

Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644F), Cropland – Temporary Nesting Islands

644F – Specification

Aug., 2015

Definition

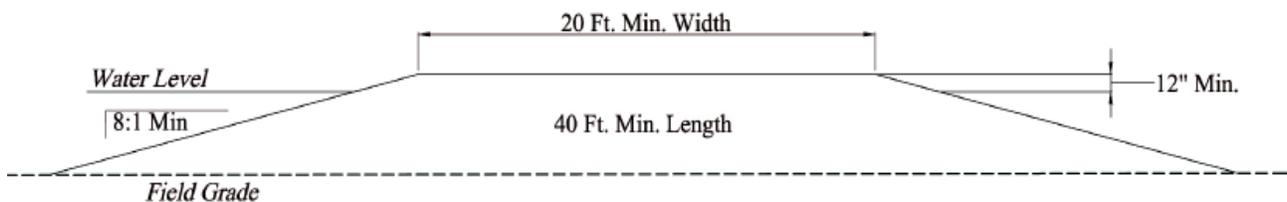
Nesting/loafing islands increase availability of nesting habitat for waterbirds during the nesting season (March–July). They can be placed within flooded agricultural fields or habitat ponds (644E). Species that nest on the ground are particularly susceptible to predation and the islands may provide some protection. Non-vegetated areas on islands may be used by breeding shorebirds while vegetated areas are preferred by most waterfowl species.

Requirements

- (1) Islands will be a minimum of 800 sq ft above the waterline. Exact configuration for an island can vary but shall be a minimum of 20 ft in width. Example: If width is 20 ft, the length would be 40 ft to meet the minimum area above waterline.
- (2) Slopes will be 8:1 or flatter.
- (3) Maintain one foot freeboard above spring water depth.
- (4) Islands shall be no closer than 50 feet from any bank or rice check levee.
- (5) Islands will be maintained for at least 12 months and shall be free from disturbance from March–July when nesting or loafing waterfowl and shorebirds may be using these islands.
- (6) If noxious or invasive plant control methods must occur between March and July, conduct a nest search. If nests occur contact a NRCS biologist.



Typical Nesting/Loafing Island
Cross Section
Not to Scale



Planning considerations

- Mowing or spraying prior to March 1st will create more bare ground area that will make these islands more suitable for nesting shorebirds.
- Islands mowed in the late fall to a height of 4 inches will provide suitable loafing areas for waterfowl and shorebirds during winter.
- Mowing in the late fall also gives sufficient time for new grass to reach a minimum 16 inches for safe waterfowl nesting habitat.
- Elliptical shaped islands reduce wind induced erosion
- Equipment width may be the biggest limiting factor on determining island size. Construction can be achieved with several types of equipment including a scrapper, dozer or motor grader.
- Constructing islands with sufficient moisture is necessary to maintain the structural integrity of the islands. Islands that settle or erode through overtopping during flood events may not provide one foot freeboard or minimum size of 800 sqft. At the time of construction the soil should contain sufficient moisture so that the soil will maintain a ball shape when squeezed in the hand.
- Sunken blinds are permitted on islands but require additional size of square footage to offset the footprint of a maximum area equal to a four man sunken blind.
- Consider the timing and type of pesticides and fertilizers applied to areas around islands. Avoid use of toxic chemicals during the nesting season (March–July).

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.



Island managed for nesting ducks.



Nesting island in a rice field in early spring.
