

Hydraulic Laboratory Technical Memorandum, PAP-1110

# Erosion Tests and Index Properties of Soil Specimens from Paonia Reservoir



U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation Technical Service Center Hydraulic Investigations and Laboratory Services Group Materials Engineering Research Laboratory Denver, Colorado

#### BUREAU OF RECLAMATION Technical Service Center, Denver, Colorado Hydraulic Investigations and Laboratory Services, 86-846000

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# **Erosion Tests and Index Properties of Soil Specimens from Paonia Reservoir**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

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### Introduction

Erosion and index properties tests were performed in May and June 2014 on soil samples obtained in June 2013 from depositional zones within Paonia Reservoir. Index properties tests were performed in the Denver soil mechanics laboratory by the Materials Engineering Research Laboratory (MERL) group. Submerged jet erosion tests (JET) were performed in the hydraulics laboratory using a jet test apparatus constructed by Reclamation in accordance with ASTM D-5852, *Standard Test Method for Erodibility Determination of Soil in the Field or in the Laboratory by the Jet Index Method.* More details of the test apparatus and its use are given in Wahl et al. (2008).

The submerged jet test simulates scour of a soil surface due to a perpendicular impinging jet. The test is typically run with a constant jet pressure. The jet is positioned over the soil surface of interest, and the initial elevation of the jet and the jet pressure are selected to apply a desired shear stress to the soil specimen. The depth of scour beneath the jet is measured over time and is used to estimate the critical shear stress needed to initiate erosion and the detachment rate coefficient relating the rate of erosion to the applied stress in excess of the critical value. Procedures for analyzing the test data have been improved since the publication of ASTM D-5852; the data from these tests were analyzed using the methods described in Hanson and Cook (2004). Recently, other analysis procedures have also been proposed (Daley, et al. 2013). The analysis is based on a volumetric form of the excess stress erosion model:

$$\dot{\varepsilon} = k_d \left( \tau - \tau_c \right)$$

where  $\dot{\varepsilon}$  is the volume of material removed per unit surface area per unit time (m<sup>3</sup>/s/m<sup>2</sup>, or m/s),  $k_d$  is a detachment rate coefficient,  $\tau$  is the applied stress (N/m<sup>2</sup>=Pa), and  $\tau_c$  is the critical shear stress (N/m<sup>2</sup>=Pa). Typical units for  $k_d$  are m<sup>3</sup>/s/m<sup>2</sup>/Pa which reduces to m/s/Pa or m<sup>3</sup>/(N·s) in S.I. units;  $k_d$  is also commonly reported in cm<sup>3</sup>/(N·s), or when working in U.S. customary units,  $k_d$  is usually expressed in ft/hr/psf [1 cm<sup>3</sup>/(N·s) = 0.5655 ft/hr/psf = 10<sup>-6</sup> m<sup>3</sup>/(N·s)].

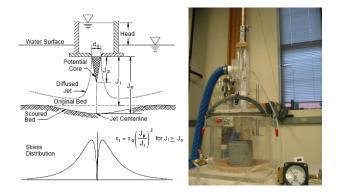


Figure 1. — Jet test schematic diagram and photo of laboratory test apparatus.

## Testing

Soil specimens were obtained from the field in June 2013 by vibracore sampling and were stored until May 2014 in the 70% humidity storage facility of the MERL. The erosion specimens were contained in 3-inch diameter acrylic tubes. A few days before testing, identified sections of the specimens were cut for testing into 4- to 4.5-inch long segments using a band saw. The upper portion of each specimen was tagged so that jet erosion tests could be conducted on the top surface of each specimen, set in the original, natural orientation. A soil sample was collected from the tube segment immediately above the jet test specimen. Care was taken to limit the extent of the soil sampling to ensure that collected material was similar in character to that observed at the top end of each jet test specimen.

#### **Erosion Testing**

The jet pressure and initial nozzle distance above the specimen determine the initial hydraulic stress applied to the specimen. As the test proceeds, the applied stress at the erosion interface reduces as the scour hole deepens. The initial stress is often set based on the expected range of stresses that will be applied to the soil in the application of interest. In this case, initial observation of the specimens suggested that their erodibility would be high, so in order to keep erosion rates to a manageable level during the test, the initial jet distance was maximized (about 3.00 to 3.75 inches depending on soil specimen height) and the jet pressure was minimized (about 1 ft of head= $0.43 \text{ lb/in}^2$ ) within the practical physical limits of the test facility. The initial shear stress for most tests was about 0.1 lb/ft<sup>2</sup> or 5 Pa. All water used for erosion testing was obtained from the tap water system in the hydraulics laboratory. This water originates from the Denver municipal water system. Water temperature at the time of the tests was about 16.5°C (62°F).

