

Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644E), Cropland – Habitat Ponds

644E – Specification

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Definition

This practice creates shallow aquatic habitat in areas that used to be irrigated cropland and provide habitat for waterbirds, amphibians, and aquatic reptiles. These shallow ponds may be anywhere in a system of irrigated fields but are typically placed in rice fields where there are cold water inputs. Rice fields that are flooded but not planted provide shallow open water areas for brood rearing. Ponds with sparse vegetation and areas of shallow depths less than 4 inches will benefit shorebirds. Deeper water depths with additional vegetation provides valuable brood habitat for breeding waterfowl and waders.

Requirements

- (1) The pond must not be planted, harvested, or sprayed.
- (2) Pond must be large enough to be successfully avoided during seeding of adjacent fields.
- (3) Minimum size will be 2 acres with a minimum width of 75 feet on any side.
- (4) Ponds will remain in place undisturbed for at least 12 months to include at least one breeding season.
- (5) Ponds will be managed for water depths at least 2 inches.
- (6) Ponds will have least 50% open water in the spring. This may require some tillage or hand removal of vegetation in the early spring.
- (7) Exclude livestock from shallow water areas and associated levees.



Planning considerations

- Ponds are constructed in the fall post-harvest and do not need separate water level management than the entire system of checks; ponds receive water when irrigation and decomposition water are applied.
- Nesting/loafing islands can be placed within habitat ponds as long as the requirements for nesting islands are met (see 644F Specification).
- Tillage implements should be selected to result in a relatively smooth surface prior to flood-up.
- It is important that water depth remain the same throughout the nesting season in areas managed as brood ponds. This will prevent inadvertent flooding of nests.
- The pond can be drawn down when the adjacent rice fields are drawn down in late summer before harvest. This will provide an opportunity to manage cattail and other emergent vegetation as well as levee and water control structure maintenance.

Operation and Maintenance

- Implementation of this practice will include a plan for monitoring and maintenance of structural, hydrologic, and vegetative measures. Emergent vegetation will be managed in the fall prior to flooding to ensure at least 50% open water in the pond in the spring.