

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**PRESCRIBED GRAZING**

(Ac.)

**CODE 528**

**DEFINITION**

Managing the controlled harvest of vegetation with grazing animals.

and economically stable plant communities that meet the land manager's objectives, the grazing animals' needs, and the resource needs.

**PURPOSE**

- Improve or maintain the health and vigor of plant communities.
- Improve or maintain quantity and quality of forage for livestock health and productivity.
- Improve or maintain water quality and quantity.
- Reduce accelerated soil erosion, and maintain or improve soil condition.
- Improve or maintain the quantity and quality of food and/or cover available for wildlife.
- Promote economic stability through grazing land sustainability.

Frequency of defoliations and season of grazing will be based on the rate and physiological condition of plant growth. Climatic conditions, management, soil fertility, and competition are among factors determining forage growth rate. During periods of low moisture or periods of plant stress, frequency of defoliations should decrease. During periods of adequate moisture or fast, vigorous plant growth, defoliations can be more frequent.

Flexibility must be used when managing the kind of animal, animal number, grazing distribution, length of grazing periods, and timing of use to provide sufficient deferment from grazing during the growing period. Protect soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources when locating livestock feeding, handling, and watering facilities.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to all lands where grazing animals are managed.

Manage grazing animals to maintain adequate vegetative cover on sensitive areas (i.e., riparian, wetland, habitats of concern, dunes, karst areas, shallow soils, etc.). Continuous grazing will not be planned on management units where sensitive areas occur and where the following stipulations are not met.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Removal of herbage will be in accordance with site production limitations, rate of plant growth, and the physiological needs of forage plants.

Planning and application will be in accordance with the carrying capacity, and will prescribe the rest period, intensity, frequency, duration, and season of grazing to promote ecologically

Continuous grazing is acceptable under the following conditions:

**Native Grasses**

- When all Range Health Attribute Indicators meet or exceed slight to moderate, and

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service or download it from the electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG).

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- Concentrations or sacrifice areas do not exceed 10 percent of the grazing unit and are not in sensitive areas.

#### **Pastureland**

- When Pasture Condition Score exceeds 30, and
- There are no other resource concerns such as streambank, gully, sheet, or rill erosion.

At least one key grazing area with one or more key forage species will be established for each management unit or for a group of management units with similar topography, soils, grazing duration, and season(s) of use.

#### **Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain the Health and Vigor of Plant Communities**

Duration and intensity of grazing will be based on desired plant health and expected productivity of key forage species to meet management unit objectives.

Adjust grazing periods and/or stocking rates to meet the desired objectives for the plant communities and the associated resources, including the grazing animal.

Schedule livestock movements based on rate of plant growth, available forage and utilization, not calendar dates.

Periodic rest from grazing may be needed to maintain or restore the desired plant community following episodic events, such as wildfire or severe drought.

#### **Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Quantity and Quality of Forage for Livestock Health and Productivity**

Plan grazing to match forage quantity and quality with goals of the livestock producer.

#### **Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Water Quality and Quantity**

Maintain adequate ground cover and plant density to maintain or improve filtering capacity of the vegetation.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas to enhance nutrient distribution and improve or maintain ground cover.

#### **Additional Criteria to Reduce Soil Erosion and Maintain Soil Condition**

Maintain adequate ground cover, litter, and canopy to maintain or improve infiltration and soil condition.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas, trailing, and trampling to reduce soil compaction, excess runoff and erosion.

#### **Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Food and/or Cover for Wildlife Species of Concern**

Manage for diverse plant communities. Manage plant height, structure and density for desired wildlife habitat.

Provide rest from grazing during critical nesting periods.

#### **Additional Criteria to Promote Economic Stability through Grazing Land Sustainability**

Evaluate the economics of the forage system and associated infrastructure.

Develop a grazing system that provides forage for as much of the year as possible to minimize supplemental feed cost.

Develop a contingency plan to ensure resource management and economic feasibility without resource degradation.

Reduce the loss of livestock from toxic and poisonous plants.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Utilization or stubble height target levels are tools that can be used in conjunction with monitoring to help ensure that resource conservation and producer objectives are met.

When needed, rest areas for a period of time to ensure the success of prescribed fire, brush control, seeding, or other conservation practices.

Where practical, start the grazing sequence in a different management unit each growing season.

When weeds are a significant problem, prescribed grazing should be implemented in

conjunction with pest management to protect desired plant communities.

Livestock feeding, handling, and watering facilities should be designed and installed in a manner to improve and/or maintain animal distribution. These facilities should also be designed and installed to minimize stress, the spread of disease, parasites, contact with harmful organisms, and toxic plants.

Supplemental feed and/or mineral requirements should be balanced with the forage consumption to meet the desired nutritional level for the kind and class of grazing livestock.

Prescribed grazing should consider the needs of other enterprises utilizing the same land, such as wildlife and recreational uses.

Consider improving carbon sequestration in biomass and soils through management of grazing to produce the desired results.

### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

The prescribed grazing plan shall conform to all applicable federal, state and local laws. Seek measures to avoid adverse affects to endangered, threatened, and candidate species and their habitats.

Prepare a prescribed grazing plan for all management units where grazing will occur according to state standards and specifications.

Guidelines for developing a prescribed grazing plan include:

- Goals and Objectives clearly stated.
- Resource Inventory (i.e., resource condition, existing structures, facilities, and soil).
- Forage Inventory of the expected forage quality, quantity, and species of forage in

each management unit(s) during the grazing period.

- Forage-Animal Balance developed as a sustainable grazing plan for the management unit(s), which ensures forage produced or available meets forage demand of livestock and/or wildlife of concern.
- Grazing Plan developed for livestock that identifies periods of grazing, rest, and other treatment activities for each management unit.
- Contingency Plan developed that details potential problems (i.e., severe drought and flooding) and serves as a guide for adjusting the grazing prescription to ensure resource management and economic feasibility without resource degradation.
- Monitoring Plan developed with appropriate records to assess whether the grazing strategy is meeting objectives. Identify the key areas and key plants that the manager should evaluate in making grazing management decisions.

### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

**Operation.** Prescribed Grazing will be applied on a continuing basis throughout the occupation period of all grazing units.

Adjustments will be made as needed to ensure that the goals and objectives of the prescribed grazing strategy are met.

**Maintenance.** All facilitating practices (e.g., Fence (382), Pest Management (595), etc.) that are needed to effect adequate grazing distribution as planned by this practice standard will be maintained in good working order.