



## Natural Resources Conservation Service

### CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

## BRUSH MANAGEMENT

### CODE 314

#### (ac)

#### DEFINITION

The management or removal of woody (non-herbaceous 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. (Degraded Plant Condition)
- Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality, or enhance hydrology. (Degraded Plant Condition)
- Maintain, modify, or enhance fish and wildlife habitat. (Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife)
- Improve forage accessibility, quality, and quantity for livestock and wildlife. (Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife)
- Manage fuel loads to achieve desired conditions. (Degraded Plant Condition)
- 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. (Degraded Plant Condition)

#### CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands except active cropland where the removal, reduction, or manipulation of woody (non-herbaceous 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)). When addressing the identified resource concern requires management or removal of non-woody herbaceous plants, use CPS Herbaceous Weed Treatment (Code 315).

#### CRITERIA

##### General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Brush management will be designed to achieve the objective, identified 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 necessary for establishment 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.

NRCS reviews and periodically updates conservation practice standards. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service State office or visit the Field Office Technical Guide online by going to the NRCS website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/> and type FOTG in the search field.

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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.

When herbicide application is planned to achieve level of target species control necessary for the objective plant community to be established and protected, the NRCS WIN-PST tool must be utilized to assess and provide information on potential water quality surface and groundwater risks.

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. All planned treatments must be components of a complete target species control strategy that will allow establishment or restoration and maintenance of the desired plant community.

**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 target species control strategy 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).

**Additional Criteria to Improve 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.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Consider using CPS Integrated Pest Management (Code 595) in support of brush management. When WIN- PST soil/pesticide interaction reports indicate a potentially significant risk to surface and/or groundwater resources, consider including mitigating practices and pesticide application techniques in the conservation plan. Information on pesticide water quality mitigation practices and techniques is available in NRCS Agronomy Tech Note 5, *Pest Management in the Conservation Planning Process*. Information on mitigation practices and techniques related to potential pollinator impacts is available in NRCS Agronomy Tech Note 9, *Preventing or Mitigating Potential Negative Impacts of Pesticides on Pollinators Using IPM and Other Conservation Practices*.

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.

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. These documents will contain the following data as a minimum:

1. Goals and objectives clearly stated, including targeted species and desired plant community that will be achieved.
2. Pretreatment cover or density of the target plant(s) and the planned post-treatment cover or density and desired efficacy.
3. Maps, drawings, and/or narratives detailing or identifying areas to be treated, pattern of treatment (if applicable), number and frequency of treatments expected to be necessary to achieve the necessary level of target species control, and areas that will not be disturbed.
4. 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 4, 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.

### **Chemical Treatment Methods**

Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 4, above, 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), including NRCS WIN-PST soil/pesticide interaction risk assessment reports.
- 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 4, 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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