

Rapid Drawdown with Multi-Stage

1 Introduction

Stability analysis during rapid drawdown is an important consideration in the design of embankment dams. During rapid drawdown, the stabilizing effect of the water on the upstream face is lost, but the pore-water pressures within the embankment may remain high. As a result, the stability of the upstream face of the dam can be much reduced. The dissipation of pore-water pressure in the embankment is largely influenced by the permeability and the storage characteristic of the embankment materials. Highly permeable materials drain quickly during rapid drawdown, but low permeability materials take a long time to drain.

Using SLOPE/W, stability during rapid drawdown can be analyzed in two approaches, namely the “effective strength” approach and the “staged undrained strength” approach. The purpose of this illustrative example is to show how to conduct a rapid drawdown analysis using the stage undrained strength approach.

A total of four examples are presented in the following sections. The first three examples have been analyses by Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990), and the fourth example is the Corps of Engineers bench mark example documented in the USACE Engineering Manual, EM1110-2-1902 (2003). These examples are repeated here to illustrate that identical answer can be obtained using the three-stage rapid drawdown analysis with SLOPE/W. Table 1 shows the comparison of the computed rapid drawdown factor of safety between SLOPE/W and the published results.

Table 1 Comparison of computed rapid drawdown factor of safety

Example	SLOPE/W FOS	Publication FOS	Reference	Date File Name
Walter Bouldin Dam	1.009	1.04	Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990)	Rapid drawdown with multi-stage.gsz
Pumed storage project dam	1.545	1.56	Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990)	Stage rapid drawdown – Pumped Storage Project Dam.gsz
Pilarcitos Dam	1.049	1.05	Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990)	Stage rapid drawdown – Pilarcitos Dam.gsz
USACE bench mark	1.424	1.44	Corps of Engineers (2003) EM 1110-2-1902	Stage rapid drawdown – CE Example.gsz

1.1 The Staged Undrained Strength Method

The “3-stage” analysis method proposed by Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990) has been implemented in SLOPE/W. In short, the 3-stage analysis method can be summarized as:

The first stage involves the stability analysis of the embankment before drawdown when the water level is high and the pore-water pressure in the materials is at steady state condition. Both the effective normal stress and shear stress along the slip surface are used to determine the undrained shear strength for materials that do not drain freely.

The second stage involves the stability analysis of the embankment after drawdown when the water level is low and the pore-water pressure in the materials is at steady state condition. The effective normal stress obtained from stage two, together with the effective strength parameters, are used to compute the drained strength along the slip surface.

Both the drained and undrained strength at the slice base along the slip surface are compared, and the smaller strength is chosen as the computed shear strength to be used in the third stage. This is needed in order to avoid using undrained strengths higher than drained strengths which cannot be mobilized if cavitation or drainage occurs (Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990)).

The third stage involves the stability analysis using the computed shear strength and the final drawdown water level. The computed factor of safety from the first and second stages are ignored, and only the factor of safety computed from the third stage analysis is used to represent the stability after rapid drawdown.

To use the staged rapid drawdown method in SLOPE/W, the following must be specified:

- A Mohr-Coulomb soil strength model
- Effective c' and ϕ' parameters
- Total c and ϕ parameters for non-freely drained material
- A piezometric line pore-water pressure condition
- The positions of the piezometric lines before rapid drawdown
- The amount of drawdown

1.2 Example 1 – The Walter Bouldin Dam

The Walter Bouldin dam failed on February 10, 1975 during an extremely rapid drawdown of 32 feet in 5.5 hours that occurred as a result of a piping failure in another section of the dam. The dam is a rolled earthfill embankment. As shown in Figure 1, the dam is approximately 60 feet high. The lower portion of the dam is clayey sandy gravel that was not involved in the slide. Overlaying the gravel are a layer of clay, a zone of silt and a clayey silty sand layer that blankets the slope. The upper portion of the upstream slope is blanketed with riprap. The upstream slope is 2 on 1 above Elevation 245 and 2.5 on 1 below.

