

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF DECLINING HABITATS

(Acre)

CODE 643**DEFINITION**

Restoring and conserving rare or declining native vegetated communities and associated wildlife species.

PURPOSES

- Restore upland, wetland, or aquatic habitats degraded by human activity.
- Provide habitat for rare or declining wildlife species by restoring and conserving native plant communities.
- Increase native plant community diversity.
- Manage and conserve unique or declining native habitats.

Note: NRCS uses the term “wildlife” to include all animals, both terrestrial and aquatic.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any landscape which once supported or currently supports the plant communities or habitats to be restored or conserved and managed.

CRITERIA**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

- Methods used will be designed to protect against erosion, prevent degradation of water quality, protect existing viable wildlife populations, and ensure the health and safety of people.
- 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.

- Management measures must be provided to control invasive species and noxious weeds in order to aid in the establishment of desirable species and to comply with state noxious weed laws.
- To benefit desirable insect populations, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.
- All activities will be scheduled to minimize impact to the priority wildlife species including aquatic insects, amphibians, birds, and fish.
- Management practices and activities are not to disturb cover during the primary nesting period for local and migratory birds. Exceptions could be granted for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community.
- Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to control weeds.
- Rotate periodic planned management or other treatments throughout the restored/managed area so that activities do not adversely impact the entire area at any one time.
- Where feasible prescribed burning will be utilized instead of mowing.
- Plant species will be adapted to soil and other site conditions.
- Plant species will be those suitable for the planned purpose(s).
- Seeding rates will be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose(s).
- Only certified, high quality and ecologically adapted native seed and plant material will be used.

- The proper handling and planting of the seed or plant material, including planting depth, will ensure that established vegetation will have an acceptable rate of survival.
- Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.
- Planting dates shall be selected to maximize survival of plant material and the use of equipment will be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

Examples of Declining Habitats

Following is a list of some declining habitats in California. As a whole, some habitats may be more common in California but are declining locally or regionally. This practice can be used for restoring or improving those habitats. Some declining habitats are: valley needlegrass grassland, valley sacaton grassland, coastal prairie, vernal pools, montane meadows, wetlands, coastal scrub, coastal sage scrub, valley sink scrub, valley saltbush scrub, desert saltbush scrub, riparian forest, valley oak riparian forest, sycamore riparian forest, valley oak woodland, Oregon white oak woodland, coast live, and blue oak woodlands.

CONSIDERATIONS

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

In many cases threatened and endangered species or other species of concern will benefit from the conservation of declining habitats. Follow-up habitat assessments shall be performed on a regular basis.

Haying and grazing will be planned and managed as necessary to achieve and maintain the intended purpose.

All habitat manipulations will be planned and managed according to soil capabilities and all activities will avoid excessive soil loss.

It may be necessary to limit the recreational or other access to the site during establishment or other critical periods dictated by the species.

Plant materials centers and commercial growers should be encouraged to develop plant materials for habitat restorations.

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' 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.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each habitat type. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, Practice Requirements Sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance).

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and/or other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose of this practice.