

## **GUIDELINES FOR CRP OPENINGS FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT**

For Use with 29<sup>th</sup> CRP Signup

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF OPENINGS**

Under CP11, trees already established, the 10-20% in openings will be established by removing pine trees. The openings must be established during the first three years of the new contract, usually during the thinning process. Under CP3, tree planting, openings will be established by not planting pine trees on 10-20% of the area. These openings will be established during the tree planting process.

Openings under both CP3 and CP11 are not to be less than 10% or greater than 20% of the field size (a minimum of 2 acres or a maximum of 5 acres in size for fields of 20 acres and larger). Openings must also have a minimum width of 60 feet to prevent total shading from adjacent trees. The openings may be of various shapes and sizes. However, to optimize wildlife habitat and maintain the value of the timber resources, the openings should be located around the perimeter of the pine stand(s) or in large blocks adjacent to the pine stand(s). For tracts with several fields, the openings may be located within one field or spaced throughout the tract. Multiple openings spaced throughout the tract (instead of 1 large opening in 1 field) will help maximize benefits to wildlife and are strongly recommended. If the location of the openings is rather complex, then the location will be required to be flagged on the ground at the site of the openings. However, if the location of the openings can be discerned from a map, then the locations may be marked on an aerial photo. Since the wildlife openings will have to be manipulated periodically for maintenance, choose areas that are accessible and have the least likelihood of erosion problems (e.g. avoid steepest slopes and streamside management zones).

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF VEGETATIVE COVER IN OPENINGS**

Openings may be established through planting or natural regeneration:

#### (1) Openings established through planting - Cost Share is available.

Open areas must be planted to the equivalent of a CP4D/50-point cover of approved native grasses, legumes, forbs, and shrubs that are best suited for various wildlife species in the area. Therefore a mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of either of the following:

- at least 2 native grasses and at least 2 shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. The 5<sup>th</sup> species may be either a native grass, shrub, forb, or legume suited for wildlife.
- at least 2 shrub species and at least 2 native grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. The 5<sup>th</sup> species may be either a native grass, shrub, forb, or legume suited for wildlife.

Selected species and planting specifications must be recorded as part of the contract's conservation plan. Eligible plant species are listed in Table 1 – CRP Eligible Plants. This list is available from NRCS. **Bermudagrass, fescue, and sericea lespedeza are not acceptable grasses to plant in these openings since they are not desirable for wildlife.**

To increase diversity for wildlife, it is recommended that shrub planting should be done in ¼ acre plots, not to exceed 50% of the openings. Many shrub species provide more suitable wildlife benefits when planted in clumps. The minimum size is a 5-row X 5-row plot planted at the recommended spacing of the particular shrub species selected.

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(2) Openings established through natural regeneration - Cost Share **not** available.

Openings will not have to be planted unless erosion is a problem. In most areas of the state, natural succession will regenerate vegetation consisting of desirable grasses, legumes, forbs, and shrubs. Once the openings are created, suitable vegetation should become established within two years. At this time, a spot check on openings with natural regeneration will be performed to certify that desirable plant species and sufficient (greater than 80%) ground cover are present. It must be determined from this evaluation that there is a mixed stand of either of the following:

- at least 20% coverage in any eligible native grasses and at least 20% coverage in any combination of eligible shrub, forb, and/or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A minimum of 3 cover groups should be represented in the mixed stand.
- at least 20% coverage in any eligible shrub species and at least 20% coverage in any combination of eligible native grass, forb, and/or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A minimum of 3 cover groups should be represented in the mixed stand.

**In very rare cases where desirable vegetation does not regenerate or noxious weeds are the predominant plants, it will be necessary for the participant to plant these areas with eligible species at the participant's expense.**

#### **MAINTENANCE**

To maintain these openings throughout the life of the CRP contract, activities such as prescribed burning, mowing, or herbicide application will be necessary to prevent these openings from becoming established in woody vegetation. Such maintenance activities will also stimulate the production of important wildlife plants and reduce rank vegetative growth. However, mowing results in fewer wildlife benefits than any other maintenance method. Experience has shown that normally there should be some maintenance performed at least once every three years. For best results, the maintenance should **not** be done over the entire area at one time, but should be done on a staggered basis (e.g., one-third of the area each year).

Shrub lespedeza should be mowed and burned every three years. Protect other shrubs and surrounding trees from fire. Where burning is used, the Mississippi Forestry Commission must be contacted to obtain a burning permit. For the other shrubs, forbs, legumes, or native grasses, the competing vegetation around these plants should be controlled by herbicide spraying or mowing.

Measures must be provided to control severe outbreaks of noxious weeds and other invasive species. Spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and other plants that benefit wildlife.

**All maintenance activities will be conducted outside the CRP primary nesting period for wildlife, April 1 through August 15. However, to maximize wildlife nesting success and to promote the growth of desirable plants for wildlife, maintenance activities may be delayed until after October 1.**

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