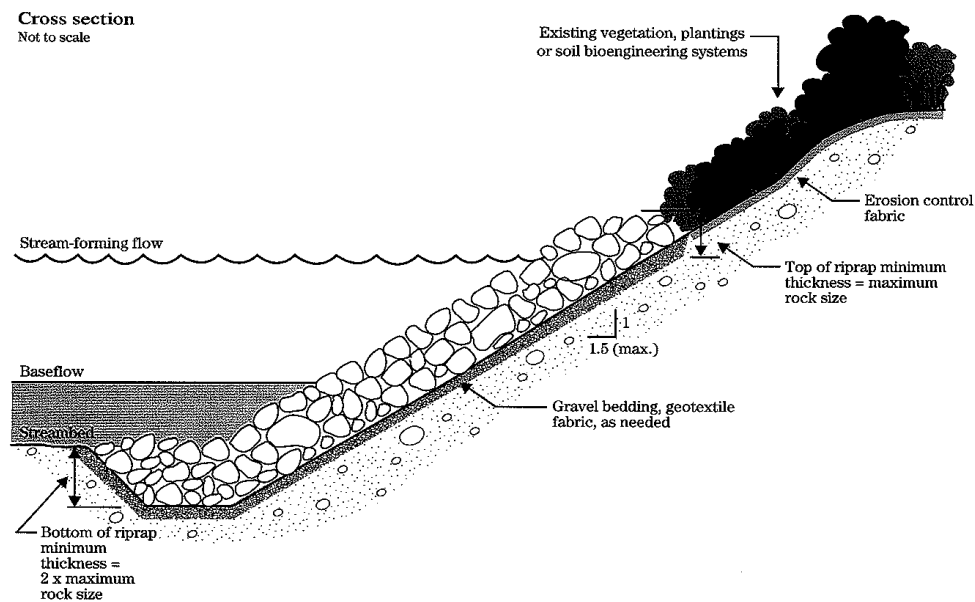
Discouraged practices are structural practices with limited or minimally functional vegetation, or no re-vegetation. These are traditional and conventional methods of hard-arming streambanks and shorelines to address erosion problems. These methods often degrade the quality of aquatic habitat and contribute to erosion in other areas, either downstream or along other shorelines. Since newer practices are available and more contractors are familiar with better stabilization practices, the use of hard armoring is discouraged, however, there are severely eroded locations where hard-arming is necessary.

### Rock Riprap

Riprap stabilization designs should include appropriate bank slope and rock size to protect the bank from wave and current action and to prolong the life of the embankment. A final slope ratio of at least 1:2 (vertical to horizontal) is recommended, and a more stable 1:3 slope should be used where possible.

A layer of gravel, small stone, or filter cloth placed under and/or behind the rock helps prevent failure. In many cases, only the toe of the slope may need rock reinforcement; the remainder can be planted with native vegetation.