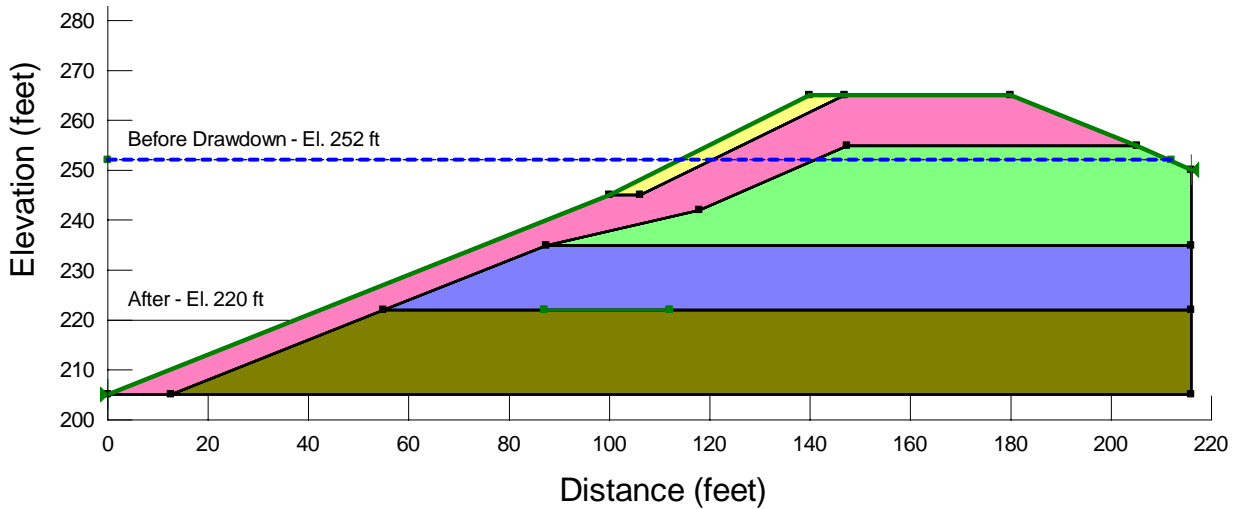


Figure 1 The Geometry of the Walter Bouldin Dam

Figure 2 shows the slip surface and the SLOPE/W computed factor of safety using the 3-stage undrained strength method. The factor of safety is 1.009, which is essentially the same as the factor of safety obtained by Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990).

