NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

PRESCRIBED GRAZING
(Ac.)

CODE 528

DEFINITION

Managing the controlled harvest of vegetation with grazing and/or browsing animals.

PURPOSE

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 desires species composition and vigor of plant communities.
- Improve or maintain quantity and quality of forage for grazing and browsing animals' health and productivity.
- Improve or maintain surface and/or subsurface water quality and quantity.
- Improve or maintain riparian and watershed function.
- 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.
- Management of fine fuel load to achieve desired conditions.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to all lands where grazing and/or /browsing animals are managed.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Application of this practice will prescribe the rest period, intensity, frequency, duration and season of grazing to promote ecologically and economically stable plant communities that meet both the land manager's objectives and the resource needs.

All grazing plans shall be designed with flexibility to reduce risk.

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

Refer to the General Specification for:

- Appendix 1 for acceptable degrees of use on grazed range, native pasture,

grazed forestland, and grazed wildlifeland. Table 1 of Appendix 1 lists acceptable use heights on pastureland.

- Appendix 2 for appropriate deferment periods.
- Appendix 3 for Grazed Cropland

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 seasons(s) of use. (Refer to Appendix 1)

Manage kind of animal, number of animals, grazing distribution, utilization, and/or timing of use for maintenance or restoration of desired vegetation.

Manage grazing animals to maintain adequate vegetative cover on sensitive areas (i.e. riparian, wetland, habitats of concern, karst areas). Grazing and/or browsing animal numbers will be managed to insure the degree of utilization of key species on the key area does not exceed a prescribed amount (Refer to Appendix 1 & 3).

Refer to Brush Management (314) Attachment 1 for Biological Management of undesirable woody plants.

For the purposes of this standard, the term “browsing” may be used synonymously for grazing.

Additional Criteria Improve Or Maintain The Desires Species Composition And Vigor Of Plant Communities.

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

Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain Quantity and Quality of Forage for Grazing And Browsing Animals’ Health And Productivity.

Plan grazing to match forage quantity and quality with goals of the livestock producer and productive capability of each grazing unit.

Water will be provided for each grazing unit based on the anticipated peak animal demands for the grazing period and the forage supply. Refer to Watering Facility (614).

Reduce the loss of livestock from toxic and poisonous plants. Plan grazing to avoid toxic plants and to increase plant diversity and abundance.

Additional Criteria to Improve or Surface And/Or Subsurface Water Quality And Quantity

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

Improve Or Maintain Riparian And Watershed Function.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas through grazing management, fencing, alternate water sources, hardened water points, controlled access, supplemental feed placement, and shade or cover manipulation. This is to enhance nutrient distribution and ground cover.

Grazing management strategies must also consider the sensitivity of different riparian areas to disturbance and their resiliency or ability to recover.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Accelerated Soil Erosion, And Maintain Or Improve Soil Condition

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

Design and install livestock feeding and watering facilities in a manner to improve animal distribution. Rotate livestock feeding locations or locate feeding areas in non-sensitive areas.

Additional Criteria to Improve or Maintain The Quantity And Quality Of Food And/Or Cover Available For Wildlife

Manage duration, frequency, kind of animal, or intensity of grazing to produce diverse plant communities with appropriate plant height, structure, diversity, and density for the desired wildlife habitat.

Utilize the kind of animal whose dietary and behavioral traits are compatible with the desired wildlife species of concern.

Identify the species of concern and the habitat component(s) to be managed in the goals and objectives of the grazing plan.

Use short-term heavy grazing to create areas of low-successional plant species that are need for habitat of upland species. These spots are to be well distributed within the grazing unit and are not to compose the majority of the unit, nor create any resource concerns. In subsequent years, manage grazing so that these heavily grazed areas recover.

Provide deferment from grazing on key habitat during critical nesting/fawning periods as needed.

Refer to Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) and Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644) standards for guidance on habitat management.

Additional Criteria to Manage Fine Fuel Loads to Achieve Desired Conditions.

Defer or rest pastures until the required amount of fine fuels are accumulated to achieve the prescribed burn prescription. Refer to Prescribed Burning (338) for fine fuel requirements.

Short-term grazing can be used to remove fine fuels for firebreaks as long as the dimensions of the Firebreak Standard (394) are met. Do not use grazing to remove fine fuel if doing so creates excessive erosion. A rest period to allow recovery of the grazed firebreak shall be planned.

VARIANCES

Any requests for variances are to be submitted to the State Resource Conservationist.

CONSIDERATIONS

The correct stocking rate is the most important consideration in grazing management. No grazing system will improve grazing lands if the stocking rate is too high.

Schedule livestock movements in one-herd multi-pasture grazing systems based on plant physiological stage, available forage, utilization and livestock nutritional needs.

Design grazing systems to minimize livestock losses from storm surges, flooding, and other potential natural disasters.

Utilization or stubble height target levels are tools to use in conjunction with monitoring.

When Grazed Forest has a canopy exceeding 40%, no appreciable amount of grazing can be expected. Managed thinning will extend forage production and improve tree growth.

Grazing during different seasons favors diverse plant communities on grazed range and native grazing land.

When herbaceous weeds are a significant resource problem, prescribed grazing should be implemented in conjunction with pest management to restore desired plant communities.

Handling facilities should be designed, located, and installed to minimize stress, the spread of disease, parasites, contact with harmful organisms, and toxic plants.

Herding can be used as a tool to avoid sensitive areas.

Supplemental feed and/or mineral requirements should be balanced with the forage quality to meet the desired nutritional level for the kind and class of grazing livestock. Forage and/or fecal testing from reputable laboratories are reliable tools to determine these requirements.

Prescribed grazing should consider the needs of other enterprises utilizing the same land. Examples include wildlife and recreational uses.

Surface rock cover of about 30% and/or slopes exceeding 8% can reduce cattle accessibility.

Proper grazing management can improve carbon sequestration in biomass and soils.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

A prescribed grazing plan will be prepared for all grazed management units.

Guidelines for developing a prescribed grazing plan include:

- Goals and Objectives clearly stated.
- Resource Inventory completed (i.e. Resource condition and concerns, existing structures, facilities)
- Forage Inventory of the expected forage quality, quantity and species of forage in each management unit(s) during the grazing period by Ecological Site or Forage Suitability Group.
- Forage-Animal Balance which analyzes forage produced or available meets forage demand of livestock and/or wildlife of concern.
- Grazing Plan: Identifies the periods of grazing, rest, and other treatment activities for each management unit for livestock or domesticated wildlife.
- Contingency Plan that identifies potential problems such as severe drought, wildfires, or flooding. The plan serves as a guide for adjusting the grazing prescription to protect the resource, protect grazing animals, and reduce economic risk.
- Monitoring Plan to measure the success of the grazing strategy. Include the key areas, key plants, and utilization that the manager should evaluate in making grazing management decisions.

Additional guidelines, products, and techniques used for developing grazing plans are found in the National Range and Pasture Handbook and the Nation Conservation Planning Manual.

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. Monitoring data and grazing records will be used on a regular basis within the prescribed grazing plan to insure that objectives are being met, or to make necessary changes in the prescribed grazing plan to meet objectives.

All facilitating practices that are needed to effect adequate grazing distribution will be maintained in good working order. Examples include Watering Facility (614), Fence (382), and Pest Management (595).

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