



## Natural Resources Conservation Service

### CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

### BRUSH MANAGEMENT

#### CODE 314

(ac)

#### DEFINITION

The management or removal of woody (nonherbaceous or succulent) plants including those that are invasive and noxious.

#### PURPOSE

This practice is used to accomplish one or more of the following purposes—

- Create the desired plant community consistent with the ecological site or a desired state within the site description
- Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality, or enhance hydrology
- Maintain, modify, or enhance fish and wildlife habitat
- Improve forage accessibility, quality, and quantity for livestock and wildlife
- Manage fuel loads to achieve desired conditions
- Pervasive plant species are controlled to a desired level of treatment that will ultimately contribute to creation or maintenance of an ecological site description “steady state” addressing the need for forage, wildlife habitat, and/or water quality

#### CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands except active cropland where the removal, reduction, or manipulation of woody (nonherbaceous or succulent) plants is desired.

This practice does not apply to removal of woody vegetation by prescribed fire (use Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Prescribed Burning (Code 338)) or removal of woody vegetation to facilitate a land-use change (use CPS Land Clearing (Code 460)).

#### CRITERIA

##### General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Brush management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community based on species composition, structure, density, and canopy (or foliar) cover or height.

Brush management will be applied in a manner to achieve the desired control of the target woody species and protection of desired species. This will be accomplished by mechanical, chemical, burning, or biological methods, either alone or in combination. When prescribed burning is used as a method, CPS Prescribed Burning (Code 338) will also be applied.

When the intent is to manage trees for silvicultural purposes, use CPS Forest Stand Improvement (Code 666).

NRCS will not develop biological or chemical treatment recommendations except for biological control utilizing grazing animals. In such cases, CPS Prescribed Grazing (Code 528) is used to ensure desired results are achieved and maintained. NRCS may provide clients with acceptable biological and/or chemical control references.

In cases where there is insufficient understory vegetation to provide a seed source to result in the desired plant community, use CPS Range Planting (Code 550) or CPS Forage and Biomass Planting (Code 512) to ensure the desired results are achieved and maintained.

Follow-up treatments may be necessary to achieve objectives.

#### **Additional Criteria for Creating the Desired Plant Community Consistent with the Ecological Site**

Use applicable ecological site description (ESD) state and transition models to develop specifications that are ecologically sound and defensible. Treatments must be congruent with dynamics of the ecological site(s) and keyed to state and plant community phases that have the potential and capability to support the desired plant community. If an ESD is not available, base specifications on the best approximation of the desired plant community composition, structure, and function to support resilience.

Additional treatments are planned and will be applied to achieve effective control of pervasive plant species through reapplication.

#### **Additional Criteria for Restoring or Releasing Desired Vegetative Cover to Protect Soils, Control Erosion, Reduce Sediment, Improve Water Quality or Enhance Hydrology**

Choose a method of control that results in the least amount of soil disturbance if soil erosion potential is high and revegetation is slow or uncertain leaving the site vulnerable to long-term exposure to soil loss.

In conjunction with other conservation practices, the number, sequence, and timing of soil-disturbing operations must be managed to maintain soil loss within acceptable levels using approved erosion prediction technology.

#### **Additional Criteria to Maintain, Modify or Enhance Fish and Wildlife Habitat**

Brush management will be planned and applied in a manner to meet the habitat requirements for wildlife species of concern as determined by an approved habitat evaluation procedure.

Conduct treatments during periods of the year that accommodate reproduction and other life-cycle requirements of target wildlife and pollinator species, and in accordance with specifications developed for CPS Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 644) and CPS Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 645).

***Managing for 10-50% aerial cover of low, thick cover (0-10 feet high) will provide breeding habitat for Shrubland Birds and other priority early successional declining species. Shrubby pastures can provide valuable habitat for a number of priority species (e.g. towhee, thrasher, etc.). Maintaining areas of undisturbed cover or limiting or eliminating grazing during peak breeding period will maximize wildlife benefits.***

#### **Additional Criteria to Improve Forage Accessibility, Quality and Quantity for Livestock and Wildlife**

Timing and sequence of brush management must be planned in coordination with specifications developed for CPS Prescribed Grazing (Code 528).

