Chapter 1 Introduction

The conversion of rural land to urban land usually increases erosion and the discharge and volume of storm runoff in a watershed. It also causes other problems that affect soil and water. As part of programs established to alleviate these problems, engineers increasingly must assess the probable effects of urban development, as well as design and implement measures that will minimize its adverse effects.

Technical Release 55 (TR-55) presents simplified procedures for estimating runoff and peak discharges in small watersheds. In selecting the appropriate procedure, consider the scope and complexity of the problem, the available data, and the acceptable level of error. While this TR gives special emphasis to urban and urbanizing watersheds, the procedures apply to any small watershed in which certain limitations are met.

Effects of urban development

An urban or urbanizing watershed is one in which impervious surfaces cover or will soon cover a considerable area. Impervious surfaces include roads, sidewalks, parking lots, and buildings. Natural flow paths in the watershed may be replaced or supplemented by paved gutters, storm sewers, or other elements of artificial drainage.

Hydrologic studies to determine runoff and peak discharge should ideally be based on long-term stationary streamflow records for the area. Such records are seldom available for small drainage areas. Even where they are available, accurate statistical analysis of them is usually impossible because of the conversion of land to urban uses during the period of record. It therefore is necessary to estimate peak discharges with hydrologic models based on measurable watershed characteristics. Only through an understanding of these characteristics and experience in using these models can we make sound judgments on how to alter model parameters to reflect changing watershed conditions.

Urbanization changes a watershed's response to precipitation. The most common effects are reduced infiltration and decreased travel time, which significantly increase peak discharges and runoff. Runoff is determined primarily by the amount of precipitation and by infiltration characteristics related to soil type, soil moisture, antecedent rainfall, cover type, impervious surfaces, and surface retention. Travel time is determined primarily by slope, length of flow path, depth of flow, and roughness of flow surfaces. Peak discharges are based on the relationship of these parameters and on the total drainage area of the watershed, the location of the development, the effect of any flood control works or other natural or manmade storage, and the time distribution of rainfall during a given storm event.

The model described in TR-55 begins with a rainfall amount uniformly imposed on the watershed over a specified time distribution. Mass rainfall is converted to mass runoff by using a runoff curve number (CN). CN is based on soils, plant cover, amount of impervious areas, interception, and surface storage. Runoff is then transformed into a hydrograph by using unit hydrograph theory and routing procedures that depend on runoff travel time through segments of the watershed.

For a description of the hydrograph development method used by SCS, see chapter 16 of the SCS National Engineering Handbook, Section 4—Hydrology (NEH-4) (SCS 1985). The routing method (Modified Att-Kin) is explained in appendixes G and H of draft Technical Release 20 (TR-20) (SCS 1983).

Rainfall

TR-55 includes four regional rainfall time distributions. See appendix B for a discussion of how these distributions were developed.

All four distributions are for a 24-hour period. This period was chosen because of the general availability of daily rainfall data that were used to estimate 24-hour rainfall amounts. The 24-hour duration spans most of the applications of TR-55.

One critical parameter in the model is time of concentration (T_c), which is the time it takes for runoff to travel to a point of interest from the hydraulically most distant point. Normally a rainfall duration equal to or greater than T_c is used. Therefore, the rainfall distributions were designed to contain the intensity of any duration of rainfall for the frequency of the event chosen. That is, if the 10-year frequency, 24-hour rainfall is used, the most intense hour will approximate the 10-year, 1-hour rainfall volume.

Runoff

To estimate runoff from storm rainfall, SCS uses the runoff curve number (CN) method (see chapters 4 through 10 of NEH-4, SCS 1985). Determination of CN depends on the watershed's soil and cover conditions, which the model represents as hydrologic soil group, cover type, treatment, and hydrologic condition. Chapter 2 of this TR discusses the effect of urban development on CN and explains how to use CN to estimate runoff.

Time parameters

Chapter 3 describes a method for estimating the parameters used to distribute the runoff into a hydrograph. The method is based on velocities of flow through segments of the watershed. Two major parameters are time of concentration (T_c) and travel time of flow through the segments (T_t). These and the other parameters used are the same as those used in accepted hydraulic analyses of open channels.

Many methods are empirically derived from actual runoff hydrographs and watershed characteristics. The method in chapter 3 was chosen because it is basic; however, other methods may be used.

Peak discharge and hydrographs

Chapter 4 describes a method for approximating peak rates of discharge, and chapter 5 describes a method for obtaining or routing hydrographs. Both methods were derived from hydrographs prepared by procedures outlined in chapter 16 of NEH-4 (SCS 1985). The computations were made with a computerized SCS hydrologic model, TR-20 (SCS 1983).

The methods in chapters 4 and 5 should be used in accordance with specific guidelines. If basic data are improperly prepared or adjustments not properly used, errors will result.

Storage effects

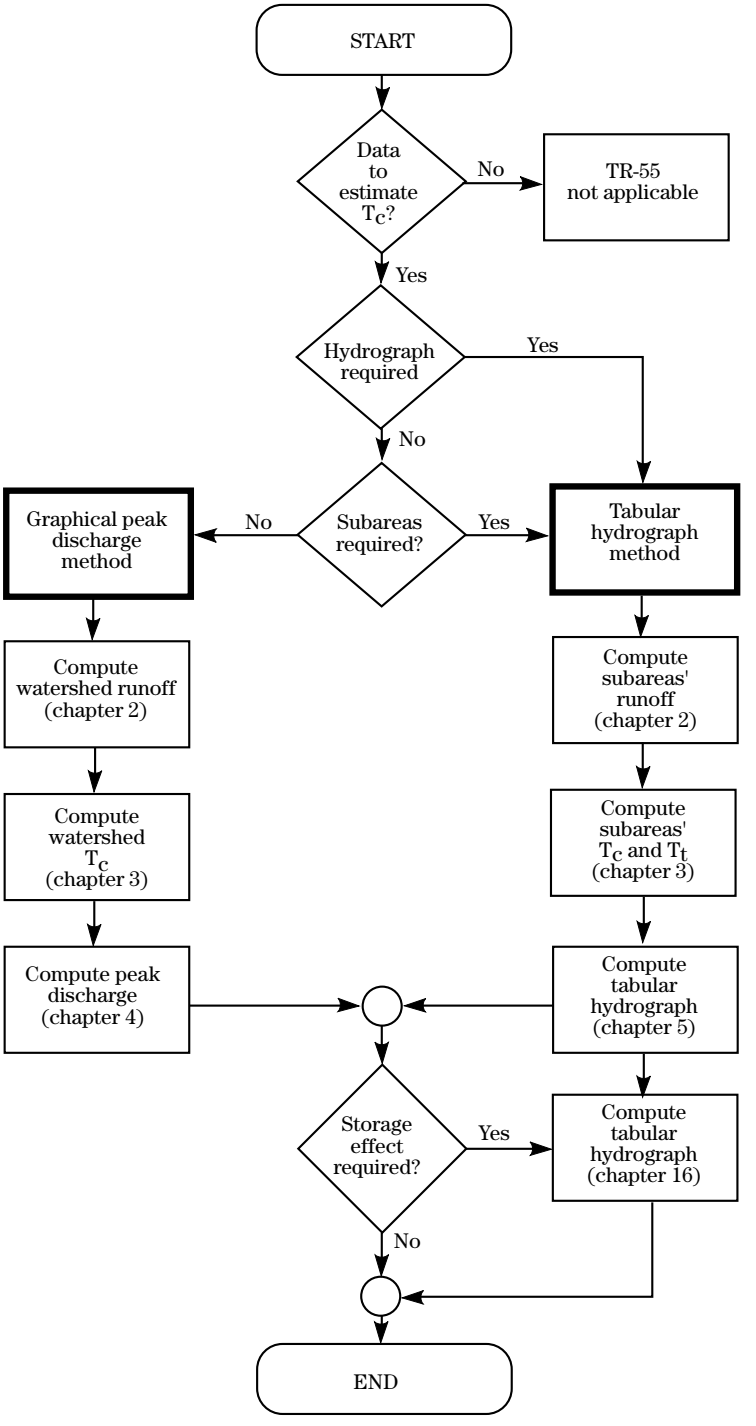
Chapter 6 outlines procedures to account for the effect of detention-type storage. It provides a shortcut method to estimate temporary flood storage based on hydrologic data developed from the Graphical Peak Discharge or Tabular Hydrograph methods.

By increasing runoff and decreasing travel times, urbanization can be expected to increase downstream peak discharges. Chapter 6 discusses how flood detention can modify the hydrograph so that, ideally, downstream peak discharge is reduced approximately to the predevelopment condition. The shortcuts in chapter 6 are useful in sizing a basin even though the final design may require a more detailed analysis.

Selecting the appropriate procedures

Figure 1-1 is a flow chart that shows how to select the appropriate procedures to use in TR-55. In the figure, the diamond-shaped box labeled "Subareas required?" directs the user to the appropriate method based on whether the watershed needs to be divided into subareas. Watershed subdivision is required when significantly different conditions affecting runoff or timing are present in the watershed—for example, if the watershed has widely differing curve numbers or nonhomogeneous slope patterns.

Figure 1-1 Flow chart for selecting the appropriate procedures in TR-55.



Limitations

To save time, the procedures in TR-55 are simplified by assumptions about some parameters. These simplifications, however, limit the use of the procedures and can provide results that are less accurate than more detailed methods. The user should examine the sensitivity of the analysis being conducted to a variation of the peak discharge or hydrograph. To ensure that the degree of error is tolerable, specific limitations are given in chapters 2 through 6. Additional general constraints to the use of TR-55 are as follows:

- The methods in this TR are based on open and unconfined flow over land or in channels. For large events during which flow is divided between sewer and overland flow, more information about hydraulics than is presented here is needed to determine T_c. After flow enters a closed system, the discharge can be assumed constant until another flow is encountered at a junction or another inlet.

- Both the Graphical Peak Discharge and Tabular Hydrograph methods are derived from TR-20 (SCS 1983) output. Their accuracy is comparable; they differ only in their products. The use of T_c permits them to be used for any size watershed within the scope of the curves or tables. The Graphical method (chapter 4) is used only for hydrologically homogeneous watersheds because the procedure is limited to a single watershed subarea. The Tabular method (chapter 5) can be used for a heterogeneous watershed that is divided into a number of homogeneous subwatersheds. Hydrographs for the subwatersheds can be routed and added.

- The approximate storage-routing curves (chapter 6) should not be used if the adjustment for ponding (chapter 4) is used. These storage-routing curves, like the peak discharge and hydrograph procedures, are generalizations derived from TR-20 routings.

