UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

# RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RARE OR DECLINING HABITATS

**(Acre)**

**Code 643**

## DEFINITION

Restoring, conserving, and managing unique or diminishing native terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

## PURPOSE

To return aquatic or terrestrial ecosystems to their original or usable and functioning condition and to improve biodiversity by providing and maintaining habitat for fish and wildlife species associated with the ecosystem.

## CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

Sites or areas that once supported or currently support a unique, dwindling, or imperiled native plant and animal community.

## CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any landscape which once supported or currently supports the habitat to be restored or managed.

## CRITERIA

***General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes***

All necessary local, state, and federal permits shall be obtained by the landowner (or designee) prior to the restoration.

Methods used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion and compaction.

Invasive plant and animal species and noxious weeds shall be controlled. When possible, control will be limited to that necessary to control undesirable species while still protecting habitat that benefit native pollinators and other fish and wildlife species that depend on the site for food, cover, and water.

Undisturbed areas shall be conserved on a sufficient extent of the area to sustain disturbance-intolerant species.

Plant species and seeding rate specifications will be prepared to achieve desired habitat condition.

Only high quality and ecologically adapted plant materials will be used. When feasible, only local ecotypes will be used.

Site preparation, planting dates and methods, and plant material care and handling shall optimize vegetation survival and growth.

A pretreatment assessment of the targeted habitat will be documented to provide a baseline for comparison with post-treatment habitat conditions. Goals or success criteria will be established using reference sites for guidance and comparison. Where no such reference site exists, use ecological site description or historic data to establish restoration goals.

Use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose of this practice

## CONSIDERATIONS

Confer with other agencies and organizations to develop guidelines and specifications to conserve declining habitats.

Vegetative manipulations to restore plant and/or animal diversity can be accomplished by prescribed burning or mechanical, biological or chemical methods, or a combination of the four. Where prescribed burning is conducted it shall follow all guidelines delineated in the Alabama NRCS conservation practice standard, Prescribed Burning - Code 338.

Consider how land use and habitat in the associated landscape may influence the ability to achieve restoration and management objectives.

Consider the likelihood of being able to maintain or establish important ecological disturbances such as burning, flooding or grazing.

Consider how the short and long term effects of climate change may influence the ability to achieve restoration and management objectives.

Generally, the size of the restored or managed habitat should be large enough to support populations of all species associated with the targeted habitat.

Other Alabama NRCS conservation practice standards that will facilitate the restoration and management of rare and declining habitats include:

Access Control – Code 472

Fence – Code 382

Prescribed Burning – Code 338

Tree and Shrub Establishment – Code 612

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets and job sheets. Narrative statements in the conservation plan or other acceptable documentation may provide supplemental information to the specifications and job sheets.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Haying, grazing, prescribed burning, forest stand improvement, and other management activities will be planned and managed (including access control) as necessary to achieve and maintain the intended purpose.

Vegetation management and maintenance activities shall not be conducted during critical life stages of fish and wildlife except when necessary to achieve the desired habitat condition.

Habitat conditions should be evaluated and compared to reference conditions on a regular basis to adapt the conservation plan and schedule maintenance to ensure the desired habitat condition.

Management and maintenance activities should be rotated to mimic natural disturbance regimes.

## REFERENCES

Barbour, M.G., and W. D. Billings (eds.). 2000. North American Terrestrial Vegetation. Cambridge University Press, New York, Second Edition.

Kuchler, A.W. 1964 Potential Natural Vegetation of the Conterminous United States. American Geography Society, Special Publication 36. Second edition (revised), 1975.

Noss, R.F., E.T. LaRoe III, and J.M. Scott. 1995. Endangered ecosystems of the United States: a preliminary assessment of loss and degradation. Biological Report 28; National Biological Service, Washington, D.C.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office, or download it from the electronic Field Office Technical Guide.