

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF DECLINING HABITATS**

(Acre)

**CODE 643**

**DEFINITION**

Restoring and conserving rare or declining native vegetated communities and associated wildlife species.

**PURPOSES**

- To restore land or aquatic habitats degraded by human activity.
- To provide habitat for rare and declining wildlife species by restoring and conserving native plant communities.
- To increase native plant community diversity.
- To manage unique or declining native habitats.

Note: NRCS uses the term "wildlife" to include all terrestrial and aquatic wild animals.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On any landscape which once supported or currently supports rare and declining habitat to be restored or managed.

Native plant communities considered rare or declining in Kansas are listed in Appendix B of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Biological Service, Biological Report 28, "Endangered Ecosystems of the United States: A Preliminary Assessment of Loss and Degradation." Four other rare and declining habitats within the state of Kansas, with documented losses of greater than 70 percent since European settlement, have been added to this list. The following list is not considered an all-inclusive listing. Other rare and declining habitats may be recognized and added to this listing in the future. At the present time these communities include:

Tallgrass Prairie  
Riparian Forests  
Large Streams and Rivers  
Sand Prairie  
Sandsage Prairie  
Shortgrass Prairie  
Mixed Grass Prairie

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Follow specifications for this practice for Tallgrass Prairie, Sand Prairie, Sandsage Prairie, Shortgrass Prairie, Mixed Grass Prairie, and Riparian Forests.

Methods used to restore or manage declining habitat will be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.

Management measures that will be utilized to manipulate plant communities or to restore native plant diversity include prescribed burning; mechanical, biological, or chemical methods; or a combination of these measures.

Management measures must be utilized to control invasive species and noxious weeds in order to establish/maintain the desired native plant community and comply with state noxious weed laws.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a "spot" basis to protect native plants that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

Management measures are not to disturb herbaceous cover from May 1 through July 15

(the end of the primary nesting period). Exceptions include periodic grazing and burning that is necessary to maintain the health and plant composition of the declining habitat. Mowing, herbicide applications, and other appropriate weed control measures may be needed during the nesting season to enhance establishment.

Where feasible, prescribed burning will be utilized instead of mowing. Prescribing burning will be conducted according to Conservation Practice Standard 338, Prescribed Burning.

Species will be adapted to soil-site conditions according to Field Office Technical Guide, Section II, "Conservation Tree and Shrub Suitability Groups," "Pasture and Hayland Interpretations," and "Rangeland Interpretations."

Species planted/selected and tree/shrub planting designs will closely resemble the native plant community to the extent technically and fiscally practical.

Only high quality certified, adapted native seed and plant material will be used according to Field Office Technical Guide, Section II, "Conservation Tree and Shrub Suitability Groups," "Pasture and Hayland Interpretations," "Adapted Grass Varieties," and Conservation Practice Standard 612, Tree/Shrub Establishment. No substitution of introduced species can be made.

Planting dates, seeding/planting rates, care and handling of plant materials, and planting requirements will follow requirements in Conservation Practice Standards 550, Range Seeding; 657, Wetland Development or Restoration; and 612, Tree/Shrub Establishment.

Cover crop establishment and site preparation shall be according to Conservation Practice Standards 612, Tree/Shrub Establishment; 657, Wetland Development or Restoration; and 550, Range Seeding, sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

Restoration of wetland communities must also meet the requirements in Conservation Practice Standard 657, Wetland Development or Restoration.

Timing of activities and equipment utilized will be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Management measures may be more beneficial if rotated throughout the restored/managed area.

Confer with specialists from other agencies and organizations who are knowledgeable about native ecosystems to develop guidelines and site specifications for declining habitats.

In many cases, threatened and endangered species or species of concern will benefit from conservation of declining habitats.

When appropriate, light tillage, haying, and grazing will be planned and managed as necessary to achieve and maintain the intended purpose.

All habitat manipulations will be planned and managed according to soil capabilities in order to avoid excessive soil loss.

Harvest of native plant materials from the local area is encouraged when practical.

When seeding small amounts of forb seed, using an appropriate carrier—such as sawdust, vermiculite, or cracked grain—and/or planting forb seed in alternate rows will improve distribution of seed.

Consideration should be given to herbicide carryover, drift, or runoff before planting and/or selecting species.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site/habitat type. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation. Refer to the specifications for this practice for general conditions for some habitat types.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to ensure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include periodic management activities (maintenance) necessary for the application and use of the practice (operation) in order to maintain the desired plant community.

Follow-up habitat assessments will be performed at intervals that assume success of the practice.

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose of this practice.

## **REFERENCES**

U.S. Department of the Interior. National Biological Service. February 1995. Biological Report 18, *Endangered Ecosystems of the United States: A Preliminary Assessment of Loss and Degradation*.