

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

RECREATION AREA IMPROVEMENT
(Acre)
CODE 562

DEFINITION

Establishing grasses, legumes, vines, shrubs, trees, or other plants or selectively reducing stand density and trimming woody plants to improve an area for recreation.

PURPOSES

To increase the attractiveness and usefulness of recreation areas and to protect the soil and plant resources.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any area planned for recreation use.

CRITERIA

Establishment

Criteria: Important landscape design principles which are involved in various recreational plantings consist of plant height, spread, texture, color of flower, leaf and stem in all seasons, and general habit.

Plant Species: Preference is generally given to native plants in most rural settings. However, in heavily used urban developments, exotic plants may better adapt to certain situations. Plant hardiness and soil suitability become determining factors in their choice. Species recommendations are contained in the Vegetative Guide of the Field Office Technical Guide.

Plant Spacing: Plants shall be spaced according to the planting plan or specifications. Spacing is determined by many factors such as plant height, spread, habit, effect desired, etc.

Planting Methods, Time of Planting, etc., will follow Standard and Specification for Tree/Shrub Establishment – 612.

Pruning

Pruning will follow Standard and Specification for Tree/Shrub Pruning – 660A.

Limbs overhang trails, paths, and roadways will be pruned to a height of 8 - 12 feet to facilitate movement of people, vehicles, and livestock.

Remove dead, broken, diseased, or insect infested branches.

When limbs are removed which are not directly attached to the trunk, cuts will always be made near a union or crotch of another branch.

Remove branches, which cross or are detrimental to the shape and appearance of the plant.

When pruning shrubs - In order to retain flower buds in early blooming shrubs such as garland spirea, prune shortly after flowering. On shrubs with colored twigs, remove about one-third of the older wood every year to retain maximum coloration. Remove old flowers of shrubs such as lilac, rhododendron, hibiscus and magnolia to maintain optimum flowering for the next season.

Thinning and Removal

Remove trees which are a hazard to users of the area such as those which are seriously defective or in danger of windthrow.

Remove stumps and debris and fill stump holes to the natural grade or grind stumps.

CONSIDERATIONS

Planning

When pruning is done to enhance an area by providing vegetative contrast or to screen contrasts determine if:

- The pruning will enhance the area by opening up vistas or screen out undesirable views;
- It will allow the addition of species in the plant community which will provide unique form, color, or texture to an area.

When pruning is accomplished for safety along trails, roads, and paths the following should be considered:

- Will the plant be subject to sun scald;
- Are there species present which require shade to exist;
- What will be the visual impacts of the limbs if scattered, or should they be removed or chipped?

What will be the vegetative response of the tree being pruned, i.e., will it sucker from the base or send out many new limbs from latent buds?

Trees and shrubs should be spaced to meet the needs of the area. In areas of dense shade or poor ventilation, remove trees to decrease shade and increase air circulation.

Remove trees to provide adequate space for trails, toilets, picnic tables, fireplaces, etc. Retain vegetation specimens, which have a unique appearance or beauty and are in a protected position.

Favor the retention of thrifty, deep-rooted trees, which are resistant to abrasion and traffic damage.

The prime consideration of recreational pruning is the controlled maintenance of the natural habit or characteristics of each plant. The exception to this is when clipped hedges etc., are used for some special location or purpose.

In general, from the standpoint of plant growth, pruning can be done at practically any time of the year. However, consideration must be given to factors of food supply, flowering period, and winter hardiness. Foliage is necessary for photosynthesis and the pruning of new growth in the spring can be detrimental to subsequent growth and the general condition of the plant. In some instances late summer pruning may promote new growth which will not harden off sufficiently before freezing weather. Also, food reserves will be removed. With most plants, the ideal time to prune is during the dormant season prior to the beginning of new growth. Early flowering shrubs

should be pruned shortly after flowering to maintain flower buds for the following season.

Water Quantity

Area improvement resulting from planting vegetation may decrease runoff through retarded flows providing the opportunity for infiltration. Where increased infiltration exceeds increase evapotranspiration, deep percolation may occur.

Area improvement resulting from thinning and removal of unwanted vegetation may have minor impact on runoff.

The improvement of recreation area may have minor impact on ground water quantity. Any impact should be an increase in ground water quantity. Increases in infiltrated runoff may be generally offset by additional consumptive use of established vegetation.

1. Effects on the water budget, especially on volumes and rates of runoff, infiltration, and transpiration.

Water Quality

The long-term effect of recreation improvement may be a reduction of sediment in surface water. Short-term sediment increases may be noted during and immediately after construction due to disturbing the soil surface. Surface water quality may be degraded in both the long and short term by an increase in chemicals in the form of fertilizers and pesticides used to establish or control vegetation. Surface water quality may also be degraded by organic waste, fuels, and other chemicals associated with recreation activity. Minor amounts of soluble chemicals such as nutrients and pesticides may percolate below the root zone when precipitation exceeds transpiration and root zone storage.

1. Effects of erosion and the movement of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment-attached substances that could be carried by runoff. Important factors are short-term changes caused by construction (sediments, fuels, oils, and other chemicals) compared to long-term changes caused by the same substances resulting from recreation activities.
2. Effects of changes in ground water from infiltrating soluble substances associated with vegetation management and recreation activities.

Endangered Species Considerations

Determine if installation of this practice with any others proposed will have any effect on any federal or state listed Rare, Threatened or Endangered species or their habitat. NRCS's objective is to benefit these species and others of concern or at least not have any adverse effect on a listed species.

If the Environmental Evaluation indicates the action may adversely affect a listed species or result in adverse modification of habitat of listed species which has been determined to be critical habitat, NRCS will advise the land user of the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and recommend alternative conservation treatments that avoid the adverse effects. Further assistance will be provided only if the landowner selects one of the alternative conservation treatments for installation; or at the request of the landowners, NRCS may initiate consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service and/or California Department of Fish and Game. If the Environmental Evaluation indicates the action will not affect a listed species or result in adverse modification of critical habitat, consultation generally will not apply and usually would not be initiated. Document any special considerations for endangered species in the Practice Requirements Worksheet.

Some species are year-round residents in some streams, such as, freshwater shrimp. Other species, such as steelhead and salmon, utilize streams during various seasons. Be aware that critical periods, such as spawning, eggs in gravels, and rearing of young may preclude activities in the stream that may directly affect the stream habitat during those periods. For example there should be no disturbance of stream gravel beds that may have eggs in them. That could include any equipment in the stream or even walking in the stream or work upstream that may result in sediment depositing in the gravel beds. Document any special considerations for endangered species in the Practice Requirements Worksheet.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for improving recreation area shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose.

Plans (drawings) shall be prepared indicating the work to be accomplished. Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared using approved practice specifications, job sheets, and narrative statement

which will include treatments, plant materials, and maintenance measures for each type of recreation area.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance plan must be prepared by the designer for use by the owner or other responsible for operating this practice. The plan should provide specific instructions for operating and maintaining the system to insure that it functions properly. It should also provide for periodic inspections and prompt repair or replacement of damage components.