

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

PRESCRIBED GRAZING

(Ac.)

CODE 528

DEFINITION

MANAGING THE CONTROLLED HARVEST OF VEGETATION WITH GRAZING ANIMALS PURPOSES

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to accomplish one or more of the following purposes.

- 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.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

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

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable for all Purposes

Removal of herbage will be in accordance with site production limitations, rate of plant growth, and the physiological needs of forage plants. Proper grazing use will be determined by measuring average residual stubble height or degree of use percentages.

Manage 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.

Manage grazing animals to maintain adequate vegetative cover on sensitive areas (i.e. riparian area, wetland, habitats of concern, etc.).

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, severe drought or excessive moisture.

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. **Sixty percent is the minimum ground cover required** (comprised of living vegetation and litter).

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

Locate livestock concentration areas (working facilities, watering facilities, feeding locations, minerals) away from sensitive areas such as natural water conveyances and areas with a high potential for erosion.

Additional Criteria for Soil Erosion and Condition

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

and soil condition. **Sixty percent is the minimum ground cover required.**

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. For ground nesting birds such as Eastern wild turkey, bobwhite quail, Eastern meadowlarks, and dickcissels this period is from April 15 to July 15.

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 during 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

burning, brush control, seeding or other conservation practices.

When practical, start the grazing sequence in a different management unit each growing season to rest management units during different times each year.

Utilize tools, such as NUTBAL PRO and forage quality testing to balance forage quality with animal requirements in an effort to maintain or improve livestock health and productivity.

When undesirable plants 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.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

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, 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 insure 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, 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 (i.e. Fence, Watering Facilities, Pest Management) that are needed to effect adequate grazing distribution as planned by this practice standard will be maintained in good working order.

REFERENCES

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