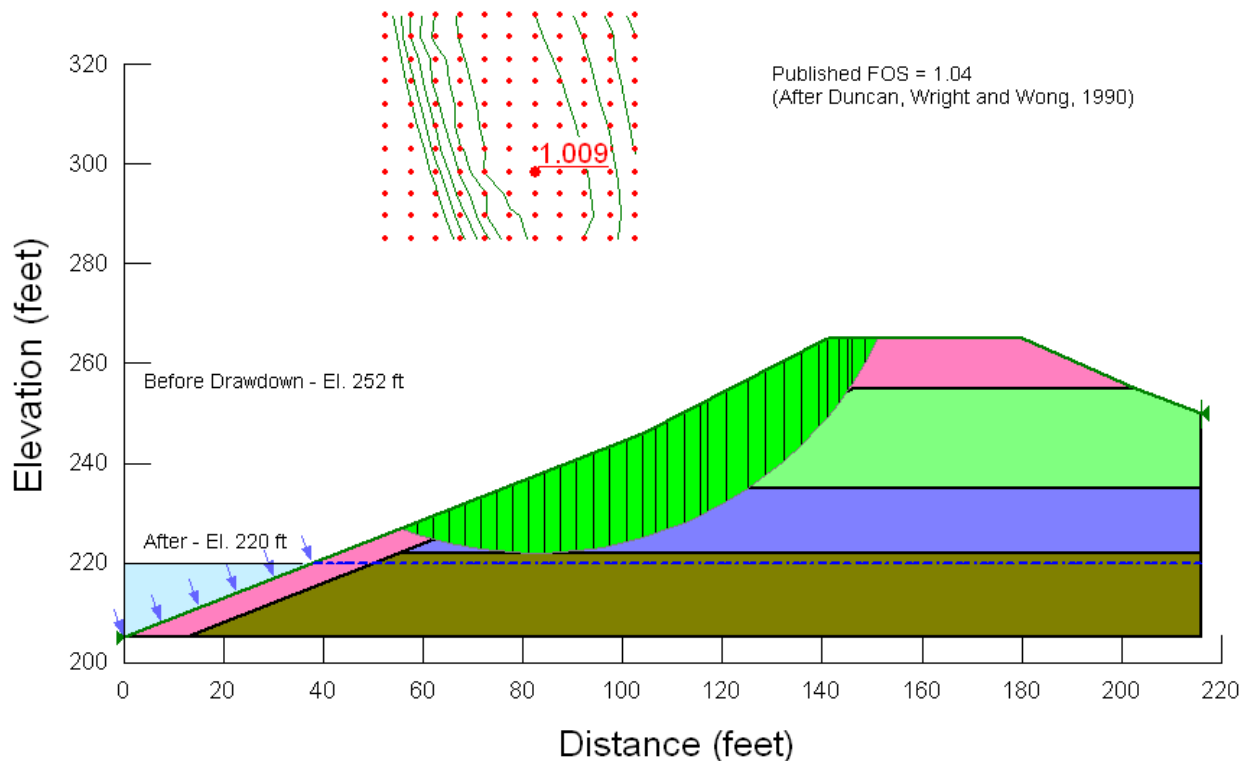


Figure 2 SLOPE/W Computed Factor of Safety Using the 3-Stage Undrained Strength Method

1.3 Example 2 – The Pumped Storage Project Dam

The geometry of the Pumped Storage Project Dam is shown in Figure 3. The dam is about 300 feet high. The embankment has a densely compacted silty clay core. The lower portion of the upstream slope is a random zone with the same strength properties as the core. The upper portion of the upstream slope and the downstream slope is free draining rockfill.

The before drawdown water level is at 545, and the after drawdown water level is at 380, which is the elevation of the bench at the mid-height of the embankment. The drawdown results in complete dewatering of the upstream rockfill shell and a portion of the filter layer beneath the shell.

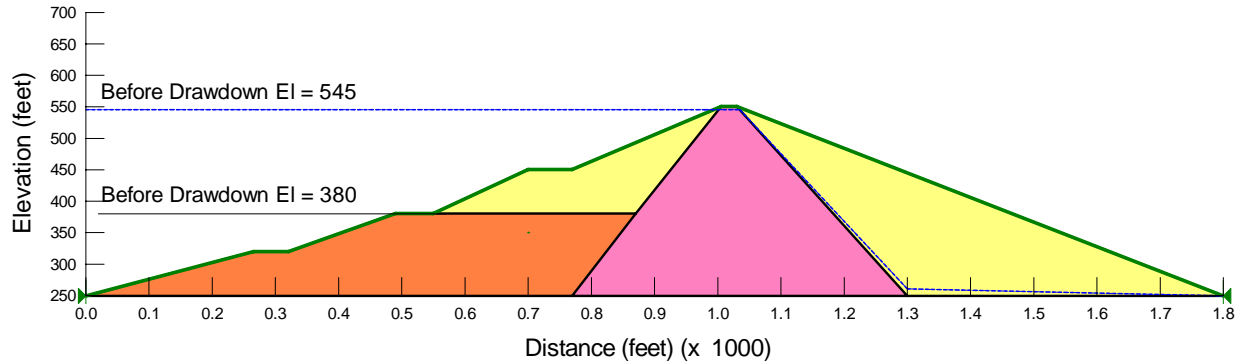


Figure 3 The Geometry of the Pumped Storage Project Dam

Figure 4 shows the slip surface and the SLOPE/W computed factor of safety using the 3-stage undrained strength method. The factor of safety is 1.545, which is almost identical to the factor of safety obtained by Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990).