Table 1 lists the soil specimens and their approximate depth below ground surface. Each specimen was tested with the jet applied to the top surface of the specimen. The table also reports the soil type, plasticity index, and clay content for each specimen.

Jet erosion tests were performed during late May and early June 2014. Scour depths were recorded at relatively short intervals at the beginning of each test, typically 5 to 30 seconds depending on the initially observed erosion, and at increasing intervals as the tests continued. Most of the soil specimens were completely eroded during the tests, and tests of the most erodible specimens were completed with total exposure times of about 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Tests of the more erosion resistant soils typically lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. Figure 2 shows the pre-test condition of two soil samples. Figure 3 provides some post-test photographs.

	Sample	USCS soil	Liquid	Plasticity		
Drill Hole	Depth, ft	classification	Limit (LL)	Index (PI)	% clay*	
1-DC-1	0.5' - 1.0'	SC – Sandy Clay	24	8	16	
1-DC-1B	0.5' - 1.0'	SC – Sandy Clay	29	14	21	
1-RC-1A	0.5' - 1.0'	CL – Lean Clay	32	15	15	
1-RC-1A	2.5' - 3.0'	SM – Silty Sand	NV**	NP***	3	
1-RC-1A	4.0' - 4.5'	s(ML) – Sandy Silt	NV	NP	5	
4-RC-1	0.5' - 1.0'	CH – Fat Clay	52	29	33	
4-RC-1	1.5' - 2.0'	SP-SM – Poorly	NV	- Poorly	NP	2
4-KC-1	1.5 - 2.0	Graded Sand with Silt		INP	2	
4-RC-1	3.0' - 3.5'	CL – Lean Clay	43	18	16	
7-RC-1A	0.5' - 1.0'	CL – Lean Clay	35	17	14	
7-RC-1A	2.0' - 2.5'	CL – Lean Clay	38	19	15	
7-RC-1A	3.0' - 3.5'	SP-SM – Poorly	NV N	ND	2	
7-RC-1A	5.0 - 5.5	Graded Sand with Silt		INV	Sand with Silt	INP
7-RC-1A	4.0' - 4.5'	CL – Lean Clay	33	11	10	
7-RC-1B	1.0' - 1.5'	SM – Silty Sand	NV	NP	3	
7-RC-1B	2.0' - 2.5'	s(ML) – Sandy Silt	24	3	6	
7-RC-1B	3.5' - 4.0'	CL – Lean Clay	35	13	9	
7-RC-1B	4.5' - 5.0'	SM – Silty Sand	NV	NP	4	

Table 1. — Soil specimens for jet erosion testing.

\* clay particles are defined here to be smaller than 0.002 mm.

\*\* NV = no value

\*\*\* NP = non-plastic

Jet test results are plotted in Figure 4, along with lines that indicate erodibility categories proposed by Hanson and Simon (2001). These classifications were established to span the range of erodibilities observed in a study of natural cohesive streambed deposits in loess areas of eastern Nebraska, western Iowa, and northern Mississippi. They also represent typical ranges of erodibility measured in compacted soils used in civil engineering infrastructure, such as dams and levees (Wahl et al. 2008; Hanson et al. 2010). Five erodibility classes are recognized from the work of Hanson and Simon (2001): very resistant, resistant, moderately resistant, erodible, and very erodible.

Figure 4 shows that all of the tested specimens are in the very erodible category, with a few plotting near the edge of the erodible category. If a sixth erodibility category were to be defined and named 'extremely erodible', ten of the sixteen samples would probably be considered extremely erodible and six would remain very erodible.

For comparison, dotted vertical lines and labels at the bottom of the chart in Figure 4 show the critical shear stress values that would be expected for cohesionless soil particles of specific sizes, applying Shield's criteria for incipient motion with a critical Shield's parameter value of 0.047. In the jet test results the specimens with little or no plasticity (SP-SM, SM, and ML soil types) exhibited critical shear values that were comparable to fine sand or silt-size particles, and this is consistent with the makeup of these soils, most of which were predominantly sand with significant silt fractions. In contrast, most of the

