

Sagebrush Management Issue Brush Management Task Force Recommendations

Participants: Cheryl Grapes, Don Gaddie, Jim Haverkamp, Jay Mar, Karen Clause, Ray Gullion, Paul Obert, Ryan Amundson (WGF), Brian Jensen (WGF), Andi Meyer, Everet Bainter, Gerald Jasmer (Phil Gonzales and George Gamblin provided input previously)

Issue: Reviews by Area and State Staff has determined that the Brush Management (314) practice, for sagebrush control, is frequently applied inconsistent with the practice standard, the conservation planning and implementation process, and with NRCS National policy. Specific concerns include:

- Inconsistent guidance from State and Area technical specialists.
- Practice planning and implementation without adequate on-site evaluation of conditions.
- Treatment of areas with less than 25% canopy cover contrary to the practice specification or no documentation of pre-treatment canopy cover and species composition.
- Treatment of areas without consideration of subsequent weed invasions.
- Prescribed Grazing (528) was not planned, documented, and applied as required by the practice standard.
- Proper protection from grazing (deferment) after treatment was not provided as required by the practice specification guide sheet.
- Lack of Wyoming Game and Fish notification as required by the practice specification guide and NRCS/WGF MOU or apparent disregard for comments provided.

Recommendations:

1. Continue to provide Brush Management TA & FA (not unanimous recommendation).
2. Refine the Brush Management standard to more clearly outline practice criteria and planning requirements and expectations -SRC
3. Revise the Brush Management Specification and job sheet to provide additional brush species specific treatment and documentation requirements - SRC
4. Develop an Economic Assessment of the various forms/scenarios of Brush Management (investigate ECONORANGE – UW Extension per Clause) - Economist
5. Prioritize implementation of WIRL - SRC
 - a. Consider building WIRL so that WGF/BIA can respond back to NRCS electronically (*need to check into confidentiality*)
 - b. WIRL should have two parts, one for resource inventory purposes; a second for communicating planned actions and soliciting comments.

6. Recommend that the following “Brush Management planners” to be given Brush Management design JAA and remove design JAA of all others. – Area Conservationists
 - a. Jim Haverkamp
 - b. Karen Clause
 - c. Ray Gullion
 - d. Ryan Amundson
 - e. Brian Jensen
 - f. George Gamblin
 - g. Andi Meyer
 - h. Everet Bainter
 - i. Paul Obert
 - j. In the future add others who show interest and ability in this area

7. Use the following process for providing TA for Sagebrush Management – All Planners, ACs, and SRC
 - a. At initial FO contact with producer, determine landowners objectives and concerns
 - i. Inform landowner of WGF/BIA role and involvement and secure signature on WY-CPA-5 (if person is only interested in CTA, this step should occur after the initial resource inventory)
 - ii. Provide program practice eligibility information. Generally the management plan will need to be written a year or growing season in advance of signing up for FA
 - b. Conduct resource inventory on, at a minimum, the “pastures(s)” containing the proposed treatment area(s).
 - i. Collect data required by Prescribed Grazing FOTG standard and specification
 - ii. Collect data required by Brush Management (314) FOTG standard and specification
 - iii. Review wildlife use information (WIRL and other sources)
 - iv. If sage grouse habitat is involved, determine season of SG use (in-field and producer/outside info) and quality of habitat
 - v. Consider cumulative impacts due to treatments on surrounding areas in context of the Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Guidelines for Wyoming, July 24, 2007
(<http://gf.state.wy.us/downloads/pdf/FinalHabitatMgmtGuidelines-07-24-07.pdf>)
 - c. Formulate treatment alternatives including grazing management concepts
 - i. Involve local WGF/BIA informally
 - ii. Consider WGF/BIA recommendations
 - d. Brush Management planners review inventory data and alternatives
 - e. Discuss alternatives with producer and choose preferred alternative
 - f. Consult with WGF/BIA formally and include results of discussions with local agency reps
 - g. Respond to WGF/BIA concerns

- h. DC determines if assistance will continue to be provided. Situations where the producer, WGF/BIA, and/or NRCS do not agree on the selected treatment alternative will be referred to the SRC through the AC.
 - i. FO planner or Brush Management planner designs treatment and grazing plans consistent with practice standards and specs. Consider designing multiple acceptable alternatives.
 - j. Brush Management planner reviews design (signs either now or after producer accepts plan)
 - k. FO or Brush Management planner presents plan to producer for approval. Revises plan as needed and reviews changes with Brush Management planner and, if needed, with WGF/BIA (when methods, rates, or timing change or substantial changes in location)
 - l. Implement treatment. Last minute changes must be approved by the Brush Management planner and may need to be reviewed with WGF/BIA when methods, rates, or timing change or substantial changes in location.
 - m. Certify practice implementation (complete as-builts) according to standards and specs.
 - n. Verify compliance with deferment requirement and discuss implementation of grazing plan.
 - o. Follow-up periodically to determine if treatment objectives are reached and O&M is being conducted.
 - p. AC & SRC conduct QA on Brush Management activities utilizing PRS reports, on-going TA to FOs, spot checking, and FO appraisals.
 - q. AO monitors Brush Management planning and application through use of PRS & Protracts data.
8. Provide training for planners (planned for summer of 2008) – SRC and ACs
9. Prioritize revision of the WGF/NRCS MOU - SRC
- a. “survey” local WGF and NRCS folks to determine which practices are a concern or priority for consultation
 - b. Consider adding or deleting practices from the consultation list
 - c. Provide FO training on the revised MOU
10. Work with partners (Colorado NRCS, Phil, Jellison, Karen, others) to develop a habitat assessment tool(s) (may need to be regionalized) for sage grouse. - SRC
11. Supplement Contracting Manual policy (eligible practices section) to require Brush Management design prior to contracting. – ASTC (Programs)
12. Revise the Cost Schedule to reflect that certified applied acres are based on a defined measured project area vs. actual GPS acres treated in the mosaic. – ASTC (Programs)
13. Hold people accountable for following policy - All
14. Re-evaluate how this is working in a year. – SRC and ACs