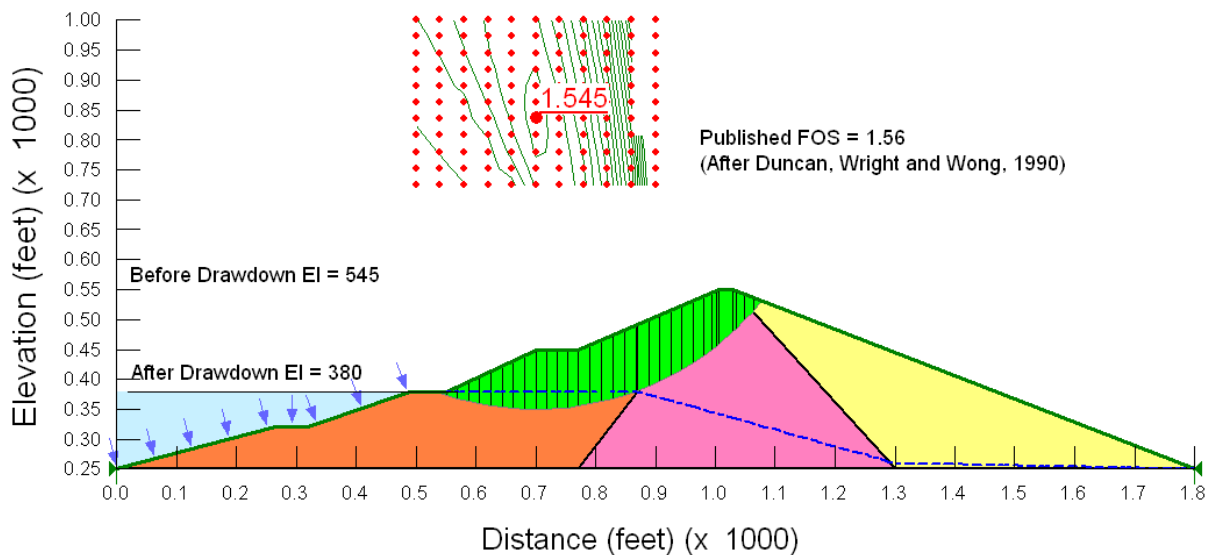


Figure 4 SLOPE/W Computed Factor of Safety Using the 3 Stage Undrained Strength Method

1.4 Example 3 – The Pilarcitos Dam

The Pilarcitos Dam is a homogeneous rolled earthfill embankment. The crest of the dam is about 78 feet above the upstream toe, as shown in Figure 5. The embankment failed when the water level was lowered from elevation 692 to 657 between Oct 7 and November 19, 1969.

The material comprising the embankment is classified as a sandy clay (CL) with 60 to 70 percent passing the number 200 sieve and a saturated hydraulic conductivity of about 4×10^{-6} m/s. The liquid limit is 45 percent and the plastic limit is 23 percent. The effective and total strength parameters used in the analysis are:

$$\gamma_{\text{soil}} = 135 \text{ pcf,}$$

$$c' = 0 \text{ psf,}$$

$$\phi' = 45 \text{ degrees,}$$

$$c_T = 60 \text{ psf,}$$

$$\phi_T = 23 \text{ degrees}$$

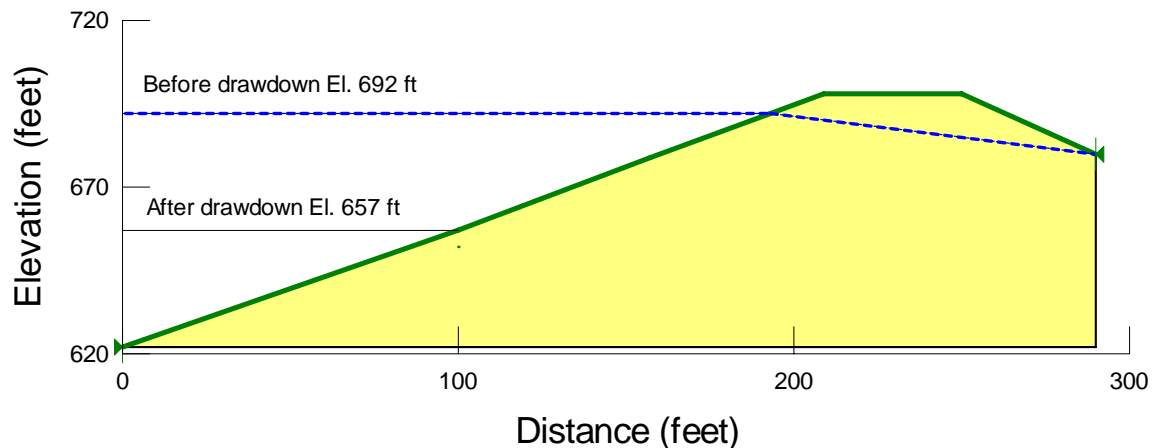


Figure 5 The Geometry of the Pilarcitos Dam

Figure 6 shows the slip surface and the SLOPE/W computed factor of safety using the 3-stage undrained strength method. The factor of safety is 1.049, which is essentially the same as the factor of safety obtained by Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990).

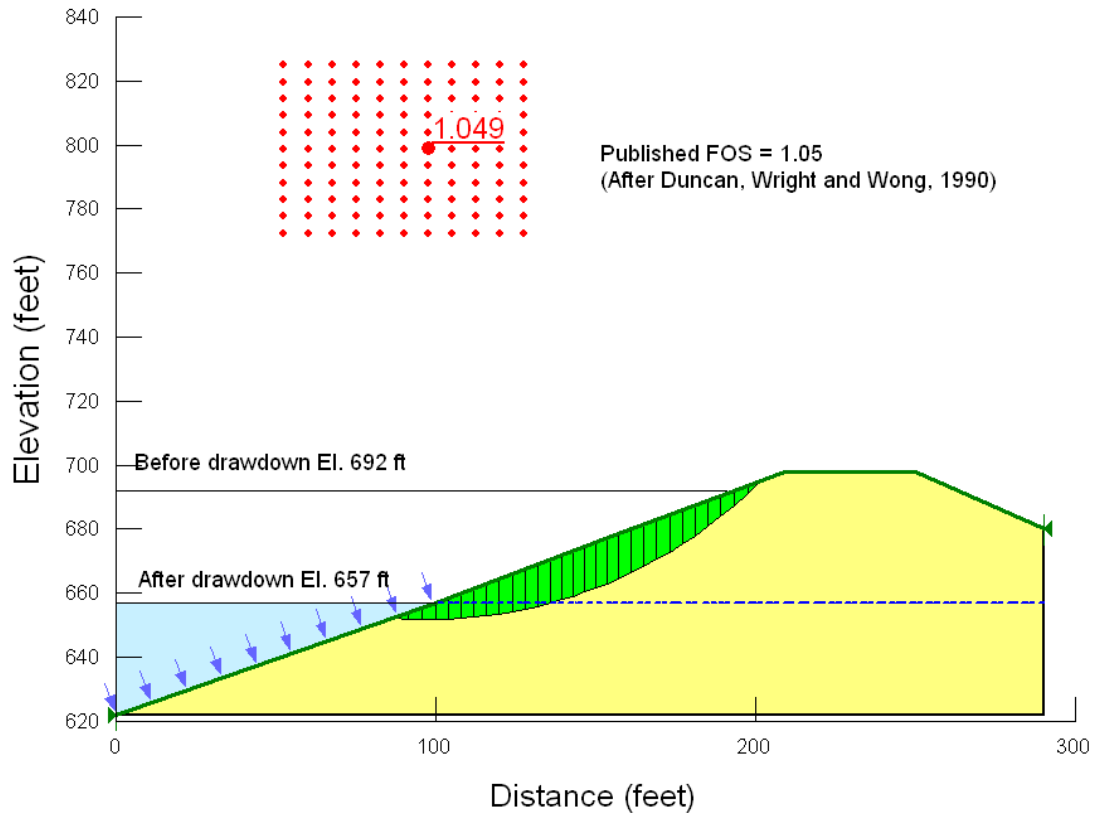


Figure 6 SLOPE/W Computed Factor of Safety Using the 3 Stage Undrained Strength Method