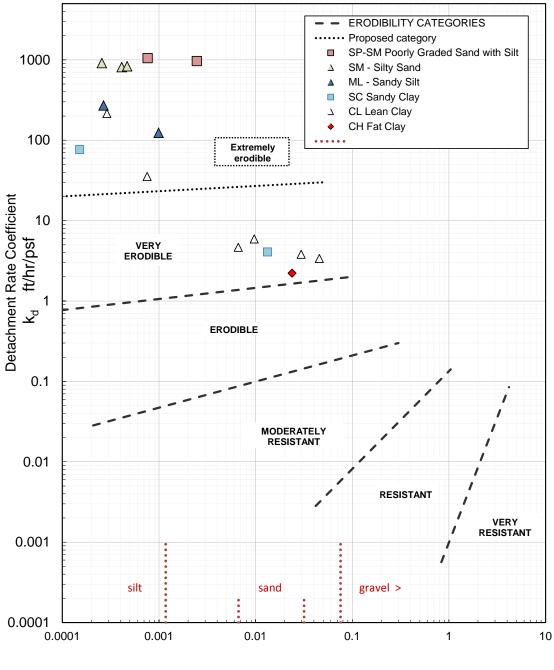
soils with significant plasticity (SC, CL, and CH soil types) exhibited critical shear stress values that were one to two orders of magnitude greater than would be expected for their predominant particle size (silt for most cases). This effectively illustrates the influence of cohesion in fine-grained soils.



Figure 2. — Representative jet test specimens from Paonia Reservoir, prior to testing. Specimens like the sandy soil at top were usually completely eroded to the bottom of the tube in less than 1 to 2 minutes.



Figure 3. — Post-test photographs of jet test specimens that exhibited some erosion resistance. Most of these specimens were tested for about 30 - 60 minutes.



Critical Shear Stress,  $\tau_c$  (psf)

Figure 4. — JET erosion test results. Erodibility classifications are those proposed by Hanson and Simon (2001). Dotted vertical lines and labels indicate expected critical shear stresses calculated using the Shield's parameter for cohesionless particles of the indicated size classes; the silt/clay boundary would plot at 0.00003 psf. Unit conversions:  $1 \text{ cm}^3/(\text{N-s}) = 0.5655 \text{ ft/hr/psf}$ ; 1 Pa = 0.0209 psf.

Figure 5 shows relations between plasticity index, clay particle content, and detachment rate coefficient. The detachment rate coefficient is inversely related to both the plasticity index and clay content, and the latter are strongly correlated as expected.

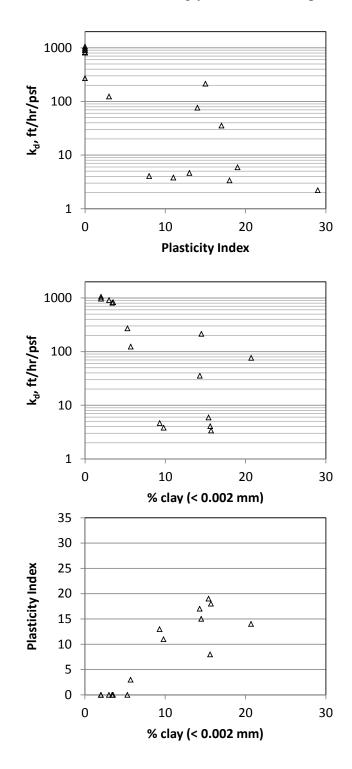


Figure 5. — Relations between plasticity index, clay particle content, and detachment rate coefficient.

## Summary

Sixteen soil specimens obtained from Paonia Reservoir were analyzed in the Materials Engineering Research Laboratory to determine soil gradation, Atterberg limits (plasticity properties), and soil type using the Unified Soil Classification System (USCS). For samples with sufficient material to conduct the tests, specific gravity was also determined. Detailed results of these tests are provided in the Appendix.

Submerged jet erosion tests were performed in the hydraulics laboratory on accompanying specimens cut from the 3-inch diameter sample tubes. Erodibility results were strongly related to the soil classifications. Seven specimens with little or no plasticity (SP-SM, SM, or ML soil types) were extremely erodible, while nine specimens of clayey soils with plasticity indices of 8 or more (SC, CL, and CH soil types) were generally more erosion resistant and exhibited more variation of erosion resistance, although all were still considered very erodible to extremely erodible. Numerical values of critical shear stress for the low and no-plasticity specimens were typical of what would be expected for cohesionless soils based on particle size, while critical shear stress values for the clayey soil specimens were about one to two orders of magnitude greater than would be calculated for cohesionless particles of their size. This demonstrates the significant effect of cohesion on erodibility of fine-grained soils.

#### References

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# **Appendix – Soil Testing Reports**

