

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 or used for recreation use.

CRITERIA

Establishment

Criteria: Important landscape design elements that are involved in various recreational plantings consist of plant height, spread, texture, color of flower, leaf and stem in all seasons, and general habit. This would also include root characteristics, wildlife habitat values, maintenance requirements, and fire hazard.

Plant Species: Preference should be given to native plants in most settings. However, in heavily used areas or where special characteristics are desirable non-native plants may better adapt to local situations. Plant hardiness and soil suitability are plant selection factors. Species recommendations for local use 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 including plant height, spread, habit, effect desired, etc.

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

Establishment – Standard 612 or Critical Area Treatment – Standard 342.

Pruning

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

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.

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 that are a hazard to users of the area. Hazard trees are those which are seriously defective, diseased, or in danger of windthrow or toppling.

Remove stumps and debris and fill stump holes to the natural grade. Stumps and debris may be utilized as a source for mulch or may be stacked and used for wildlife habitat enhancement if site conditions permit.

CONSIDERATIONS

Planning

The primary consideration of pruning recreational pruning is the 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.

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. 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.

The pruning, thinning and removal should be accomplished with consideration to personnel safety factors such as lighting access to entries and exits, visibility, etc.

When pruning is being considered to visually enhance an area determine if:

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

When pruning is being considered consider: Will the plant be subject to sun or wind damage;

- If the plant will be subject to sun or wind damage;
- If there are desirable species present which require shade to exist;
- How will the pruning debris be properly disposed of?

Consider 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 or thinned 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 specimen types, which have a unique appearance or beauty and are in a protected location.

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

Cultural Resources Considerations

Determine if installation of this practice with any others proposed will have any effect on any cultural resources. NRCS's objective is to avoid any effect to cultural resources and protect them in their original location. GM 420, Part 401, the California Environmental Handbook and the training for the California Environmental Assessment Worksheet specify how the NRCS must account for cultural resources. The Field Office Technical Guide, Section II contains general information, with Web sites for additional information, about cultural resources. The Environmental Handbook is online at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/rts/rts.html.

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.

Water Quantity

Increasing vegetative cover by planting new vegetation may decrease runoff and increase infiltration. Where infiltration exceeds evapotranspiration, deep percolation below the root zone may occur.

Decreasing vegetative cover by thinning and/or removal of unwanted vegetation may increase runoff. The increased runoff will decrease over time as the vegetative cover increases.

This practice may result in a minor increase in ground water quantity. However, the increases in the amounts of ground water may be offset by increased water use by the vegetation.

Water Quality

The long-term effect of applying the practice may be a reduction of sediment in surface water. Short-term sediment increases may be noted during and immediately after vegetation establishment due to disturbing the soil surface and preparing the seedbed. 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.

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 a narrative description of prescribed 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 parties responsible for this practice. The plan should provide specific instructions to insure that the prescribed practices function properly. It should also include for periodic inspections and prompt repair or replacement of damaged components.

REFERENCES