1.5 Example 4 – The USACE Benchmark Example

Example 4 is the benchmark example used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (2003) in the Appendix G of the Engineering Manual – EM 1110-2-1902. It is a simple homogenous embankment. The material properties are:

$$\gamma_{\text{soil}} = 135 \text{ pcf}$$

$$c' = 0 \text{ psf}$$

$$\phi' = 30 \text{ degrees}$$

$$c_T = 1200 \text{ psf}$$

$$\phi_T = 16 \text{ degrees}$$

The slip surface is established by a center located at $x=169.5$ feet, $y=210$ feet and a radius of 210 feet. Drawdown is from a maximum water level of 103 feet to a minimum level of 24 feet. The upstream slope is 3 to 1 up to elevation 74 and 2.5 to 1 above elevation 74.

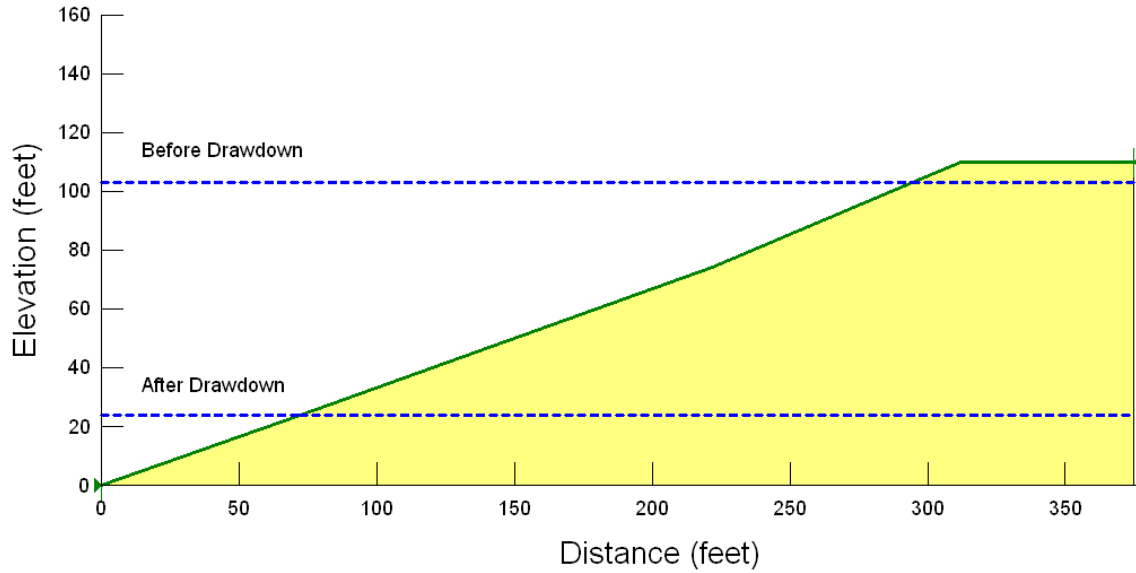


Figure 7 The Geometry of the USACE Bench Mark Example

Figure 8 shows the slip surface and the SLOPE/W computed factor of safety using the 3-stage undrained strength method. The factor of safety is 1.424, which is almost identical to the factor of safety as presented in the Corps of Engineers (2003) engineering manual.