#### **Additional Criteria for Control of Pervasive Plant Species to a Desired Level of Treatment That Will Ultimately Contribute to Creation or Maintenance of an Ecological Site Description "Steady State" Addressing the Need for Forage, Wildlife Habitat, and/or Water Quality**

Additional treatments are planned and will be applied to achieve effective control of pervasive plant species through reapplication.

### **Additional Criteria to Manage Fuel Loads to Achieve Desired Conditions**

Control undesirable woody plants in a manner that creates the desired plant community, including the desired fuel load, to reduce the risk of wildfire, and facilitate the future application of prescribed fire.

### **Additional Criteria for Controlling Invasive Exotic Plants**

*Control of invasive plants may include eradicating, reducing, or managing invasive species populations and preventing their spread. Control also includes restoration of native species and habitats to reduce the effects of invasive species and to prevent further invasions.*

*Preventing the initial establishment of invasive plants should be a major component of any Invasive Plant Species Control Plan. Early detection and control is a more efficient and effective strategy than waiting until an area is infested.*

*Control of noxious or invasive plants may be accomplished by mechanical, chemical, biological, prescribed burning, or a combination of all of these methods.*

*The control method(s) used will be designed to protect the soil from erosion and to avoid the degradation of soil quality.*

*Control methods will be designed to protect and encourage the growth of desirable native plant species.*

*When using chemical control, spot treatment methods will be used whenever feasible.*

*Minimum control is 90% reduction of existing invasive plants on site after application.*

*Areas where control measures have been used may require active re-vegetation methods to reestablish desirable plant species. Vegetative plantings and site preparation will follow the Conservation Practice Standards and vegetative establishment in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide for applicable planting standards such as: Pasture and Hay Planting (512), Tree/Shrub Planting (612), Riparian Forest Buffer (391), Conservation Cover (327), Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats (643), Critical Area Planting (342).*

*Use vegetation adapted to the site conditions that will accomplish the desired purpose. Federal or state listed noxious or invasive plant species shall not be planted.*

*Disposal of noxious or invasive plant species from the site treated will be by appropriate methods (e.g., burned, hung off ground, placed on tarps, bagged, etc.) to lessen the potential for the plants to repopulate the site or spread to new areas. Bagged plants will be properly disposed of off-site. After plants are dead and dried, properly dispose of or remove tarp.*

*Where herbicides will be applied, Vermont Agency of Agriculture certified pesticide applicators with Category 2 – Forest Pests must be used. Plan approval by Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Wetlands Division is required when herbicides will be applied to Vermont State Significant Wetlands which includes Class 1 & 2 wetlands and/or associated buffer zones of 100 or 50 feet respectively.*

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Consider using CPS Integrated Pest Management (Code 595) in support of brush management.

Consider the appropriate time period for treatment. Some brush management activities can be effective when applied within a single year; others may require multiple years of treatment(s) to achieve desired objectives.

Consider impacts and consequences to obligate species (species dependent on the target woody species) when significant changes are planned to existing and adjacent plant communities.

Consider impacts to wildlife food supplies, space, nesting, and cover availability when planning the method and amount of brush management. ***Consider control methods that leave structure in place while still allowing control of the invasive species.***

***Brush management should be applied outside the primary nesting season of April 15-August 1st. Peak breeding for target shrubland birds is mid May through mid July.***

***Consider choosing methods of control that cause no or limited soil disturbance. Disturbed soil may lead to increased germination of invasive plant seeds.***

***Plant material native to the State or local area should be used whenever possible.***

State-issued licenses may be required when using chemical pesticide treatments.

For air quality purposes, consider using chemical methods of brush management that minimize chemical drift and excessive chemical usage, and consider mechanical methods of brush management that minimize the entrainment of particulate matter.

## **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Plans and specifications for the treatment option(s) selected by the decision maker will be recorded for each field or management unit where brush management will be applied.

Prepare brush management plans and specifications that conform to all applicable Federal, State, and local laws. ***Use VT NRCS job sheets or implementation requirements as available. For invasive plant control, use the Vermont NRCS control plan template to develop the Invasive Plant Control Plan.*** These documents will contain the following data as a minimum:

1. Goals and objectives clearly stated.
2. ***Site Description***
3. Pretreatment cover or density of the target plant(s), ***listing of target plants, control strategies and method for the site***, and the planned post-treatment cover or density and desired efficacy. ***Revegetation methods will be included if applicable.***
4. Maps, drawings, and/or narratives detailing or identifying areas to be treated, pattern of treatment (if applicable), and areas that will not be disturbed.
5. A monitoring plan that identifies what should be measured (including timing and frequency) and that documents the changes in the plant community (compare with objectives) will be implemented.