Chapter 2 Estimating Runoff

SCS runoff curve number method

The SCS Runoff Curve Number (CN) method is described in detail in NEH-4 (SCS 1985). The SCS runoff equation is

$$Q = \frac{(P - I_a)^2}{(P - I_a) + S} \qquad \text{[eq. 2-1]}$$

where

Q = runoff (in)
P = rainfall (in)
S = potential maximum retention after runoff begins (in) and
I_a = initial abstraction (in)

Initial abstraction (I_a) is all losses before runoff begins. It includes water retained in surface depressions, water intercepted by vegetation, evaporation, and infiltration. I_a is highly variable but generally is correlated with soil and cover parameters. Through studies of many small agricultural watersheds, I_a was found to be approximated by the following empirical equation:

$$I_a = 0.2S \qquad \text{[eq. 2-2]}$$

By removing I_a as an independent parameter, this approximation allows use of a combination of S and P to produce a unique runoff amount. Substituting equation 2-2 into equation 2-1 gives:

$$Q = \frac{(P - 0.2S)^2}{(P + 0.8S)} \qquad \text{[eq. 2-3]}$$

S is related to the soil and cover conditions of the watershed through the CN. CN has a range of 0 to 100, and S is related to CN by:

$$S = \frac{1000}{CN} - 10 \qquad \text{[eq. 2-4]}$$

Figure 2-1 and table 2-1 solve equations 2-3 and 2-4 for a range of CN's and rainfall.

Factors considered in determining runoff curve numbers

The major factors that determine CN are the hydrologic soil group (HSG), cover type, treatment, hydrologic condition, and antecedent runoff condition (ARC). Another factor considered is whether impervious areas outlet directly to the drainage system (connected) or whether the flow spreads over pervious areas before entering the drainage system (unconnected). Figure 2-2 is provided to aid in selecting the appropriate figure or table for determining curve numbers.

CN's in table 2-2 (*a* to *d*) represent average antecedent runoff condition for urban, cultivated agricultural, other agricultural, and arid and semiarid rangeland uses. Table 2-2 assumes impervious areas are directly connected. The following sections explain how to determine CN's and how to modify them for urban conditions.

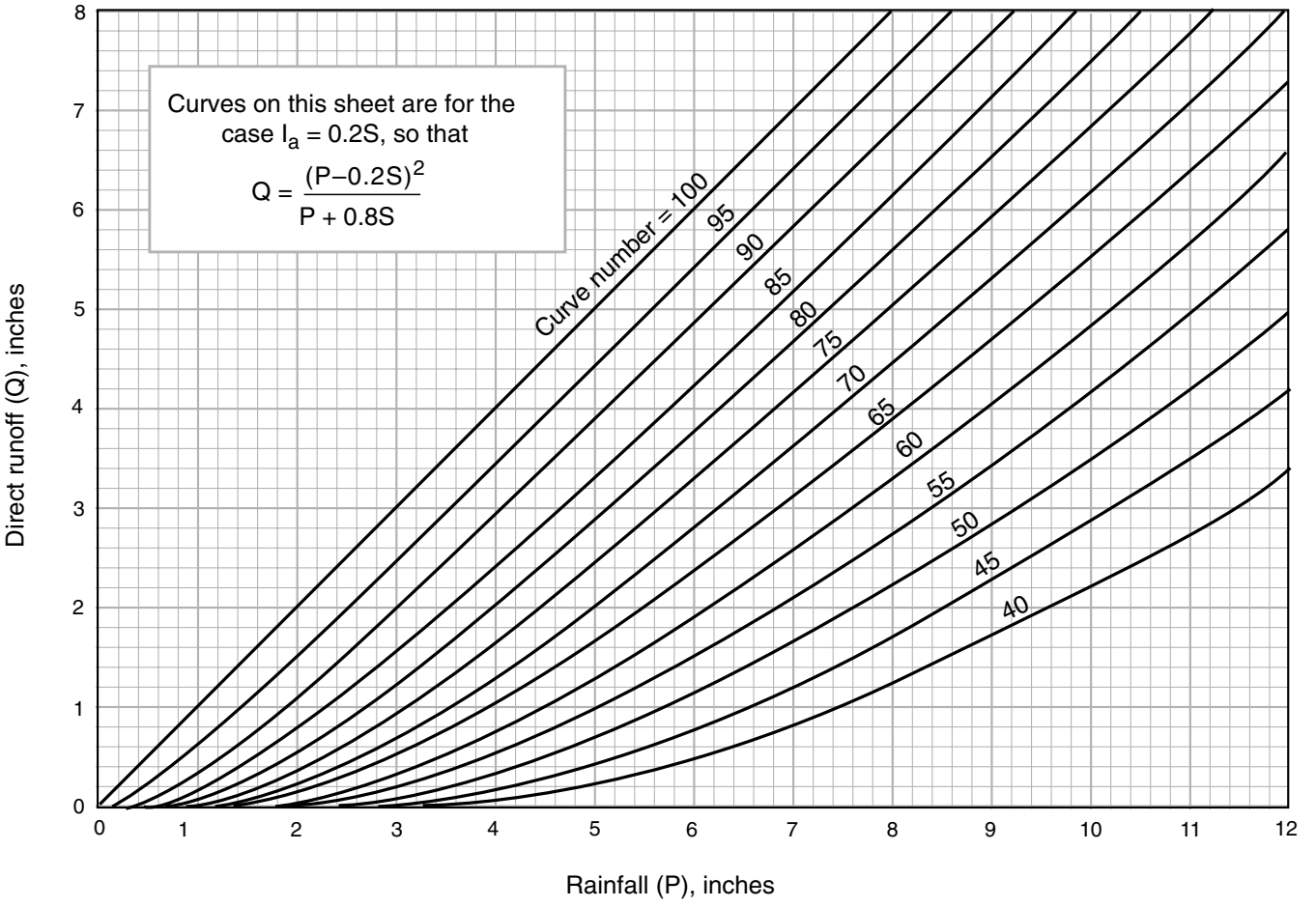
Hydrologic soil groups

Infiltration rates of soils vary widely and are affected by subsurface permeability as well as surface intake rates. Soils are classified into four HSG's (A, B, C, and D) according to their minimum infiltration rate, which is obtained for bare soil after prolonged wetting. Appendix A defines the four groups and provides a list of most of the soils in the United States and their group classification. The soils in the area of interest may be identified from a soil survey report, which can be obtained from local SCS offices or soil and water conservation district offices.

Most urban areas are only partially covered by impervious surfaces: the soil remains an important factor in runoff estimates. Urbanization has a greater effect on runoff in watersheds with soils having high infiltration rates (sands and gravels) than in watersheds predominantly of silts and clays, which generally have low infiltration rates.

Any disturbance of a soil profile can significantly change its infiltration characteristics. With urbanization, native soil profiles may be mixed or removed or fill material from other areas may be introduced. Therefore, a method based on soil texture is given in appendix A for determining the HSG classification for disturbed soils.

Figure 2-1 Solution of runoff equation.



Cover type

Table 2-2 addresses most cover types, such as vegetation, bare soil, and impervious surfaces. There are a number of methods for determining cover type. The most common are field reconnaissance, aerial photographs, and land use maps.

Treatment

Treatment is a cover type modifier (used only in table 2-2b) to describe the management of cultivated agricultural lands. It includes mechanical practices, such as contouring and terracing, and management practices, such as crop rotations and reduced or no tillage.

Hydrologic condition

Hydrologic condition indicates the effects of cover type and treatment on infiltration and runoff and is generally estimated from density of plant and residue cover on sample areas. *Good* hydrologic condition indicates that the soil usually has a low runoff potential for that specific hydrologic soil group, cover type, and treatment. Some factors to consider in estimating the effect of cover on infiltration and runoff are (a) canopy or density of lawns, crops, or other vegetative areas; (b) amount of year-round cover; (c) amount of grass or close-seeded legumes in rotations; (d) percent of residue cover; and (e) degree of surface roughness.

Table 2-1 Runoff depth for selected CN's and rainfall amounts [1/]

Rainfall	Runoff depth for curve number of—												
	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	98
	inches												
1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.08	0.17	0.32	0.56	0.79
1.2	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.03	.07	.15	.27	.46	.74	.99
1.4	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.02	.06	.13	.24	.39	.61	.92	1.18
1.6	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.05	.11	.20	.34	.52	.76	1.11	1.38
1.8	.00	.00	.00	.00	.03	.09	.17	.29	.44	.65	.93	1.29	1.58
2.0	.00	.00	.00	.02	.06	.14	.24	.38	.56	.80	1.09	1.48	1.77
2.5	.00	.00	.02	.08	.17	.30	.46	.65	.89	1.18	1.53	1.96	2.27
3.0	.00	.02	.09	.19	.33	.51	.71	.96	1.25	1.59	1.98	2.45	2.77
3.5	.02	.08	.20	.35	.53	.75	1.01	1.30	1.64	2.02	2.45	2.94	3.27
4.0	.06	.18	.33	.53	.76	1.03	1.33	1.67	2.04	2.46	2.92	3.43	3.77
4.5	.14	.30	.50	.74	1.02	1.33	1.67	2.05	2.46	2.91	3.40	3.92	4.26
5.0	.24	.44	.69	.98	1.30	1.65	2.04	2.45	2.89	3.37	3.88	4.42	4.76
6.0	.50	.80	1.14	1.52	1.92	2.35	2.81	3.28	3.78	4.30	4.85	5.41	5.76
7.0	.84	1.24	1.68	2.12	2.60	3.10	3.62	4.15	4.69	5.25	5.82	6.41	6.76
8.0	1.25	1.74	2.25	2.78	3.33	3.89	4.46	5.04	5.63	6.21	6.81	7.40	7.76
9.0	1.71	2.29	2.88	3.49	4.10	4.72	5.33	5.95	6.57	7.18	7.79	8.40	8.76
10.0	2.23	2.89	3.56	4.23	4.90	5.56	6.22	6.88	7.52	8.16	8.78	9.40	9.76
11.0	2.78	3.52	4.26	5.00	5.72	6.43	7.13	7.81	8.48	9.13	9.77	10.39	10.76
12.0	3.38	4.19	5.00	5.79	6.56	7.32	8.05	8.76	9.45	10.11	10.76	11.39	11.76
13.0	4.00	4.89	5.76	6.61	7.42	8.21	8.98	9.71	10.42	11.10	11.76	12.39	12.76
14.0	4.65	5.62	6.55	7.44	8.30	9.12	9.91	10.67	11.39	12.08	12.75	13.39	13.76
15.0	5.33	6.36	7.35	8.29	9.19	10.04	10.85	11.63	12.37	13.07	13.74	14.39	14.76

[1/] Interpolate the values shown to obtain runoff depths for CN's or rainfall amounts not shown.

Figure 2-2 Flow chart for selecting the appropriate figure or table for determining runoff curve numbers.

