

**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.

Lowland Communities

Forests

Cottonwood Floodplain Forest

Herbaceous

Fen

Sandhills Fen

Wet Meadow

Eastern Saline Meadow

Playa Meadow

Vernal Pool

Pond Marsh

Eastern Saline Marsh

Playa Wetland

Upland Communities

Forests

Bur Oak Forest

Southeastern Upland Forest

Mesic Upland Forest

Northeastern Upland Forest

Northern Springbranch Canyon Forest

Western Coniferous Forest

Woodlands

Oak Woodland

Northwestern Canyon Forest

PURPOSE

- Restore land or aquatic habitats degraded by human activity.
- Provide habitat for rare and declining wildlife species by restoring and conserving native plant communities.
- Increase native plant community diversity.
- Management of unique or declining native habitats.

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

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 Nebraska are listed and described in Nebraska Biology Technical Note Number 65 "Imperiled and Critically Imperiled Terrestrial Natural Communities of Nebraska". These communities include:

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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Shrublands

Sandsage Prairie
Silver Sagebrush Shrubland
Greasewood Shrubland

Grasslands

Shortgrass (Mixed and Shortgrass) Prairie
Loess Bluff (Loess Mixed Grass) Prairie
Wheatgrass Basin Prairie
Tallgrass (Upland) Prairie
Wet-mesic (Lowland Tallgrass) Prairie

15 (the end of the primary nesting period). Exceptions include: periodic grazing and burning, 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 NRCS standard Prescribed Burning (338).

- Species will be adapted to soil-site conditions according to 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.

- Seeding/planting will be conducted according to NRCS standard(s) Range Planting (550) or Tree Planting (612).

- Only high quality certified or ecologically adapted native seed and plant material will be used according to Section II Pasture and Hayland Interpretations, "Adapted Grass Varieties" and NRCS standard Tree Planting (612).

- Planting dates, seeding/planting rates, care and handling of plant materials, and planting requirements will follow requirements in NRCS standard(s) Range Planting (550) and Tree Planting (612).

- Cover crop establishment, and site preparation shall be according to NRCS standard(s) Tree Planting (612) and Range Planting (550) sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

- Specifications for Tallgrass Prairies, Loess Mixed Grass Prairies, Mixed and Shortgrass Prairies, Riparian Deciduous Forests, and Upland Deciduous Forests found in (643S) must be followed to meet the following criteria.
- 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 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

- Timing of activities and equipment utilized will be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.
- Appropriate management measures must be utilized in order to maintain/develop the desired plant community.

CONSIDERATIONS

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

Confer with specialists from other agencies and organizations 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.

Follow-up habitat assessments should be performed on a regular basis.

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, an appropriate carrier such as sawdust or cracked grain, and/or planting forb seed in alternate (every other) row 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 Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats specification (643S), for general specifications 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.

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