



6200 Jefferson NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87109
Phone: (505) 761-4400 **Fax:** (505) 761-4462
Web site: www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov

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SUBJECT: TCH - 314 Brush Management (Shinnery Control, Tebuthiuron Variance)

TO: Joe Whitehead, District Conservationist, Portales File Code: 450-11
Phillip Carter, District Conservationist, Lovington
Kenneth Walker, Area Conservationist, Clovis

Attached is a Variance to the Lovington and Portales Field Office Technical Guide Brush Management Specification (314). This variance is provided as guidance for the application of tebuthiuron herbicides in the shinnery oak ecosystem. This variance will allow the management of shinnery oak in a manner that improves habitat for the lesser prairie chicken and is benign to the habitat of the sand dune lizard.

Please attach a copy of this variance to all site specific job sheets developed for this practice. All pertinent operations and maintenance practices must be made part of the site specific job sheet as per 314 Brush Management Specifications.

GEORGE CHAVEZ
State Resource Conservationist

314 Brush Management, Lost Draw Supplement

The proposed action is to revise the standard and specifications for Brush Management (Field Office Technical Guide, section IV). The revision is intended to provide criteria for applying Chemical Brush Management (tebuthiuron) in the Shinnery Oak Ecosystem which will result in net benefits to the lesser prairie chicken and a benign outcome for the sand dune lizard. Adherence to these criteria will be mandatory for brush management applications that are federal actions.

This variance provides criteria for applying brush management (314) with tebuthiuron in the shinnery ecosystem in the Lost Draw Watershed of Lea and Roosevelt Counties, New Mexico. The intent of this action is to provide a methodology for the management of shinnery oak that is beneficial to lesser prairie chicken habitat and benign to the sand dune lizard.

The following criteria for brush management apply to the application of tebuthiuron herbicides to shinnery oak in the Lost Draw Watershed :

- No treatment of sand hills ecological sites (dunes)
- 100 feet non-treated buffer around sand hills ecological sites
- Use 0.5-0.75 pounds of active ingredient as allowed by the New Mexico supplemental label for wildlife habitat
- Provide connectivity among dune complexes by retaining 100 foot swaths of untreated shinnery oak occupied flats (deep sand, sandy plains, shallow sandy ecological sites) to connect dunes complexes that are 2,000 meters or less apart.
- Timing: critical time periods such as the breeding and nesting seasons will be avoided. No application between March 1 and July 1.
- Amount: 50 percent or less of the suitable habitat within 2 miles of an active lek will be treated during a two year period. This will reduce the impacts on forb production, loss of winter forage resources, and risk and uncertainty due to climatic factors.
- Grazing deferral to achieve plant community and cover goals.

Additional considerations (items to be considered during planning but that are not required)

- Follow up grazing management plan to maintain a mosaic of habitats (nesting, brood rearing, fall and winter).

- Once grasses are re-established consider re-introducing fire into the ecosystem to maintain a balance between shrubs and grasses.

NRCS technical guides are dynamic documents. As research information becomes available that provides for better techniques of lesser prairie chicken habitat restoration these findings can be incorporated into the Field Office Technical Guide.