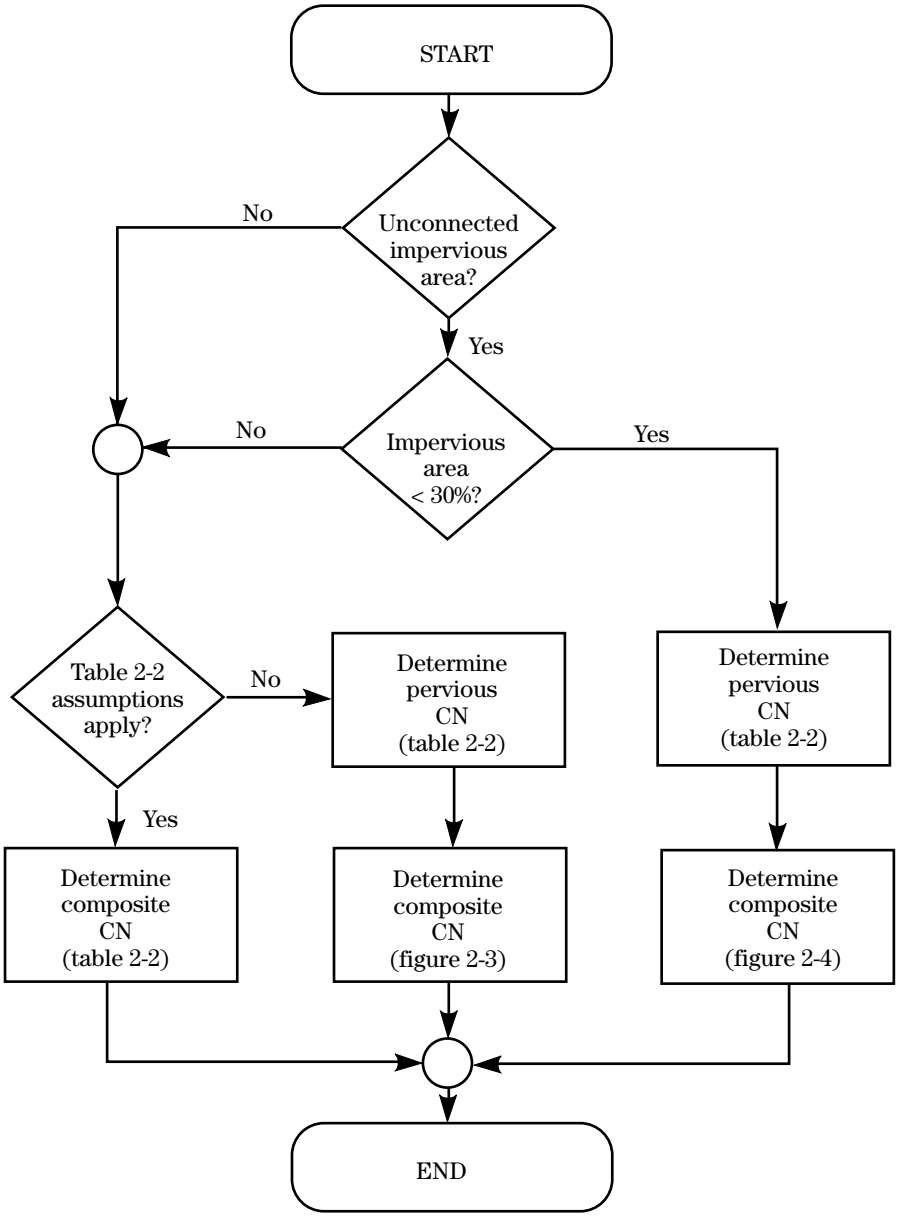


Table 2-2a Runoff curve numbers for urban areas [1]

Cover description: Cover type and hydrologic condition	Average percent impervious area [2]	Curve numbers for hydrologic soil group: A	B	C	D
Fully developed urban areas (vegetation established)					
Open space (lawns, parks, golf courses, cemeteries, etc.) [3]:					
Poor condition (grass cover < 50%)		68	79	86	89
Fair condition (grass cover 50% to 75%)		49	69	79	84
Good condition (grass cover > 75%)		39	61	74	80
Impervious areas:					
Paved parking lots, roofs, driveways, etc. (excluding right-of-way)		98	98	98	98
Streets and roads:					
Paved; curbs and storm sewers (excluding right-of-way)		98	98	98	98
Paved; open ditches (including right-of-way)		83	89	92	93
Gravel (including right-of-way)		76	85	89	91
Dirt (including right-of-way)		72	82	87	89
Western desert urban areas:					
Natural desert landscaping (pervious areas only) [4]		63	77	85	88
Artificial desert landscaping (impervious weed barrier, desert shrub with 1- to 2-inch sand or gravel mulch and basin borders)		96	96	96	96
Urban districts:					
Commercial and business	85	89	92	94	95
Industrial	72	81	88	91	93
Residential districts by average lot size:					
1/8 acre or less (town houses)	65	77	85	90	92
1/4 acre	38	61	75	83	87
1/3 acre	30	57	72	81	86
1/2 acre	25	54	70	80	85
1 acre	20	51	68	79	84
2 acres	12	46	65	77	82
Developing urban areas					
Newly graded areas (pervious areas only, no vegetation) [5]		77	86	91	94
Idle lands (CN's are determined using cover types similar to those in table 2-2c).					

1 Average runoff condition, and $I_a = 0.2S$.

2 The average percent impervious area shown was used to develop the composite CN's. Other assumptions are as follows: impervious areas are directly connected to the drainage system, impervious areas have a CN of 98, and pervious areas are considered equivalent to open space in good hydrologic condition. CN's for other combinations of conditions may be computed using figure 2-3 or 2-4.

3 CN's shown are equivalent to those of pasture. Composite CN's may be computed for other combinations of open space cover type.

4 Composite CN's for natural desert landscaping should be computed using figures 2-3 or 2-4 based on the impervious area percentage (CN = 98) and the pervious area CN. The pervious area CN's are assumed equivalent to desert shrub in poor hydrologic condition.

5 Composite CN's to use for the design of temporary measures during grading and construction should be computed using figure 2-3 or 2-4 based on the degree of development (impervious area percentage) and the CN's for the newly graded pervious areas.

Table 2-2b Runoff curve numbers for cultivated agricultural lands [1]

Cover description			Curve numbers for hydrologic soil group			
Cover type	Treatment [2]	Hydrologic condition [3]	A	B	C	D
Fallow	Bare soil	—	77	86	91	94
	Crop residue cover (CR)	Poor	76	85	90	93
		Good	74	83	88	90
Row crops	Straight row (SR)	Poor	72	81	88	91
		Good	67	78	85	89
	SR + CR	Poor	71	80	87	90
		Good	64	75	82	85
	Contoured (C)	Poor	70	79	84	88
		Good	65	75	82	86
	C + CR	Poor	69	78	83	87
		Good	64	74	81	85
	Contoured & terraced (C&T)	Poor	66	74	80	82
		Good	62	71	78	81
	C&T+ CR	Poor	65	73	79	81
		Good	61	70	77	80
Small grain	SR	Poor	65	76	84	88
		Good	63	75	83	87
	SR + CR	Poor	64	75	83	86
		Good	60	72	80	84
	C	Poor	63	74	82	85
		Good	61	73	81	84
	C + CR	Poor	62	73	81	84
		Good	60	72	80	83
	C&T	Poor	61	72	79	82
		Good	59	70	78	81
	C&T+ CR	Poor	60	71	78	81
		Good	58	69	77	80
Close-seeded or broadcast legumes or rotation meadow	SR	Poor	66	77	85	89
		Good	58	72	81	85
	C	Poor	64	75	83	85
		Good	55	69	78	83
	C&T	Poor	63	73	80	83
		Good	51	67	76	80

[1] Average runoff condition, and I_a=0.2S
[2] Crop residue cover applies only if residue is on at least 5% of the surface throughout the year.
[3] Hydraulic condition is based on combination factors that affect infiltration and runoff, including (a) density and canopy of vegetative areas, (b) amount of year-round cover, (c) amount of grass or close-seeded legumes, (d) percent of residue cover on the land surface (good ≥ 20%), and (e) degree of surface roughness.

Poor: Factors impair infiltration and tend to increase runoff.

Good: Factors encourage average and better than average infiltration and tend to decrease runoff.

Table 2-2c Runoff curve numbers for other agricultural lands [1]

Cover description		Curve numbers for hydrologic soil group			
Cover type	Hydrologic condition	A	B	C	D
Pasture, grassland, or range—continuous forage for grazing. [2]	Poor	68	79	86	89
	Fair	49	69	79	84
	Good	39	61	74	80
Meadow—continuous grass, protected from grazing and generally mowed for hay.	—	30	58	71	78
Brush—brush-weed-grass mixture with brush the major element. [3]	Poor	48	67	77	83
	Fair	35	56	70	77
	Good	30 [4]	48	65	73
Woods—grass combination (orchard or tree farm). [5]	Poor	57	73	82	86
	Fair	43	65	76	82
	Good	32	58	72	79
Woods. [6]	Poor	45	66	77	83
	Fair	36	60	73	79
	Good	30 [4]	55	70	77
Farmsteads—buildings, lanes, driveways, and surrounding lots.	—	59	74	82	86

1 Average runoff condition, and $I_a = 0.2S$.
2 *Poor:* <50%) ground cover or heavily grazed with no mulch.
Fair: 50 to 75% ground cover and not heavily grazed.
Good: > 75% ground cover and lightly or only occasionally grazed.
3 *Poor*: <50% ground cover.
Fair: 50 to 75% ground cover.
Good: >75% ground cover.
4 Actual curve number is less than 30; use CN = 30 for runoff computations.
5 CN's shown were computed for areas with 50% woods and 50% grass (pasture) cover. Other combinations of conditions may be computed from the CN's for woods and pasture.
6 *Poor:* Forest litter, small trees, and brush are destroyed by heavy grazing or regular burning.
Fair: Woods are grazed but not burned, and some forest litter covers the soil.
Good: Woods are protected from grazing, and litter and brush adequately cover the soil.

Table 2-2d Runoff curve numbers for arid and semiarid rangelands [1]

Cover description		Curve numbers for hydrologic soil group			
Cover type	Hydrologic condition [2]	A [3]	B	C	D
Herbaceous—mixture of grass, weeds, and low-growing brush, with brush the minor element.	Poor		80	87	93
	Fair		71	81	89
	Good		62	74	85
Oak-aspen—mountain brush mixture of oak brush, aspen, mountain mahogany, bitter brush, maple, and other brush.	Poor		66	74	79
	Fair		48	57	63
	Good		30	41	48
Pinyon-juniper—pinyon, juniper, or both; grass understory.	Poor		75	85	89
	Fair		58	73	80
	Good		41	61	71
Sagebrush with grass understory.	Poor		67	80	85
	Fair		51	63	70
	Good		35	47	55
Desert shrub—major plants include saltbush, greasewood, creosotebush, blackbrush, bursage, palo verde, mesquite, and cactus.	Poor	63	77	85	88
	Fair	55	72	81	86
	Good	49	68	79	84

1 Average runoff condition, and I_a, = 0.2S. For range in humid regions, use table 2-2c.
2 Poor: <30% ground cover (litter, grass, and brush overstory).
Fair: 30 to 70% ground cover.
Good: > 70% ground cover.
3 Curve numbers for group A have been developed only for desert shrub.