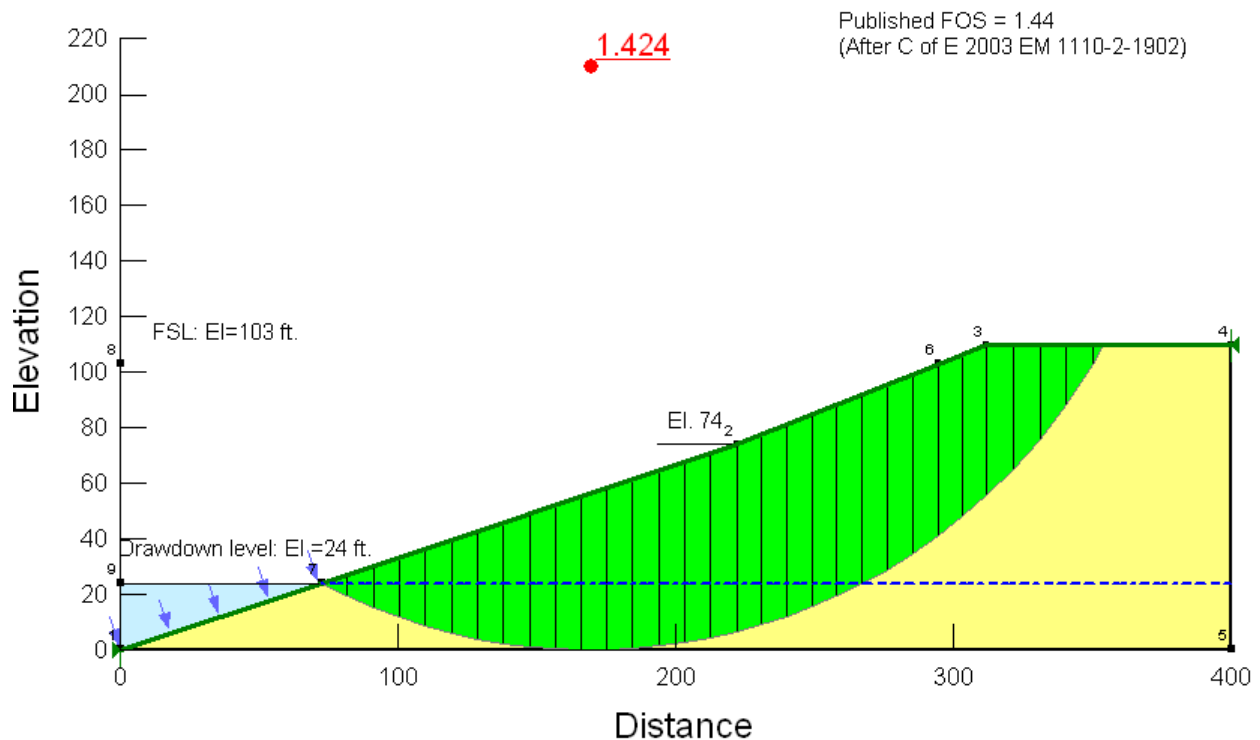


Figure 8 SLOPE/W Computed Factor of Safety Using the 3 Stage Undrained Strength Method

1.6 Discussions

As illustrated in the above three examples, it is evident that the Duncan, Wright and Wong's 3-Stage has been implemented correctly in SLOPE/W. The computed factors of safety in all three cases are identical to those presented by Duncan, Wright and Wong (1990) and the USACE Engineering Manual (2003).

The 3-Stage method seems to provide a reasonable evaluation of the stability during rapid drawdown. The approach avoids the extra work of evaluating the pore-water pressure conditions in the embankment dam by using the undrained strengths. However, the hydraulic properties of the materials, such as permeability, cannot be considered, the element of time is missing, and the total strength parameters are used.

References

Corps of Engineers (1970) "Engineering and Design – Stability of Earth and Rock Fill Dams". Engineering Manual, EM 1110-2-1902. Department of the U.S Army Corps of Engineers.

Corps of Engineers (2003) "Appendix G - Procedures and Examples for Rapid Drawdown". Engineering Manual, EM 1110-2-1902. Department of the U.S Army Corps of Engineers.

Duncan, J.M., Wright S.G. and Wong, K.S. (1990). "Slope Stability during Rapid Drawdown". Proceedings of H. Bolton Seed Memorial Symposium. Vol. 2.

Lowe, J and Karafiath, L., (1960) "Stability of Earth Dams Upon Drawdown". Proceedings of 1st PanAm Conference on Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering. Mexico City, Vol 2.