NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

(Acre)

CODE 645

DEFINITION

Creating, restoring, maintaining or enhancing areas for food, cover, and water for upland wildlife and species which use upland habitat for a portion of their life cycle.

PURPOSE

- Provide a variety of food for the desired kinds of wildlife species.
- Provide a variety of cover types for the desired kinds of wildlife species, examples include nesting, fawning, loafing, resting, escape, travel lanes, and thermal concern.
- Provide drinking water for the desired kinds of wildlife species.
- Arrange habitat elements in proper amounts and locations to benefit desired species.
- Manage the wildlife habitat to achieve a viable wildlife population within the species home range.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all landscapes that are suitable for the kinds of wildlife habitat that are needed within the range of the desired species or the natural community under consideration.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to all Purposes

Identify species management goals and objectives in the management plan.

For the desired kinds of wildlife, specify the type, amount, and distribution of vegetation required and the management condition of each element necessary for survival and reproduction of a sustained population.

Habitat elements for species of special concern (including state sensitive and threatened or endangered species) which have the potential to occur in the planning area will be included in the management plan. No plan shall have an adverse affect on species of special concern.

The landowner shall obtain all necessary local, state, and federal permits that may be required to implement components of the standard.

Habitat Appraisal or Habitat Evaluation:

Wildlife habitat evaluations shall be done using any of the following.

- USFWS Habitat Evaluation Procedure Model (HEP);
- NRCS or other formally developed species specific models;
- State developed wildlife habitat appraisal guide;
- Or, in absence of a suitable model or appraisal guide, provide a narrative description evaluating both benchmark conditions and after practice implementation. Qualitatively describe the conditions of habitat components or wildlife species needs according to related quality criteria ranges and values in Section III of the technical guide. Where available, use of ecological site wildlife interpretations

can assist in identifying native climax vegetative conditions and current seral stage presence and qualitative features.

The evaluation will result in a quality rating or habitat suitability value that will consider the type, amount, and distribution of habitat elements required. The quality rating or rating value will be compared to the quality criteria in Section III of the FOTG.

If the evaluation indicates a level below the acceptable quality, alternatives will be recommended that will result in the necessary changes in habitat elements or their management to bring the rating up to the minimum acceptable level or above.

If the evaluation is at the minimum or above, alternatives will be recommended that will result in the necessary management to preserve or maintain the existing habitat in its present state or to raise the quality of the habitat towards optimum conditions.

The following habitat elements will be evaluated when assessing wildlife habitat. Not all may apply to every habitat type.

1. Food – type and amount
2. Cover – type and amount
3. Water – quality, quantity, accessibility, seasonal availability
4. Spatial diversity of – crops, grasses/ legumes, trees/shrubs, water, open areas, human disturbance factors
5. Migration – routes, season of use, corridors

Consult approprate local or state NRCS, ADF&G, USFWS or other federal agency or tribal authority for details on habitat management or plans for identified species in the project area.

The Conservation Plan will:

1. Designate the location and amount of land managed for upland wildlife.
2. List the species or general kinds of wildlife for which the land is being managed, i.e. songbirds, moose, bears, deer, caribou, upland game birds, fur bearers, neotropical migratory birds, bats, riparian species, tundra species, boreal species etc.
3. List those practices, activities or components necessary to restore, retain, manage, enhance or create sufficient food, water and cover.

Development and Management of Wildlife Habitat:

- As indicated by the wildlife habitat evaluation, certain habitat elements may be weak or missing. Identify types, amount, and distribution of habitat.
- The use of native plant materials shall be encouraged.
- Vegetative manipulations to restore plant and/or animal diversity shall be accomplished by prescribed burning or mechanical, biological or chemical methods, or a combination of the four.
- Where feasible prescribed burning shall be utilized instead of mowing.
- Where livestock grazing or haying occurs, it shall be conducted to maintain or improve vegetation structure and composition so as to improve the desired wildlife habitat.
- Management measures shall be provided to control invasive species and noxious weeds.
- Integrated pest management shall be used when planning for wildlife habitat.
- Biological controls of undesirable plants and pests shall be implemented where feasible and available.
- To protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife and provide insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a "spot" basis. Treatments for weeds and pest will follow the Pest Management Standard No 595.
- When present, state and Federal Threatened and Endangered species habitat concerns will take priority over other wildlife species.