Antecedent runoff condition

The index of runoff potential before a storm event is the antecedent runoff condition (ARC). ARC is an attempt to account for the variation in CN at a site from storm to storm. CN for the average ARC at a site is the median value as taken from sample rainfall and runoff data. The CN's in table 2-2 are for the average ARC, which is used primarily for design applications. See NEH-4 (SCS 1985) and Rallison and Miller (1981) for more detailed discussion of storm-to-storm variation and a demonstration of upper and lower enveloping curves.

Urban impervious area modifications

Several factors, such as the percentage of impervious area and the means of conveying runoff from impervious areas to the drainage system, should be considered in computing CN for urban areas (Rawls et al., 1981). For example, do the impervious areas connect directly to the drainage system, or do they outlet onto lawns or other pervious areas where infiltration can occur?

Connected impervious areas — An impervious area is considered connected if runoff from it flows directly into the drainage system. It is also considered connected if runoff from it occurs as concentrated shallow flow that runs over a pervious area and then into the drainage system.

Urban CN's (table 2-2a) were developed for typical land use relationships based on specific assumed percentages of impervious area. These CN vales were developed on the assumptions that (a) pervious urban areas are equivalent to pasture in good hydrologic condition and (b) impervious areas have a CN of 98 and are directly connected to the drainage system. Some assumed percentages of impervious area are shown in table 2-2a

If all of the impervious area is directly connected to the drainage system, but the impervious area percentages or the pervious land use assumptions in table 2-2a are not applicable, use figure 2-3 to compute a composite CN. For example, table 2-2a gives a CN of 70 for a 1/2-acre lot in HSG B, with assumed impervious area of 25 percent. However, if the lot has 20 percent impervious area and a pervious area CN of 61, the composite CN obtained from figure 2-3 is 68. The CN difference between 70 and 68 reflects the difference in percent impervious area.

Unconnected impervious areas — Runoff from these areas is spread over a pervious area as sheet flow. To determine CN when all or part of the impervious area is not directly connected to the drainage system, (1) use figure 2-4 if total impervious area is less than 30 percent or (2) use figure 2-3 if the total impervious area is equal to or greater than 30 percent, because the absorptive capacity of the remaining pervious areas will not significantly affect runoff.

When impervious area is less than 30 percent, obtain the composite CN by entering the right half of figure 2-4 with the percentage of total impervious area and the ratio of total unconnected impervious area to total impervious area. Then move left to the appropriate pervious CN and read down to find the composite CN. For example, for a 1/2-acre lot with 20 percent total impervious area (75 percent of which is unconnected) and pervious CN of 61, the composite CN from figure 2-4 is 66. If all of the impervious area is connected, the resulting CN (from figure 2-3) would be 68.

Figure 2-3 Composite CN with connected impervious area.

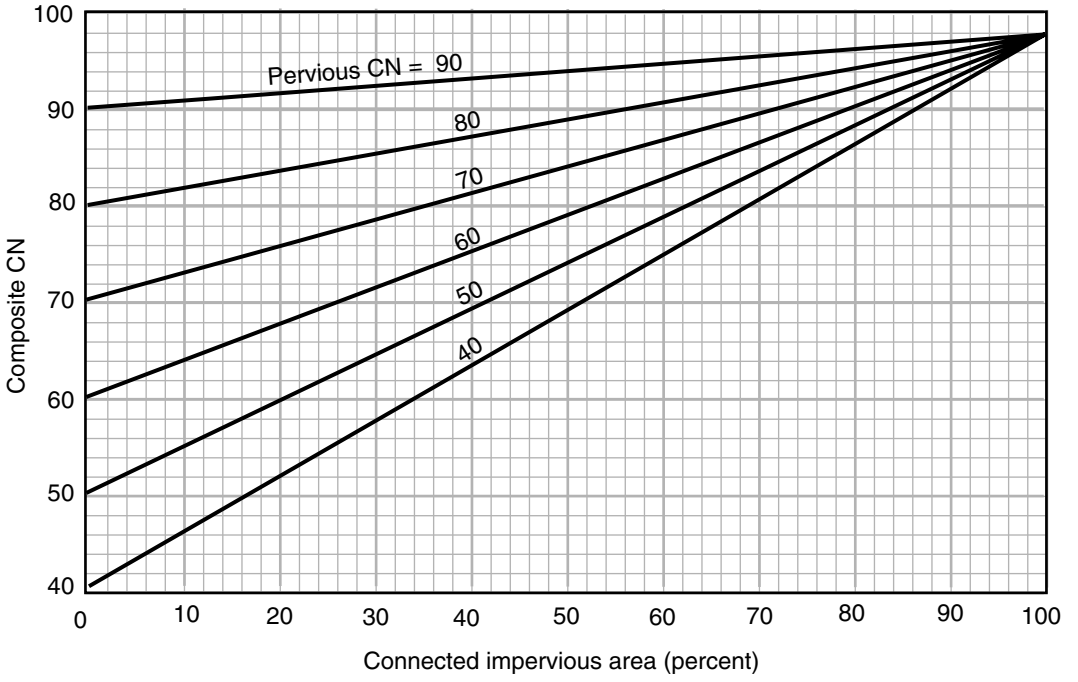
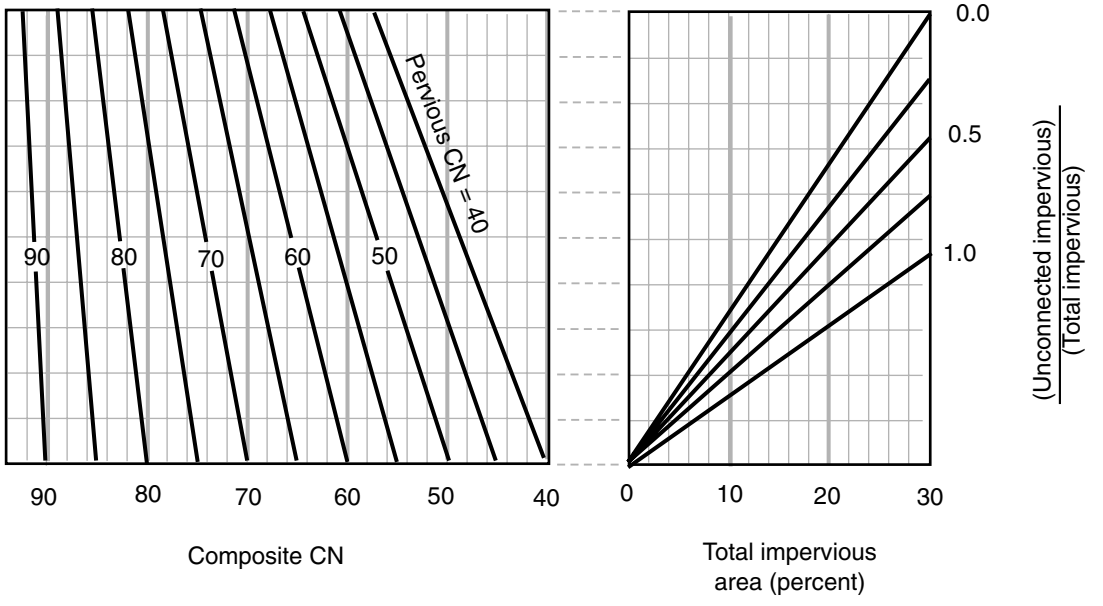


Figure 2-4 Composite CN with unconnected impervious areas and total impervious area less than 30%



Runoff

When CN and the amount of rainfall have been determined for the watershed, determine runoff by using figure 2-1, table 2-1, or equations 2-3 and 2-4. The runoff is usually rounded to the nearest hundredth of an inch.

Limitations

- Curve numbers describe average conditions that are useful for design purposes. If the rainfall event used is a historical storm, the modeling accuracy decreases.

- Use the runoff curve number equation with caution when re-creating specific features of an actual storm. The equation does not contain an expression for time and, therefore, does not account for rainfall duration or intensity.

- The user should understand the assumption reflected in the initial abstraction term (I_a) and should ascertain that the assumption applies to the situation. I_a, which consists of interception, initial infiltration, surface depression storage, evapotranspiration, and other factors, was generalized as 0.2S based on data from agricultural watersheds (S is the potential maximum retention after runoff begins). This approximation can be especially important in an urban application because the combination of impervious areas with pervious areas can imply a significant initial loss that may not take place. The opposite effect, a greater initial loss, can occur if the impervious areas have surface depressions that store some runoff. To use a relationship other than $I_a = 0.2S$, one must redevelop equation 2-3, figure 2-1, table 2-1, and table 2-2 by using the original rainfall-runoff data to establish new S or CN relationships for each cover and hydrologic soil group.

- Runoff from snowmelt or rain on frozen ground cannot be estimated using these procedures.

- The CN procedure is less accurate when runoff is less than 0.5 inch. As a check, use another procedure to determine runoff.

- The SCS runoff procedures apply only to direct surface runoff: do not overlook large sources of subsurface flow or high ground water levels that contribute to runoff. These conditions are often related to HSG A soils and forest areas that have been assigned relatively low CN's in table 2-2. Good judgment and experience based on stream gage records are needed to adjust CN's as conditions warrant.

- When the weighted CN is less than 40, use another procedure to determine runoff.

Examples

Four examples illustrate the procedure for computing runoff curve number (CN) and runoff (Q) in inches. Worksheet 2 in appendix D is provided to assist TR-55 users. Figures 2-5 to 2-8 represent the use of worksheet 2 for each example. All four examples are based on the same watershed and the same storm event.

The watershed covers 250 acres in Dyer County, northwestern Tennessee. Seventy percent (175 acres) is a Loring soil, which is in hydrologic soil group C. Thirty percent (75 acres) is a Memphis soil, which is in group B. The event is a 25-year frequency, 24-hour storm with total rainfall of 6 inches.

Cover type and conditions in the watershed are different for each example. The examples, therefore, illustrate how to compute CN and Q for various situations of proposed, planned, or present development.

Example 2-1

The present cover type is pasture in good hydrologic condition. (See figure 2-5 for worksheet 2 information.)

Example 2-2

Seventy percent (175 acres) of the watershed, consisting of all the Memphis soil and 100 acres of the Loring soil, is 1/2-acre residential lots with lawns in good hydrologic condition. The rest of the watershed is scattered open space in good hydrologic condition. (See figure 2-6.)