Figure 15. Rock riprap details



## Rock Gabions

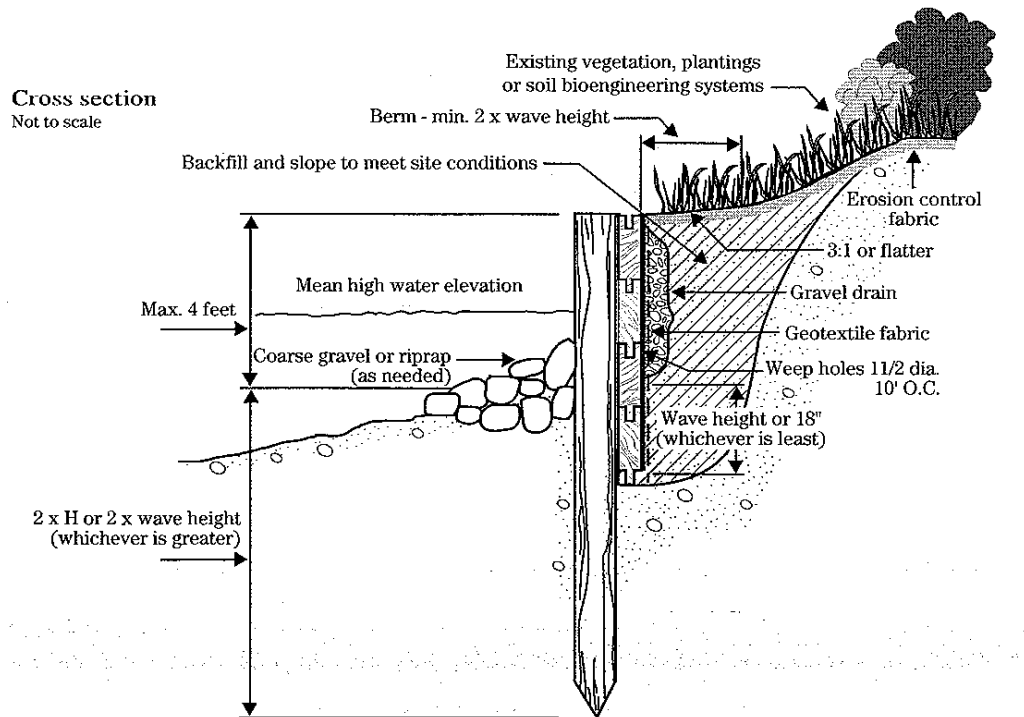
Rock gabions with vegetation are a more acceptable stabilization practice. See details for gabion baskets on page 13.

## Bulkheads and Seawalls

Bulkheads and seawalls are not encouraged and generally are not approved. These structures (typically sheet steel, concrete or wood) produce a sterile, vertical, flat-faced object that is of little use to aquatic organisms and other wildlife. They also tend to reflect wave energy rather than dissipate it, usually resulting in erosion problems in front of the "fix" and elsewhere.

However, when erosive forces are severe, existing building foundations or structures are threatened, and other stabilization approaches would not be effective, a new or replacement retaining wall may be warranted. In these cases, rock should be placed at the toe to reduce the adverse impacts of reflected wave energy.

Figure 16. Timber bulkhead detail



## Summary

Streambank and shoreline work should be proposed only when a problem exists and needs fixing (i.e., to stabilize identified erosion areas) - not to decorate, landscape or reclaim land. When work is necessary, natural approaches should be considered first. **Permits and buffer variances may be required from the following agencies:**

***U.S. Army Corps of Engineers***

Savannah District  
100 W. Oglethorpe Avenue  
Savannah, GA 31401  
(912) 652-5279/5770

***U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service***

Southeast Region  
1875 Century Blvd, Suite 400  
Atlanta, GA 30345  
(404) 679-4000

***Georgia DNR - Environmental Protection Division***

Watershed Protection Branch  
4220 International Parkway, Suite 101  
Atlanta, GA 30354  
(404) 675-6240

***Georgia DNR - Coastal Resources Division***

One Conservation Way  
Brunswick, GA 31520  
(912) 264-7218

***Georgia DNR – Historic Preservation Division***

254 Washington Street SW  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
(404) 656-2840

***Local Governments (Cities, Counties)***

***Other Entities (Utilities, Authorities)***

**Please contact appropriate agencies BEFORE beginning any stabilization activities.**

## **Additional Resources**

### **Plants**

Calculating Plant Quantities for Restoration Projects

<http://www.soundnativeplants.com/calculator.htm>

Sources for Native Plants and Seed

[http://gnps.org/resources/Native\\_Nurseries.php](http://gnps.org/resources/Native_Nurseries.php)

### **Streambank and Shoreline Stabilization**

Guidelines for Streambank and Shoreline Restoration

[http://www.files.georgia.gov/SWCC/Files/Guidelines\\_Streambank\\_Restoration.pdf](http://www.files.georgia.gov/SWCC/Files/Guidelines_Streambank_Restoration.pdf)

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Handbooks – Part 650 Engineering Field Handbook, Chapter 16 Streambank and Shoreline Protection

<http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/>

The Shoreline Stabilization Handbook

<http://nsgd.gso.uri.edu/lcsg/lcsg04001.pdf>

Streambank and Shoreline Stabilization Guidance

[http://www.gaepd.org/Files\\_PDF/techguide/wpb/Streambank\\_and\\_Shoreline\\_Stabilization\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.gaepd.org/Files_PDF/techguide/wpb/Streambank_and_Shoreline_Stabilization_Guidance.pdf)

