

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT

(Acre)

CODE 647



DEFINITION

Manage plant succession to develop and maintain early successional habitat to benefit desired wildlife and/or natural communities.

PURPOSE

To provide habitat for species requiring early successional habitat for all or part of their life cycle.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands that are suitable for the kinds of desired wildlife and plant species.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Design management of early successional habitat to achieve the desired plant community in density, vertical and horizontal structure, and plant species diversity.

Where planting is required, encourage the establishment of native plant species over introduced species. Introduced sod-forming grasses (e.g., bahiagrass, bermudagrass, etc.) are not permitted as a component of this conservation practice standard.

Site preparation, planting dates, and planting methods shall optimize survival.

Do not use prohibited/noxious weeds or Category

I invasive plant species, as listed by the [Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council](#) (see Florida FOTG Sect. I (f) (4)). Provide management measures to control invasive species and noxious weeds and comply with state laws.

Use herbicides according to label instructions and only for habitat reclamation or control of noxious or invasive plants. If pesticides are used, refer to [Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Integrated Pest Management, Code 595](#), as appropriate. Pesticide Screening Tool (WinPST) shall be used to assess risks, and appropriate mitigation to reduce known risks shall be employed.

To minimize impacts on pollinators, insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, and other wildlife, control of noxious weeds in a targeted manner through the use of spot spraying, mechanical or hand wick applicators, or other approved methods.

Minimize soil disturbance in natural communities where soil integrity is essential such as on steep slopes, on highly erodible soil, or where establishment of invasive species is likely. Use methods designed to maintain soil erosion quality criteria. Plan and manage all habitat manipulations according to soil capabilities and avoid recommendations that promote excessive soil loss. Follow topographical contours where soil erosion concerns exist.

When grazing is used as a management tool, a prescribed grazing plan, developed to specifically meet the intent and objective(s) of this practice standard, is required.

Time management operations to minimize negative impacts to wildlife. Particularly, restrict habitat disturbance(s) during critical periods for wildlife (e.g., wildlife nesting, brood rearing, fawning or calving seasons).

Protect at least 20% of ground nesting habitat

from management activities when conducted within 30 days prior to or during the prime ground nesting period (i.e., March 1st to July 15th). Exceptions are allowed for periodic burning or other mechanical treatments when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community and to allow plant establishment. Refer to [Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Guidance Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 645](#), for more information on the primary nesting period for early successional bird species.

Impact to cultural resources, wetlands, and Federal and State protected species need to be avoided or minimized to the extent practical during planning, design, and implementation of this conservation practice in accordance with established National and Florida NRCS policy as stated in the General Manual (GM) Title 420-Part 401, Title 450-Part 401, and Title 190-Parts 410.22 and 410.26; National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) FL Supplements to Parts 600.1 and 600.6; National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook (NCRPH); and Subpart F of The National Environmental Compliance Handbook (NECH).

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider the specific needs of each wildlife species or suite of species when considering management options. Management for one species may or may not be beneficial to other grassland dependent species.

Managing for early successional plant communities is beneficial, if not essential, for less mobile animal species (e.g., gopher tortoise). For less mobile species, it is more important to provide all the habitat requirements in a small area.

This practice may promote the conservation of declining species, including threatened and endangered (plant, wildlife or aquatic) species.

Manage vegetation to maintain, enhance, or create early successional habitat and maximize plant and animal diversity through the following practices, but not limited to:

- light disking,
- mowing,
- roller chopping,
- chipping,
- web-plow,

- herbicides,
- prescribed grazing,
- prescribed burning,
- or a combination of these.

Where applicable, refer to Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards [Upland](#) and [Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management](#), Codes 645 and 644; [Brush Management, Code 314](#); [Integrated Pest Management, Code 595](#); [Prescribed Grazing, Code 528](#); and [Prescribed Burning, Code 338](#).

Plan prescribed burning of native early successional ecosystems to mimic natural fire frequencies and season(s) of occurrence.

Design and install the prescribed burning treatment layout to best facilitate operation of all machinery used to make controlled burning boundaries. Whenever possible, lay out strips to have some multiple or full width passes by all farm implements.

Encourage management for plant species diversity which provides cover for nesting, escape and brood rearing, and abundant food sources.

For early successional species tolerant to or preferring a shrub or tree component, consider using [Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards Forest Stand Improvement, Code 666](#), to develop early successional habitat within forested habitat; or [Hedgerow Planting, Code 422](#), and [Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612](#), for spot plantings to promote habitat diversity in open areas.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications need to be in keeping with this standard and need to describe the details adequately so the practice can be applied to meet intended purpose for each habitat type.

Planned development and/or management of early successional habitat needs to:

- Be based on an assessment of watershed conditions that affect the physical, biological, and chemical conditions of the habitat area.
- Be based on an assessment of current habitat conditions. Evaluate vegetation, threatened and endangered species present, and habitat limitations.

- Include a site map or sketch of current and planned conditions.
- Include approved specification sheets, job sheets, and narrative statements.

An NRCS biologist needs to review and approve all specifications for this practice. Approval by state wildlife agency or other biologists can occur when directed by the NRCS State biologist.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Carry out the following actions to ensure 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).

Apply activities outlined in the plans and specifications periodically to maintain the desired early successional plant community. If the managed area is of sufficient size and when practical, rotate habitat treatments among and within fields.

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

REFERENCES

Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards

Brush Management, Code 314
Forest Stand Improvement, Code 666
Hedgerow Planting, Code 422
Integrated Pest Management, Code 595
Prescribed Burning, Code 338
Prescribed Grazing, Code 528
Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 645

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