Example 2-3

This example is the same as example 2-2, except that the 1/2-acre lots have a total impervious area of 35 percent. For these lots, the pervious area is lawns in good hydrologic condition. Since the impervious area percentage differs from the percentage assumed in table 2-2, use figure 2-3 to compute CN. (See figure 2-7.)

Example 2-4

This example is also based on example 2-2, except that 50 percent of the impervious area associated with the 1/2-acre lots on the Loring soil is "unconnected," that is, it is not directly connected to the drainage system. For these lots, the pervious area CN (lawn, good condition) is 74 and the impervious area is 25 percent. Use figure 2-4 to compute the CN for these lots. CN's for the 1/2-acre lots on Memphis soil and the open space on Loring soil are the same as those in example 2-2. (See figure 2-8.)

Figure 2-5 Worksheet 2 for example 2-1

Worksheet 2: Runoff curve number and runoff

Project: Heavenly Acres	By: WJR	Date: 10/1/85
Location: Dyer County, Tennessee	Checked: NM	Date: 10/3/85

Check one: ☒ Present ☐ Developed

1. Runoff curve number

Soil name and hydrologic group (appendix A)	Cover description (cover type, treatment, and hydrologic condition; percent impervious; unconnected/connected impervious area ratio)	CN 1/ Table 2-2	CN 1/ Figure 2-3	CN 1/ Figure 2-4	Area ☐ acres ☐ mi² ☒ %	Product of CN x area
Memphis, B	Pasture, good condition	61			30	1830
Loring, C	Pasture, good condition	74			70	5180
					Totals ➡ 100	7010

1/ Use only one CN source per line

CN (weighted) = $\frac{\text{total product}}{\text{total area}} = \frac{7010}{100} = 70.1$; **Use CN** ➡ 70

2. Runoff

		Storm #1	Storm #2	Storm #3
Frequency	yr	25		
Rainfall, P (24-hour)	in	6.0		
Runoff, Q	in	2.81		

(Use P and CN with table 2-1, figure 2-1, or equations 2-3 and 2-4)

Figure 2-6 Worksheet 2 for example 2-2

Worksheet 2: Runoff curve number and runoff

Project	By	Date
Heavenly Acres	WJR	10/1/85
Location	**Checked**	**Date**
Dyer County, Tennessee	NM	10/3/85

Check one: ☐ Present ☒ Developed 175 Acres residential

1. Runoff curve number

Soil name and hydrologic group (appendix A)	Cover description (cover type, treatment, and hydrologic condition; percent impervious; unconnected/connected impervious area ratio)	CN 1/ Table 2-2	CN 1/ Figure 2-3	CN 1/ Figure 2-4	Area ☒ acres ☐ mi² ☐ %	Product of CN x area
Memphis, B	25% impervious 1/2 acre lots, good condition	70			75	5250
Loring, C	25% impervious 1/2 acre lots, good condition	80			100	8000
Loring, C	Open space, good condition	74			75	5550
					Totals ➡ 250	18,800

1/ Use only one CN source per line

CN (weighted) = $\frac{\text{total product}}{\text{total area}} = \frac{18{,}800}{250} = 75.2$; **Use CN** ➡ 75

2. Runoff

		Storm #1	Storm #2	Storm #3
Frequency	yr	25		
Rainfall, P (24-hour)	in	6.0		
Runoff, Q (Use P and CN with table 2-1, figure 2-1, or equations 2-3 and 2-4)	in	3.28		

Figure 2-7 Worksheet 2 for example 2-3

Worksheet 2: Runoff curve number and runoff

Project	By	Date
Heavenly Acres	WJR	10/1/85
Location	**Checked**	**Date**
Dyer County, Tennessee	NM	10/3/85

Check one: ☐ Present ☒ Developed

1. Runoff curve number

Soil name and hydrologic group (appendix A)	Cover description (cover type, treatment, and hydrologic condition; percent impervious; unconnected/connected impervious area ratio)	CN 1/ Table 2-2	CN 1/ Figure 2-3	CN 1/ Figure 2-4	Area ☒ acres ☐ mi² ☐ %	Product of CN x area
Memphis, B	35% impervious 1/2 acre lots, good condition		74		75	5550
Loring, C	35% impervious 1/2 acre lots, good condition		82		100	8200
Loring, C	Open space, good condition	74			75	5550
				Totals ➡	250	19,300

1/ Use only one CN source per line

CN (weighted) = $\frac{\text{total product}}{\text{total area}} = \frac{19{,}300}{250} = 77.2$; **Use CN** ➡ 77

2. Runoff

		Storm #1	Storm #2	Storm #3
Frequency	yr	25		
Rainfall, P (24-hour)	in	6.0		
Runoff, Q (Use P and CN with table 2-1, figure 2-1, or equations 2-3 and 2-4)	in	3.48		

Figure 2-8 Worksheet 2 for example 2-4

Worksheet 2: Runoff curve number and runoff

Project: Heavenly Acres	By: WJR	Date: 10/1/85
Location: Dyer County, Tennessee	Checked: NM	Date: 10/3/85

Check one: ☐ Present ☒ Developed

1. Runoff curve number

Soil name and hydrologic group (appendix A)	Cover description (cover type, treatment, and hydrologic condition; percent impervious; unconnected/connected impervious area ratio)	CN 1/ Table 2-2	CN 1/ Figure 2-3	CN 1/ Figure 2-4	Area ☒ acres ☐ mi² ☐ %	Product of CN x area
Memphis,B	25% connected impervious 1/2 acre lots, good condition	70			75	5250
Loring, C	25% impervious with 50% unconnected 1/2 acre lots, good condition			78	100	7800
Loring, C	Open space, good condition	74			75	5550
				Totals ➡	250	18,600

1/ Use only one CN source per line

CN (weighted) = $\frac{\text{total product}}{\text{total area}} = \frac{18{,}600}{250} = 74.4$; Use CN ➡ 74

2. Runoff

		Storm #1	Storm #2	Storm #3
Frequency	yr	25		
Rainfall, P (24-hour)	in	6.0		
Runoff, Q (Use P and CN with table 2-1, figure 2-1, or equations 2-3 and 2-4)	in	3.19		

Chapter 3 Time of Concentration and Travel Time

Travel time (T_t) is the time it takes water to travel from one location to another in a watershed. T_t is a component of time of concentration (T_c), which is the time for runoff to travel from the hydraulically most distant point of the watershed to a point of interest within the watershed. T_c is computed by summing all the travel times for consecutive components of the drainage conveyance system.

T_c influences the shape and peak of the runoff hydrograph. Urbanization usually decreases T_c, thereby increasing the peak discharge. But T_c can be increased as a result of (a) ponding behind small or inadequate drainage systems, including storm drain inlets and road culverts, or (b) reduction of land slope through grading.

Factors affecting time of concentration and travel time

Surface roughness

One of the most significant effects of urban development on flow velocity is less retardance to flow. That is, undeveloped areas with very slow and shallow overland flow through vegetation become modified by urban development: the flow is then delivered to streets, gutters, and storm sewers that transport runoff downstream more rapidly. Travel time through the watershed is generally decreased.

Channel shape and flow patterns

In small non-urban watersheds, much of the travel time results from overland flow in upstream areas. Typically, urbanization reduces overland flow lengths by conveying storm runoff into a channel as soon as possible. Since channel designs have efficient hydraulic characteristics, runoff flow velocity increases and travel time decreases.

Slope

Slopes may be increased or decreased by urbanization, depending on the extent of site grading or the extent to which storm sewers and street ditches are used in the design of the water management system. Slope will tend to increase when channels are straightened and decrease when overland flow is directed through storm sewers, street gutters, and diversions.

Computation of travel time and time of concentration

Water moves through a watershed as sheet flow, shallow concentrated flow, open channel flow, or some combination of these. The type that occurs is a function of the conveyance system and is best determined by field inspection.

Travel time (T_t) is the ratio of flow length to flow velocity:

$$T_t = \frac{L}{3600V} \qquad \text{[eq. 3-1]}$$

where:

T_t = travel time (hr)
L = flow length (ft)
V = average velocity (ft/s)
3600 = conversion factor from seconds to hours.

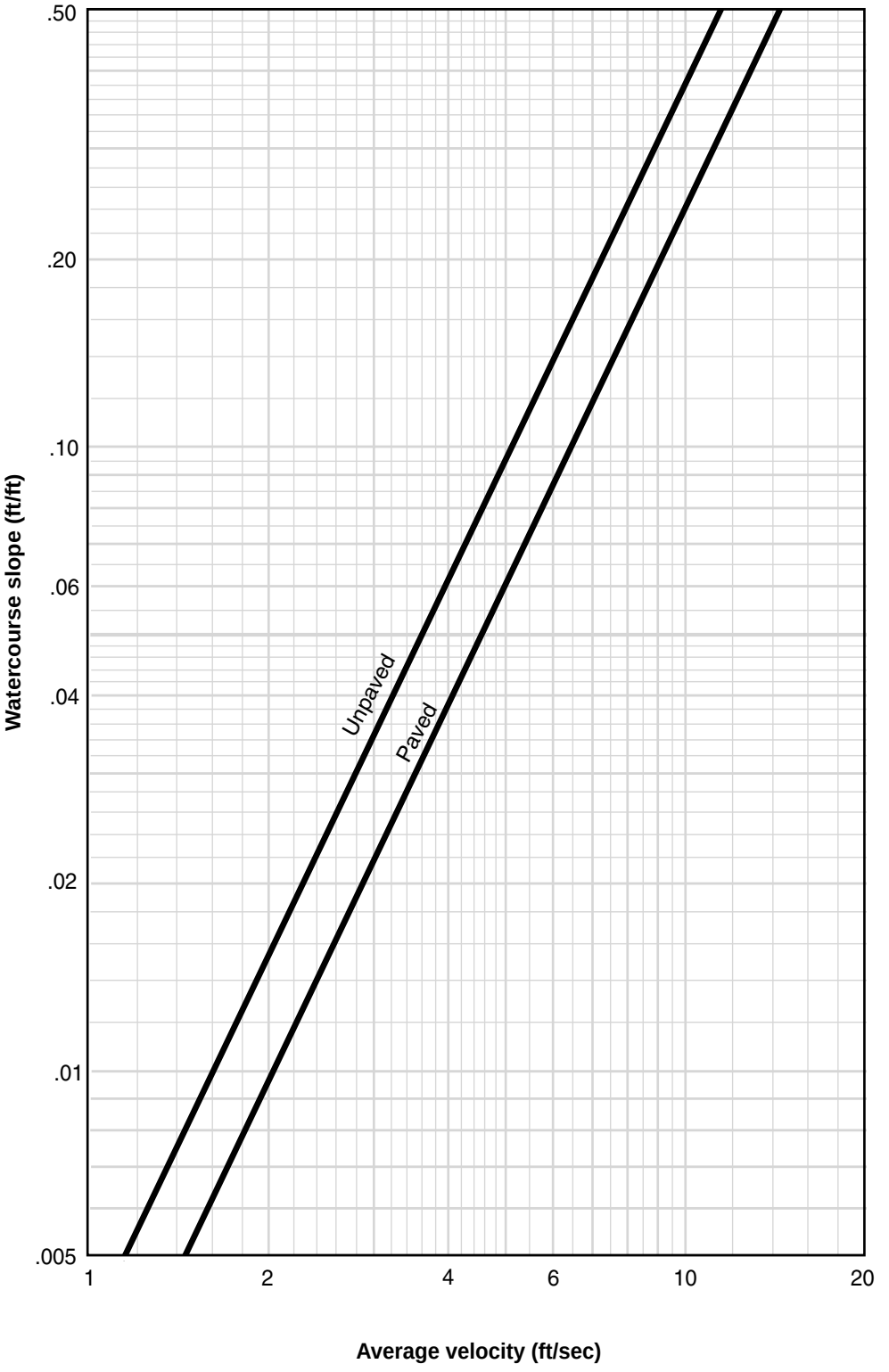
Time of concentration (T_c) is the sum of T_t values for the various consecutive flow segments:

$$T_c = T_{t_1} + T_{t_2} + \ldots T_{t_m} \qquad \text{[eq. 3-2]}$$

where:

