

First 5 of 10 commonly asked questions when pondering dry ponds

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Rural landowners often get a good look at the bottom of their ponds during winter and particularly after a drought, and so they might be considering corrective actions such as cleaning the sediment out or adding sealants to leaky ponds.

DeAnn Presley, K-State Soil Management specialist, and Herschel George, K-State Watershed specialist, answer some frequently asked questions regarding dry ponds and what to consider before deciding to clean or amend a pond.

Q: Should I clean my pond or make a new pond somewhere else?

A: Normally the “best” pond site was taken by the initial pond. However, if a suitable site is available, it is usually less expensive to construct a new pond than to clean sediment from an existing one. Thus, a new pond should be fully considered before deciding to clean one. Be sure to include fencing around the pond and providing a remote watering site in the cost.

Q: What is the purpose(s) of the pond?

A: Many ponds were originally built as a water source for livestock and that may have been the best option at the time. But, is a pond the best option for the purpose now? Connection to a pressurized system either from a public water supply or a farm well can be an economic choice. Piping water to a pasture should be a financial decision. A solar pump from a pond or well might be less than half the cost of a new or cleaned-out pond and would have better quality water. See KSU Extension Pub: S-147 Waterers and Watering Systems: A Handbook for Livestock Producers and Landowners.

Q: What is the pond’s value (how much are you willing to spend) for the intended purpose?

A: Ponds are expensive. The cost to build and the future cost to rebuild the pond when necessary should always be considered. The risks of livestock loss in the mud or falling through the ice are often forgotten until the loss occurs. Not all ponds hold water well in spite of corrective measures. The most proactive thing a producer can do is place a waterer for the livestock to drink and a fence to exclude the cattle from direct access to the pond edges. Ponds require considerable maintenance. Unless you have a reliable cost estimate from a local business person, a good estimate to clean the pond is \$10 per cubic yard.

Q: What do you do with sediment once the pond is cleaned?

A: Often this sludge from a pond cleanout has the consistency of pancake batter - it just keeps sliding down hill. It may require a period of time to de-water before the material can be used. Placing the sediment on the back side of the dam is the best and recommended place. This sediment could be used to fill some low spots, small gullies, or ruts on the property. Putting it right next to or upslope from the pond is not a good spot because it could wash right back in.

Q: Can the removed sediment be used as a building or topsoil material?

A: Pond fill (sediment) will not have any soil structure, so it will have very little strength. It is probably not a good idea to use pond fill under a supporting wall of a building, but it might have some value for amending a degraded soil.