**Appendix A – Woody Plants for Soil Bioengineering and Associated Systems in Georgia**

<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Plant Type</b>	<b>Region *</b>	<b>Establishment Speed</b>
<i>Acer negundo</i>	boxelder	small to medium tree		fast
<i>Acer rubrum</i>	red maple	medium tree	M, P, C	fast
<i>Alnus serrulata</i>	smooth alder	large shrub	M, P, C	medium
<i>Amorpha fruticosa</i>	false indigo	shrub	M, P, C	fast
<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	red chokeberry	shrub	M, P, C	fast
<i>Asimina triloba</i>	pawpaw	small tree	M, P, C	
<i>Betula nigra</i>	river birch	medium to large tree	M, P, C	fast
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	american hornbeam	small tree	M, P, C	slow
<i>Carya cordiformis</i>	bitternut hickory	tree	P, C	
<i>Catalpa bignonioides</i>	southern catalpa	tree	P, C	fair
<i>Celtis laevigata</i>	sugarberry	medium tree	P, C	slow
<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	hackberry	medium tree	P, C	slow
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	buttonbush	large shrub	M, P, C	medium
<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	fringe tree	small tree	P, C	
<i>Clethera ainifolia</i>	sweet pepperbush	shrub	P, C	
<i>Cornus amomum</i>	silky dogwood	small shrub	M, P	medium
<i>Cornus florida</i>	flowering dogwood	small tree	M, P, C	fair
<i>Cyrilla racemiflora</i>	titi	small tree	C	
<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	persimmon	medium tree	M, P, C	fair
<i>Fraxinus caroliniana</i>	carolina ash	large tree	C	fast
<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	green ash	medium tree	M, P, C	fast
<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>	honeylocust	medium tree	P, C	fast
<i>Hibiscus aculeatus</i>	hibiscus	shrub	C	
<i>Ilex coriacea</i>	sweet gallberry	small to large shrub	C	
<i>Ilex decidua</i>	possumhaw	large shrub to small tree	P, C	
<i>Ilex glabra</i>	bitter gallberry	small shrub	C	
<i>Ilex opaca</i>	american holly	small tree	M, P, C	medium
<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	winterberry	small to large shrub	M, P	
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>	yaupon	large shrub	C	
<i>Juglans nigra</i>	black walnut	medium tree	M, P	fair
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	eastern redcedar	large tree	M, P, C	medium
<i>Leucothoe axillaries</i>	leucothoe	small to large shrub	C	
<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	spicebush	shrub	M	
<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	sweetgum	large tree	M, P, C	
<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	tulip poplar	large tree	M, P	fast
<i>Lyonia lucida</i>	fetterbush	small to large shrub	C	

Scientific Name	Common Name	Plant Type	Region *	Establishment Speed
<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>	sweetbay	small tree	P, C	
<i>Myrica cerifera</i>	southern waxmyrtle	small shrub	C	slow
<i>Nyssa aquatica</i>	swamp tupelo	large tree	C	slow
<i>Nyssa ogeeche</i>	ogeeche lime	large shrub to small tree	C	medium
<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	blackgum	tall tree	M, P, C	slow
<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	hophornbean	small tree	M, P, C	slow
<i>Persea borbonia</i>	redbay	small to large tree	C	slow
<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	sycamore	large tree	M, P, C	fast
<i>Populus deltoides</i>	eastern cottonwood	tall tree	M, P, C	fast
<i>Quercus alba</i>	white oak	large tree	M, P, C	slow
<i>Quercus laurifolia</i>	swamp laurel oak	tree	C	fast
<i>Quercus lyrata</i>	overcup oak	medium tree	P, C	slow
<i>Quercus michauxii</i>	swamp chestnut oak	medium tree	M, P, C	fair
<i>Quercus nigra</i>	water oak	medium tree	M, P, C	slow
<i>Quercus palustris</i>	pin oak	large tree	M	fast
<i>Quercus pbellos</i>	willow oak	medium to large tree	M, P, C	medium
<i>Quercus shumardii</i>	shumard oak	large tree	P, C	slow
<i>Rhododendron atlanticum</i>	coast azalea	small shrub	P, C	
<i>Rhododendron viscosum</i>	swamp azalea	shrub	P, C	
<i>Salix nigra</i>	black willow	small to large tree	M, P, C	fast
<i>Taxodium distichum</i>	baldcypress	medium tree	C	fast
<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	eastern hemlock	large tree	M	slow
<i>Viburnum nudum</i>	swamp haw	large shrub	M, P, C	