T_c = time of concentration (hr)
m = number of flow segments

Figure 3-1 Average velocities for estimating travel time for shallow concentrated flow



Sheet flow

Sheet flow is flow over plane surfaces. It usually occurs in the headwater of streams. With sheet flow, the friction value (Manning's n) is an effective roughness coefficient that includes the effect of raindrop impact; drag over the plane surface; obstacles such as litter, crop ridges, and rocks; and erosion and transportation of sediment. These n values are for very shallow flow depths of about 0.1 foot or so. Table 3-1 gives Manning's n values for sheet flow for various surface conditions.

Table 3-1 Roughness coefficients (Manning's n) for sheet flow

Surface description	n [1]
Smooth surfaces (concrete, asphalt, gravel, or bare soil)	0.011
Fallow (no residue)	0.05
Cultivated soils:	
Residue cover ≤20%	0.06
Residue cover >20%	0.17
Grass:	
Short grass prairie	0.15
Dense grasses [2]	0.24
Bermudagrass	0.41
Range (natural)	0.13
Woods:[3]	
Light underbrush	0.40
Dense underbrush	0.80

[1] The n values are a composite of information compiled by Engman (1986).
[2] Includes species such as weeping lovegrass, bluegrass, buffalo grass, blue grama grass, and native grass mixtures.
[3] When selecting n , consider cover to a height of about 0.1 ft. This is the only part of the plant cover that will obstruct sheet flow.

For sheet flow of less than 300 feet, use Manning's kinematic solution (Overtop and Meadows 1976) to compute T_t:

$$T_t = \frac{0.007(nL)^{0.8}}{(P_2)^{0.5} s^{0.4}} \qquad \text{[eq. 3-3]}$$

where:

T_t = travel time (hr),
n = Manning's roughness coefficient (table 3-1)
L = flow length (ft)
P_2 = 2-year, 24-hour rainfall (in)
s = slope of hydraulic grade line (land slope, ft/ft)

This simplified form of the Manning's kinematic solution is based on the following: (1) shallow steady uniform flow, (2) constant intensity of rainfall excess (that part of a rain available for runoff), (3) rainfall duration of 24 hours, and (4) minor effect of infiltration on travel time. Rainfall depth can be obtained from appendix B.

Shallow concentrated flow

After a maximum of 300 feet, sheet flow usually becomes shallow concentrated flow. The average velocity for this flow can be determined from figure 3-1, in which average velocity is a function of watercourse slope and type of channel. For slopes less than 0.005 ft/ft, use equations given in appendix F for figure 3-1. Tillage can affect the direction of shallow concentrated flow. Flow may not always be directly down the watershed slope if tillage runs across the slope.

After determining average velocity in figure 3-1, use equation 3-1 to estimate travel time for the shallow concentrated flow segment.

Open channels

Open channels are assumed to begin where surveyed cross section information has been obtained, where channels are visible on aerial photographs, or where blue lines (indicating streams) appear on United States Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangle sheets. Manning's equation or water surface profile information can be used to estimate average flow velocity. Average flow velocity is usually determined for bankfull elevation.

Manning's equation is:

$$V = \frac{1.49 r^{\frac{2}{3}} s^{\frac{1}{2}}}{n} \qquad \text{[eq. 3-4]}$$

where:

V = average velocity (ft/s)
r = hydraulic radius (ft) and is equal to a/p_w
a = cross sectional flow area (ft^2)
p_w = wetted perimeter (ft)
s = slope of the hydraulic grade line (channel slope, ft/ft)
n = Manning's roughness coefficient for open channel flow.

Manning's n values for open channel flow can be obtained from standard textbooks such as Chow (1959) or Linsley et al. (1982). After average velocity is computed using equation 3-4, T_t for the channel segment can be estimated using equation 3-1.

Reservoirs or lakes

Sometimes it is necessary to estimate the velocity of flow through a reservoir or lake at the outlet of a watershed. This travel time is normally very small and can be assumed as zero.

Limitations

- Manning's kinematic solution should not be used for sheet flow longer than 300 feet. Equation 3-3 was developed for use with the four standard rainfall intensity-duration relationships.

- In watersheds with storm sewers, carefully identify the appropriate hydraulic flow path to estimate T_c. Storm sewers generally handle only a small portion of a large event. The rest of the peak flow travels by streets, lawns, and so on, to the outlet. Consult a standard hydraulics textbook to determine average velocity in pipes for either pressure or nonpressure flow.

- The minimum T_c used in TR-55 is 0.1 hour.

- A culvert or bridge can act as a reservoir outlet if there is significant storage behind it. The procedures in TR-55 can be used to determine the peak flow upstream of the culvert. Detailed storage routing procedures should be used to determine the outflow through the culvert.

Example 3-1

The sketch below shows a watershed in Dyer County, northwestern Tennessee. The problem is to compute T_c at the outlet of the watershed (point D). The 2-year 24-hour rainfall depth is 3.6 inches. All three types of flow occur from the hydraulically most distant point (A) to the point of interest (D). To compute T_c, first determine T_t for each segment from the following information:

Segment AB: Sheet flow; dense grass; slope (s) = 0.01 ft/ft; and length (L) = 100 ft. Segment BC: Shallow concentrated flow; unpaved; s = 0.01 ft/ft; and L = 1,400 ft. Segment CD: Channel flow; Manning's n = .05; flow area (a) = 27 ft^2; wetted perimeter (p_w) = 28.2 ft; s = 0.005 ft/ft; and L = 7,300 ft.

See figure 3-2 for the computations made on worksheet 3.

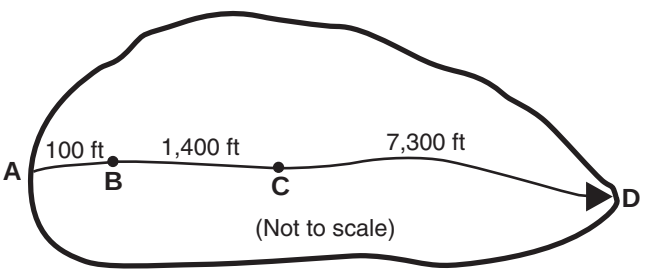


Figure 3-2 Worksheet 3 for example 3-1

Worksheet 3: Time of Concentration (T_c) or travel time (T_t)

Project	Heavenly Acres	By	DW	Date	10/6/85
Location	Dyer County, Tennessee	Checked	NM	Date	10/8/85

Check one: ☐ Present ☒ Developed

Check one: ☒ T_c ☐ T_t through subarea

Notes: Space for as many as two segments per flow type can be used for each worksheet. Include a map, schematic, or description of flow segments.

Sheet flow (Applicable to T_c only)

	Segment ID	AB		
1. Surface description (table 3-1)		Dense Grass		
2. Manning's roughness coefficient, n (table 3-1)		0.24		
3. Flow length, L (total L ≤ 300 ft) ft		100		
4. Two-year 24-hour rainfall, P_2 in		3.6		
5. Land slope, s ft/ft		0.01		
6. $T_t = \frac{0.007\ (nL)^{0.8}}{P_2^{\ 0.5}\ s^{0.4}}$ Compute T_t hr		0.30	+	= 0.30

Shallow concentrated flow

	Segment ID	BC		
7. Surface description (paved or unpaved)		Unpaved		
8. Flow length, L ft		1400		
9. Watercourse slope, s ft/ft		0.01		
10. Average velocity, V (figure 3-1) ft/s		1.6		
11. $T_t = \frac{L}{3600\ V}$ Compute T_t hr		0.24	+	= 0.24

Channel flow

	Segement ID	CD		
12. Cross sectional flow area, a ft^2		27		
13. Wetted perimeter, p_w ft		28.2		
14. Hydraulic radius, $r = \frac{a}{p_w}$ Compute r ft		0.957		
15 Channel slope, s ft/ft		0.005		
16. Manning's roughness coefficient, n		0.05		
17. $V = \frac{1.49\ r^{2/3}\ s^{1/2}}{n}$ Compute V ft/s		2.05		
18. Flow length, L ft		7300		
19. $T_t = \frac{L}{3600\ V}$ Compute T_t hr		0.99	+	= 0.99
20. Watershed or subarea T_c or T_t (add T_t in steps 6, 11, and 19) Hr				1.53

Chapter 4 Graphical Peak Discharge Method

This chapter presents the Graphical Peak Discharge method for computing peak discharge from rural and urban areas. The Graphical method was developed from hydrograph analyses using TR-20, "Computer Program for Project Formulation—Hydrology" (SCS 1983). The peak discharge equation used is:

$$q_p = q_u A_m Q F_p \qquad \text{[eq. 4-1]}$$

where:

q_p = peak discharge (cfs)
q_u = unit peak discharge (csm/in)
A_m = drainage area (mi²)
Q = runoff (in)
F_p = pond and swamp adjustment factor

The input requirements for the Graphical method are as follows: (1) T_c (hr), (2) drainage area (mi²), (3) appropriate rainfall distribution (I, IA, II, or III), (4) 24-hour rainfall (in), and (5) CN. If pond and swamp areas are spread throughout the watershed and are not considered in the T_c computation, an adjustment for pond and swamp areas is also needed.

Peak discharge computation

For a selected rainfall frequency, the 24-hour rainfall (P) is obtained from appendix B or more detailed local precipitation maps. CN and total runoff (Q) for the watershed are computed according to the methods outlined in chapter 2. The CN is used to determine the initial abstraction (I_a) from table 4-1. I_a / P is then computed.