### **Mechanical Treatment Methods**

Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 5, above, plus—

- Types of equipment and any modifications necessary to enable the equipment to adequately complete the job.
- Dates of treatment to best effect control.
- Operating instructions (if applicable).
- Techniques or procedures to be followed.
- ***Cultural Resources review if necessary for uprooting large shrubs or trees.***

### **Chemical Treatment Methods**

***The Invasive Plant Control Plan will be written or reviewed and signed by NRCS or NRCS Partner who is a Certified Pesticide Applicator with Category 2. In addition, include the 314 General Info sheet, applicable Species Info Sheets and Landowner Acknowledgment Form. Following herbicide use, the selected contractor must complete the Contractor Record and Certification Sheet which***

**will be submitted to NRCS. Follow the Vermont NRCS Invasive Plant Control Checklist in development of the Plan and Maps.** Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 5, above under general specifications, plus—

- Acceptable chemical treatment references for containment and management or control of target species.
- Evaluation and interpretation of herbicide risks associated with the selected treatment(s).
- Acceptable dates or plant growth stage at application to best effect control and reduce reinvasion.
- Any special mitigation, timing considerations or other factors (such as soil texture and organic matter content) that must be considered to ensure the safest, most effective application of the herbicide.
- Reference to product label instructions.

### **Biological Treatment Methods**

Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 5, above, plus—

- Acceptable biological treatment references for containment and management or control of target species.
- Kind of grazing animal to be used, if applicable.
- Timing, frequency, duration, and intensity of grazing or browsing.
- Desired degree of grazing or browsing use for effective control of target species.
- Maximum allowable degree of use on desirable nontarget species.
- Special mitigation, precautions, or requirements associated with the selected treatment(s).

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

### **Operation**

Brush management practices must be applied using approved materials and procedures. Operations will comply with all local, State, and Federal laws and ordinances.

Success of the practice shall be determined by evaluating post-treatment regrowth of target species after sufficient time has passed to monitor the situation and gather reliable data. Length of evaluation periods will depend on the woody species being monitored, proximity of propagules (seeds, branches, and roots) to the site, transport mode of seeds (wind or animals), and methods and materials used.

The operator will develop a safety plan for individuals exposed to chemicals, including telephone numbers and addresses of emergency treatment centers and the telephone number for the nearest poison control center. The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) telephone number in Corvallis, Oregon, may also be given for nonemergency information: **1-800-858-7384**, Monday to Friday, 6:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Pacific Time. The national Chemical Transportation Emergency Center (CHEMTRAC) telephone number is **1-800-424-9300**.

- Follow label requirements for mixing/loading setbacks from wells, intermittent streams and rivers, natural or impounded ponds and lakes, and reservoirs.
- Post signs, according to label directions and/or Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, around fields that have been treated. Follow restricted entry intervals.
- Dispose of herbicides and herbicide containers in accordance with label directions and adhere to Federal, State, Tribal, and local regulations.
- Read and follow label directions and maintain appropriate Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). MSDS and pesticide labels may be accessed on the Internet at: <http://www.greenbook.net/>.
- Calibrate application equipment according to recommendations before each seasonal use and with each major chemical and site change.

- Replace worn nozzle tips, cracked hoses, and faulty gauges on spray equipment.
- Maintain records of brush/shrub control for at least 2 years. Herbicide application records shall be in accordance with USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Pesticide Recordkeeping Program and State-specific requirements.

### **Maintenance**

Following initial application, some regrowth, resprouting, or reoccurrence of brush may be expected. Spot treatment of individual plants or areas needing retreatment should be completed as needed while woody vegetation is small and most vulnerable to desired treatment procedures.

Review and update the plan periodically in order to—

- Incorporate new integrated pest management technology.
- Respond to grazing management and complex plant population changes.
- Avoid the development of plant resistance to herbicide chemicals.

### **REFERENCES**

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