\*M=Mountain, P=Piedmont, C=Coastal

**NOTE:** EPD recommends that trees be planted at a density of 10 feet on center (ft o.c.) or 436 trees per acre. If planted alone, shrubs should be planted at an average density of 6 ft o.c. (1210 shrubs per acre) and groundcovers (4" containers) at an average density of 1.5 ft o.c. (19,360 containers per acre). When combined with planting trees, shrubs and/or groundcover may be planted at a density of 774 shrubs per acre and 18,150 containers per acre. Live stakes are typically planted at 2 ft o.c. Please reference <http://www.soundnativeplants.com/calculator.htm> for further planting density information.

**Appendix B – Plants Suitable for Rooting as Cuttings (Live Stakes) in Georgia**

Scientific Name	Common Name	Plant Type	Rooting Ability*	Region
<i>Acer negundo</i>	boxelder			M, P, C
<i>Asimina triloba</i>	pawpaw	small tree	poor to fair	M, P, C
<i>Baccharis halimifolia</i>	groundsel bush	medium shrub	good	P, C
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	buttonbush	large shrub	fair to good	M, P, C
<i>Cornus amomum</i>	silky dogwood	small shrub	fair	M, P
<i>Cornus sericia</i>	red osier dogwood			M, P
<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>	honeylocust	medium tree	poor to fair	P, C
<i>Populus deltoides</i>	eastern cottonwood	tall tree	very good	M, P, C
<i>Robinia sp.</i>	black locust			P, M
<i>Salix discolor</i>	pussy willow	large shrub	very good	
<i>Salix nigra</i>	black willow	small to large tree	good to excel	M, P, C
<i>Salix purpurea</i>	purpleosier willow	medium tree	excel	M, P, C
<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	american elder	medium shrub	good	M, P
<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	arrowwood	medium to tall shrub	good	M, P, C
<i>Viburnum lentago</i>	nannyberry	large shrub	fair to good	M, P, C

\*Rooting ability from cutting

**Appendix C – Grasses and Forbs Useful in Conjunction with Soil Bioengineering and Associated Systems in the Southeast**

Scientific Name	Common Name	Soil Preference	Drought Tolerance	Shade Tolerance	Flood Tolerance
<i>Ammophila breviligulata</i>	american beachgrass	sands	fair	poor	
<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	big bluestem	loams	good	poor	fair
<i>Arundo donax</i>	giant reed	sandy	good	poor	poor
<i>Herarthria altissima</i>	limpogress	sandy	poor	poor	good
<i>Panicum amarulum</i>	coastal panicgrass	sands to loams	good	poor	good
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	switchgrass	loams to sands	good	poor	good
<i>Paspalum vaginatum</i>	seashore paspalum	sandy		poor	good
<i>Pennisetum purpureum</i>	elephant grass			poor	
<i>Spartina pectinata</i>	prarie cordgrass	sands to loams	good	fair	fair
<i>Zizaniopsis miliacea</i>	giant cutgrass	loam	poor	poor	good



Georgia Environmental Protection Division  
Watershed Protection Branch  
4220 International Parkway, Suite 101  
Atlanta, GA 30354  
(404) 675-6240

[www.gaepd.org](http://www.gaepd.org)



Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission  
State Headquarters  
4310 Lexington Road  
P. O. Box 8024  
Athens, GA 30603  
(706) 542-3065

[www.gaswcc.georgia.gov](http://www.gaswcc.georgia.gov)



The publication of this document was supported by the Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division and was financed in part through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the provisions of the Section 319(h) of the Federal Clean Water Act of 1987, as amended. January 2010.