If the computed I_a / P ratio is outside the range in exhibit 4 (4-I, 4-IA, 4-II, and 4-III) for the rainfall distribution of interest, then the limiting value should be used. If the ratio falls between the limiting values, use linear interpolation. Figure 4-1 illustrates the sensitivity of I_a / P to CN and P.

Peak discharge per square mile per inch of runoff (q_u) is obtained from exhibit 4-I, 4-IA, 4-II, or 4-III by using T_c (chapter 3), rainfall distribution type, and I_a / P ratio. The pond and swamp adjustment factor is obtained from table 4-2 (rounded to the nearest table value). Use worksheet 4 in appendix D to aid in computing the peak discharge using the Graphical method.

Figure 4-1 Variation of I_a / P for P and CN

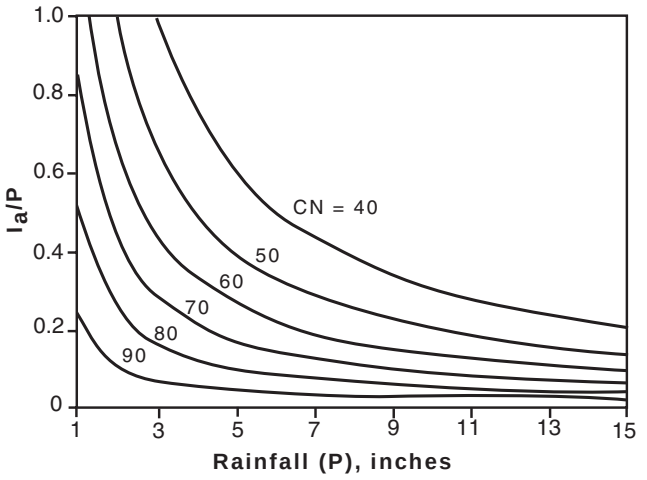


Table 4-1 I_a values for runoff curve numbers

Curve number	I_a (in)	Curve number	I_a (in)
40	3.000	70	0.857
41	2.878	71	0.817
42	2.762	72	0.778
43	2.651	73	0.740
44	2.545	74	0.703
45	2.444	75	0.667
46	2.348	76	0.632
47	2.255	77	0.597
48	2.167	78	0.564
49	2.082	79	0.532
50	2.000	80	0.500
51	1.922	81	0.469
52	1.846	82	0.439
53	1.774	83	0.410
54	1.704	84	0.381
55	1.636	85	0.353
56	1.571	86	0.326
57	1.509	87	0.299
58	1.448	88	0.273
59	1.390	89	0.247
60	1.333	90	0.222
61	1.279	91	0.198
62	1.226	92	0.174
63	1.175	93	0.151
64	1.125	94	0.128
65	1.077	95	0.105
66	1.030	96	0.083
67	0.985	97	0.062
68	0.941	98	0.041
69	0.899		

Table 4-2 Adjustment factor (F_p) for pond and swamp areas that are spread throughout the watershed

Percentage of pond and swamp areas	F_p
0	1.00
0.2	0.97
1.0	0.87
3.0	0.75
5.0	0.72

Limitations

The Graphical method provides a determination of peak discharge only. If a hydrograph is needed or watershed subdivision is required, use the Tabular Hydrograph method (chapter 5). Use TR-20 if the watershed is very complex or a higher degree of accuracy is required.

- The watershed must be hydrologically homogeneous, that is, describable by one CN. Land use, soils, and cover are distributed uniformly throughout the watershed.
- The watershed may have only one main stream or, if more than one, the branches must have nearly equal T_C' s.
- The method cannot perform valley or reservoir routing.
- The F_p factor can be applied only for ponds or swamps that are not in the T_c flow path.
- Accuracy of peak discharge estimated by this method will be reduced if I_a / P values are used that are outside the range given in exhibit 4. The limiting I_a / P values are recommended for use.
- This method should be used only if the weighted CN is greater than 40.
- When this method is used to develop estimates of peak discharge for both present and developed conditions of a watershed, use the same procedure for estimating T_c.
- T_c values with this method may range from 0.1 to 10 hours.

Example 4-1

Compute the 25-year peak discharge for the 250-acre watershed described in examples 2-2 and 3-1. Figure 4-2 shows how worksheet 4 is used to compute q_p as 345 cfs.

Example 4-1 Worksheet 4 for example 4-1

Worksheet 4: Graphical Peak Discharge method

Project: Heavenly Acres	By: RHM	Date: 10/15/85
Location: Dyer County, Tennessee	Checked: NM	Date: 10/17/85

Check one: ☐ Present ☒ Developed

1. Data

Drainage area ..... A_m = 0.39 mi^2 (acres/640) _____

Runoff curve number .....CN = 75 (From worksheet 2), Figure 2-6

Time of concentration ..... T_c = 1.53 hr (From worksheet 3), Figure 3-2

Rainfall distribution ..... = II (I, IA, II III) _____

Pond and swamp areas sprea
throughout watershed ..... = – – percent of A_m (– – acres or mi^2 covered)

	Storm #1	Storm #2	Storm #3
2. Frequency ..... yr	25		
3. Rainfall, P (24-hour) ..... in	6.0		
4. Initial abstraction, I_a ..... in (Use CN with table 4-1)	0.667		
5. Compute I_a/P	0.11		
6. Unit peak discharge, qu ..... csm/in (Use T_c and I_a/P with exhibit 4– II)	270		
7. Runoff, Q ..... in (From worksheet 2). Figure 2-6	3.28		
8. Pond and swamp adjustment factor, F_p ..... (Use percent pond and swamp area with table 4-2. Factor is 1.0 for zero percent pond ans swamp area.)	1.0		
9. Peak discharge, q_p ..... cfs	345		

(Where $q_p = q_u A_m Q F_p$)

Exhibit 4-I Unit peak discharge (q_u) for NRCS (SCS) type I rainfall distribution

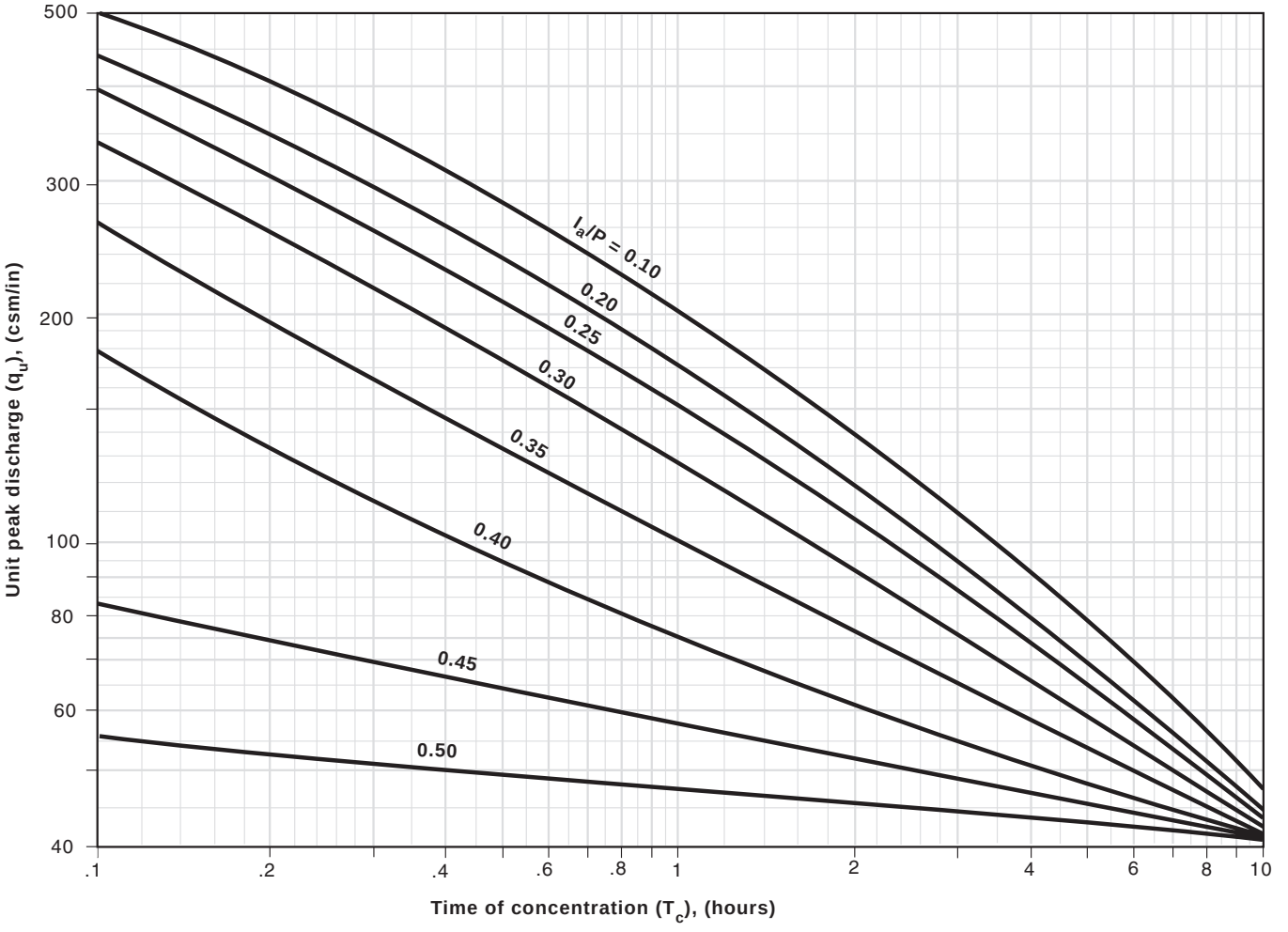


Exhibit 4-IA Unit peak discharge (q_u) for NRCS (SCS) type IA rainfall distribution

