

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**  
**WETLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

(Ac.)

**CODE 644**

**DEFINITION**

Retaining, developing or managing wetland habitat for wetland wildlife.

**PURPOSE**

To maintain, develop, or improve wetland habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, fur-bearers, or other wetland dependent or associated flora and fauna.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On or adjacent to wetlands, rivers, lakes and other water bodies where wetland associated wildlife habitat can be managed. This practice applies to natural wetlands and/or water bodies as well as wetlands that may have been previously restored (657), enhanced (659), and created (658).

**CRITERIA**

**I.** A habitat evaluation or appraisal, approved by the NRCS state office, shall be used to identify habitat-limiting factors in the planning area.

- Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG)'s are found online in the [NRCS New Mexico FOTG Section II](#). If a WHEG is not provided for the desired target species, contact the NRCS NM State Biologist for assistance.
- Application of this practice shall remove or reduce limiting factor(s) in their order of significance, as indicated by results of the habitat evaluation.
- Application of this practice alone, or in combination with other supporting and facilitating practices, shall result in a conservation system that will enable the planning area to meet or exceed the minimum quality criteria for wildlife habitat as established in the [NRCS FOTG Section III](#).

**II.** Identify the wildlife or flora species management goals and objectives. Identify the types, amounts and distribution of the habitat elements and the management actions necessary to achieve the management objectives. See the Plans and Specification section for more details.

**III.** Site must be free of hazardous materials, including materials that may be bound within the soil. Any required clean-up will be completed prior to installation of this practice.

**IV.** If planting, native species and/or local ecotypes will be used wherever possible.

**V.** Invasive plant species and federally/state listed noxious and nuisance species shall be controlled on the site.

- Utilize Integrated Pest Management (a combination of Biological, Mechanical and/or Chemical) using environmentally sensitive methods. *Example:* prevention, scouting, spot treatment, and follow-up. Refer to NRCS practice Integrated Pest Management (595).
- Refer to USDA Plants Database, NM invasive and noxious weeds. [www://plants.usda.gov](http://www://plants.usda.gov)
- Refer to [NRCS Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 24, Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) and Wildlife](#)

**VI.** Any implementation or management (including access points) used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion and compaction.

**VII.** Users of this standard shall comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations. This standard does not provide the details of each required law.

- All necessary local, state, and federal permits shall be obtained by the landowner (or designee) prior to the restoration.

## CONSIDERATIONS

If wetland restoration, enhancement or creation is necessary to implement this practice, refer to NRCS practice Wetland Restoration (657), Wetland Enhancement (659) or Wetland Creation (658).

Refer to NRCS practice Shallow Water Development and Management (646) for information on plant and wildlife species that require shallow water for at least a part of their life cycle. This practice provides more guidance on wetland development and management.

This practice may affect the target species, as well as non-target species. Consider effects of this practice on all potentially impacted species. Including, but not limited to:

- effect it may have on disease vectors such as mosquitoes,
- effect on water temperature; to prevent undesired effects on aquatic communities,
- unintentional mortalities by bird collision with utility lines, fences, wind turbines etc,
- increased nest parasitism or predation,
- increased disease transmission,
- habitat alteration. i.e. targeting habitat to benefit one species may be detrimental to another wildlife species or guild, or plant.

Consider the effects on unique or rare wetland flora. Refer to the New Mexico Rare Plants list, found at <http://nmrareplants.unm.edu>.

Vegetation management activities should not be conducted during critical life stages of fish and wildlife except when necessary to achieve the desired habitat condition.

When selecting plants and designing management for this practice, consider the needs of pollinators and incorporate to the maximum extent practicable.

Consider how land use and habitat in the associated landscape may influence the ability to achieve restoration and management objectives.

Consider adjacent wetlands or water bodies that contribute to the wetland system complexity and diversity, to decrease habitat fragmentation and maximize use by wetland-associated wildlife.

Consider effects on flows or aquifers that would affect other water uses or users.

Consider establishing vegetative buffers on surrounding uplands. Refer to Filter Strip (393), Field Border (386), and/or Conservation Cover (327).

Consider flood impacts or water seepage problems on adjacent non-wetland areas.

Consider the accessibility of the site for installation, management and maintenance. Access to wetlands are especially challenging due to remoteness and wet soil conditions.

Soil disturbance associated with the installation of this practice may increase the potential of invasion or spread of invasive plant species. Use mitigation techniques to prevent or reduce any negative effects.

Maintain dead standing or downed large trees to provide important structure and cover for a diversity of wildlife and to serve as a carbon source for food-chain support.

Artificial nesting structures can be used to increase wildlife reproductive success in areas where natural nest sites are unavailable or unsuitable. Although artificial nesting structures cannot replace natural nesting habitats, they can increase the number of nesting sites available in an area. Refer to [NRCS Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 20, Artificial Nesting Structures](#).

Consider the potential effects of site development and management actions on compliance with state and federal hunting regulations. Example: Federal law prohibits waterfowl hunting if bait is present that could lure or attract birds (i.e. planted millet is considered bait).

Livestock grazing or haying or prescribed burning may be used as management tools to maintain or improve the vegetation structure and plant composition for wetland wildlife habitat. Refer to NRCS practice Prescribed Grazing (528), Prescribed Haying (528), and Prescribed Burning (338).

- Consider effects on nesting success, concealment cover, infiltration/compaction, and damage to sensitive areas such as springs, playas, saturated soils, water edge.
- Refer to [NRCS Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 37, Importance of Disturbance in Habitat Management](#).

Consider if improved wetland wildlife habitat may lead to increased crop depredation by wildlife on adjacent cropland.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

NRCS shall ensure that plans and specifications for this practice are prepared by persons with adequate training in the fields of wildlife management, biology or ecology.

Site specific planning for this practice shall follow the Standard and Specifications, and be recorded using the appropriate, approved job sheet(s). Narrative statements in the conservation plan or other documentation may provide supplemental information.

In addition to conservation plan requirements, the plan shall identify and describe:

- the baseline (pre-treatment) condition,
- the desired natural plant community and/or desired habitat type(s),
- the targeted wildlife species or guild of species (e.g. wading birds), or targeted flora (such as a rare wetland plant),
- the required habitat elements (food, water, cover, etc.) including the amount and distribution of those elements,
- the limiting factors being addressed,  
*Note: remove or reduce limiting factor(s), in their order of significance, as indicated by results of the habitat evaluation.*
- structural and vegetative implementation actions necessary to achieve the goals and objectives,
- management actions necessary to achieve the goals and objectives. Including the method, timing and intensity of each action (i.e. a prescribed grazing plan, water management plan)

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to ensure that this practice functions as intended. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance):

- Habitat conditions shall be evaluated and compared to desired conditions on a regular basis; to be able to quickly adjust the conservation plan and ensure the desired habitat conditions are met. Specify the appropriate timing in the Operation & Maintenance schedule.
- Annually inspect and repair structural or vegetative components of this practice.
- Any adjustments must be made in consultation with the local NRCS conservationist.

## REFERENCES

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. 2006. [Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for New Mexico](#). New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Santa Fe, New Mexico. 526 pp + appendices.

New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council. 1999. New Mexico Rare Plants. Albuquerque, NM: New Mexico Rare Plants Home Page. <http://nmrareplants.unm.edu>

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USDA, NRCS. [National Biology Manual](#). Title 190, Washington, DC.

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USDA, NRCS, Wildlife Habitat Management Institute. 2001. [Wetland Mammals](#). Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 21. Technical Note 190-24