

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE SPECIFICATIONS**

**EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT
(acre)
CODE 647**

SCOPE

The work will develop and maintain plants in specially selected areas in early stages of plant succession. Methods used may be mechanical or chemical or biological or combinations of these.

CRITERIA

Used alone or in combination with other techniques, mechanical methods (prescribed burning, light disking, mowing, grazing, or a combination of the above) can successfully manipulate successional stages of habitat.

Light disking (2-4" deep) of existing stands may be necessary to increase the amount of open ground and encourage a diverse plant community of annual and perennial plants. Disk between October 1 and April 30. Alternate disked strips (less than or equal to 75' wide) with buffer strips (2 times the disked width) across the field on contour/cross-slope. Rotate the disked strips across the field.

Use Prescribed Grazing (528) to manipulate plant succession, reduce ground litter, and provide dusting areas. Livestock can be beneficial to maintaining the quality of herbaceous cover and controlling invasive plants when managed in accordance with a grazing plan with wildlife habitat management as the primary objective. This technique requires careful management to assure the site is not over-grazed.

Use Prescribed Burning (338) to remove excess litter, which can reduce the quality of wildlife habitat. Controlled fire can allow germination of seed bearing annuals, increase plant species

diversity, control unwanted woody cover, and open up the stand for movement of small animals and birds.

Use selective herbicides to manipulate plant succession and improve habitat diversity. Care in planning and application is required in the use of chemicals to improve existing habitat. Selection of a product should be based on several factors including product effectiveness, non-target species impacts, toxicological risks, and off-site movement of chemicals. See Pest Management (595) to determine a risk assessment.

Annual mowing or mowing of entire stands is discouraged since it greatly decreases plant diversity and reduces residual cover available for the following nesting season. If mowing is necessary, two options are available. Mow between July 15 and August 15 to protect ground nesting wildlife and to allow residual growth. Mow no more than one-third of the field and rotate mowed strips across the field. Mow cool season grasses no shorter than 6 inches.

Native warm season grasses should be mowed no shorter than 10 inches.

A second option for mowing would be to strip mow in the spring. Mowing between March 15 and May 1 will be most compatible with wildlife without greatly impacting ground nesting activities or loss of fall food plants. Mow no more than one-third of the field every year. Rotate mowed strips across the field every year.

If mowing is used as a habitat management practice, thoroughly shred residues to prevent

excess litter accumulation.

This practice should be applied periodically to maintain the desired early successional plant community. Vegetative manipulation must be done at least once every three years, or more frequently if the site requires treatment as recommended by an NRCS or Arkansas Game & Fish Commission biologist.

Native adapted plant materials will be encouraged through succession whenever possible, but some introduced species may provide adequate value depending upon habitat objectives.

Management practices and activities are not to disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species (May 1 – July 15). Exceptions will be allowed during this for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the plant establishment period to control undesirable plants.

REFERENCES

1. “Early Successional Habitat

Development/Management,” Conservation Practice Standard and Specifications 647, NRCS, Missouri.

2. In Ecological Sciences Reference Guide – Vol. 1 – Pond Management, Wildlife Habitat Management, Streambank Restoration, NRCS, Arkansas:
 - “Filter Strips as Wildlife Habitat”
 - “Forest Openings for Wildlife Management”
 - “Hedgerow Plantings for Wildlife”
 - Managing Pastures and Haylands for Wildlife”
 - “Native Perennial Warm Season Grass Establishment and Management”
 - “Prescribed Burning for Wildlife”
 - “Strip Mowing and Strip Disking for Wildlife Habitat”
3. “Pest Management,” Conservation Practice Standard and Specifications 595, NRCS, Arkansas, May 2002.
4. “Prescribed Burning,” Conservation Practice Standard and Specifications 338, NRCS, Arkansas, May 2002.
5. “Prescribed Grazing,” Conservation Practice Standard and Specifications 528A, NRCS, Arkansas, June 1997.