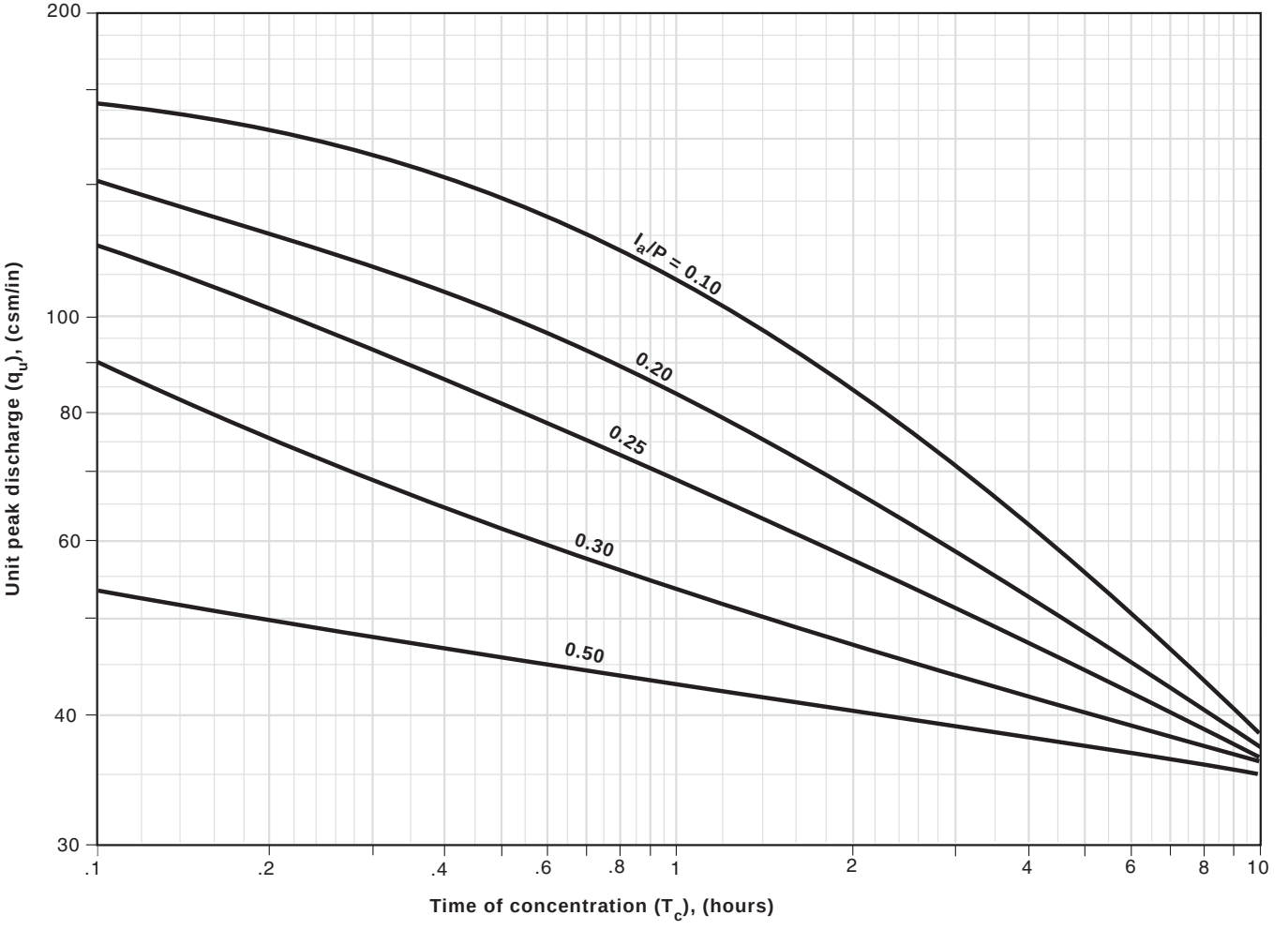


Exhibit 4-II Unit peal discharge (q_u) for NRCS (SCS) type II rainfall distribution

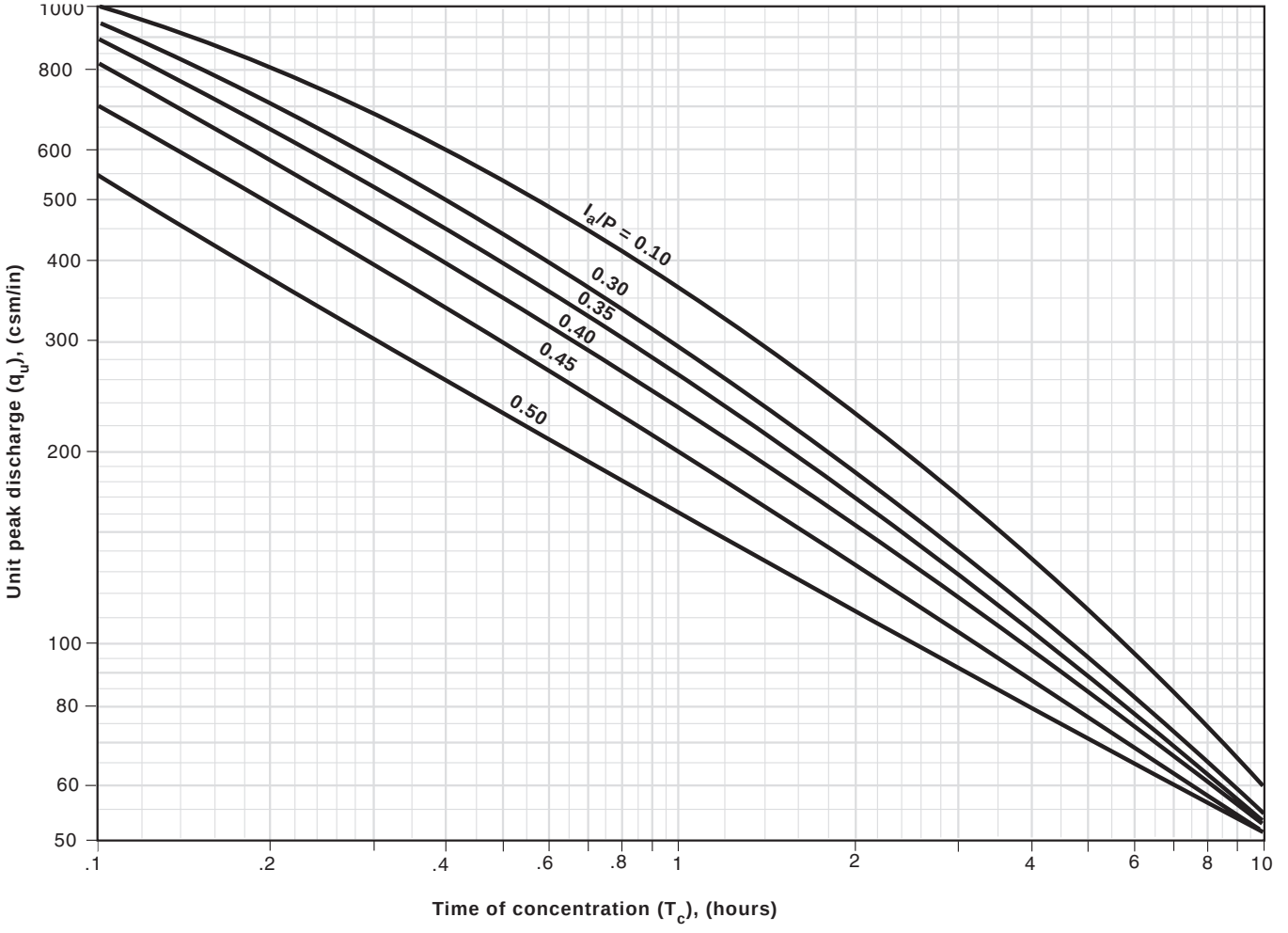
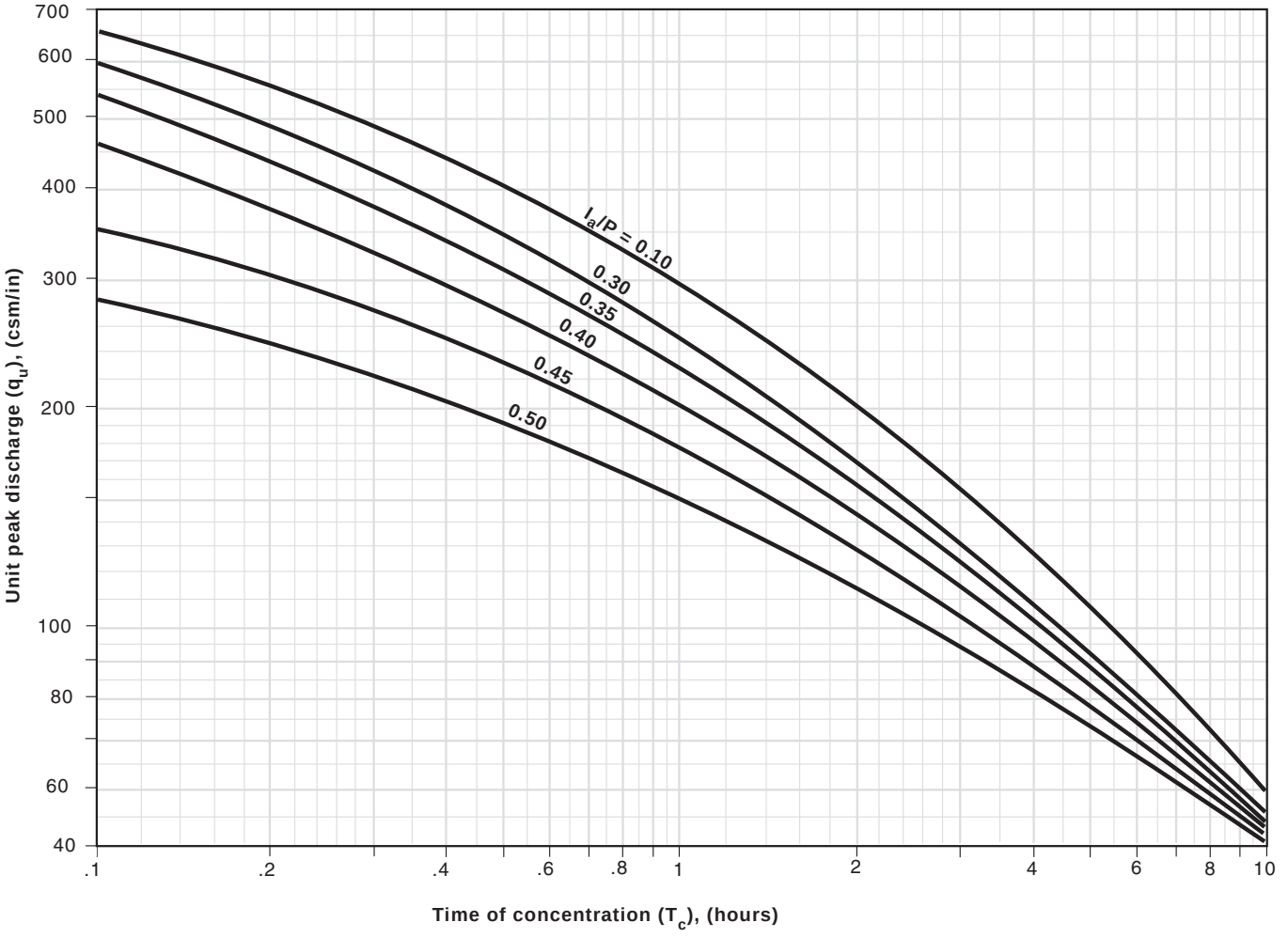



Exhibit 4-III Unit peal discharge (q_u) for NRCS (SCS) type III rainfall distribution