CONSIDERATIONS

Habitat Diversity

The intermixing of plant species and plant communities that provide the upland habitat components will improve habitat diversity. Numerous habitat types in small units provide greater diversity and edge. The amount of diversity providing food or cover is generally correlated with higher wildlife population numbers, especially game species. However, larger blocks of contiguous habitat can be more beneficial to many native songbirds, neotropical migratory birds, and other species of wildlife.

Consider locating the management practice to encompass or abutt existing wetlands, streams, rivers, or other water bodies.

Consider adding structural complexity by placing brushpiles or other natural physical features (e.g. trees, logs, stones, etc.).

Snag creation should be considered where risks to human and forest health are minimal.

Habitat Corridors

Corridors contribute to upland habitat complexity and diversity, these linkages decrease habitat fragmentation, and maximize use of the site at the landscape level by upland wildlife. These are important considerations for large and small migratory species. Consider whether species to be addressed prefer large blocks of habitat rather than edges or ecotones.

Fish and Wildlife

Wildlife population control (such as hunting to reduce numbers) is the responsibility of state and federal wildlife agencies and the landowner and may be necessary to protect and maintain certain habitats.

Practices and management to benefit desired or identified species may impact non-target species.

Plant Communities

For many species native vegetation and the associated plant community may be preferred for food and cover. Many wildlife species prosper in early or mid-seral plant communities before the climax plant community. Others are dependent on late seral communities. Some may use different successional stages for reproduction and feeding. Knowledge of the local plant communities, the plant species in the successional stages, and the associated animals and life history are essential for wildlife management. For example, in woodlands, an appropriate amount of mature timber, snags, and downed logs should remain usable to wildlife.

Consider effects of maintaining early seral stages, over establishing late seral stages. Early seral stage vegetation often requires higher management and maintenance.

Consider short-term mechanical or cultural supplements to plant establishment in order to ensure a healthy and vigorous stand of desired species (e.g. animal damage protection and seedling release).

Domestic Animals

If improperly managed, livestock can have negative impacts on wildlife habitat.

When managed properly, livestock can be used as a management tool in areas where invasive vegetation will out-compete native plant species.

Consider effects of livestock grazing on runoff, infiltration, and soil compaction.

Consider alternatives for excluding livestock from wetland and buffer areas, or other sensitive habitat areas.

Subsistence Use Areas

Consider the impact on traditional users and cultural needs of harvesting plants and animals for subsistence and for ceremonial purposes.

Conservation plans should address subsistence hunting and fishing as an objective where legitimately recognized, as well as how the implementation of this practice will enhance, create or protect this resource.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Plans and specifications shall be recorded using approved job sheets, specification sheets, technical notes, or narrative documentation in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The purpose of operation, maintenance and management is to insure the practice functions as intended over time.

A plan for operation and maintenance of upland wildlife habitat at a minimum shall include monitoring and management of structural and vegetative measures.

Timing of haying, grazing, burning or other disturbance activities will avoid periods when upland wildlife are nesting, fawning, etc. and will allow the establishment and management of upland vegetation for the intended purpose.

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PRACTICE STANDARD APPROVED:

_____ _____

Technical Specialist Date

This practice standard is needed in the _____ Field Office Technical Guide.

_____ _____

Designated Conservationist Date

CERTIFICATION:

Reviewed and determined adequate without need of revision.

_____ _____

Technical Specialist Date

_____ _____

Technical Specialist Date

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Technical Specialist Date

_____ _____

Technical Specialist Date

_____ _____

Technical Specialist Date

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

NRCS, ALASKA

March, 2002