NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

(Ac.)

CODE 645

DEFINITION

Provide and manage upland habitats and connectivity within the landscape for wildlife.

PURPOSE

To treating upland wildlife habitat concerns identified during the conservation planning process that enable movement, or provide shelter, cover and food in proper amounts, locations and times to sustain wild animals that inhabit uplands during a portion of their life cycle.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

Land where the decision maker has identified an objective for conserving a wild animal species, guild, suite or ecosystem.

Land within the range of targeted wildlife species and capable of supporting the desired habitat.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to all Purposes

A habitat evaluation or appraisal, approved by the NRCS state office, shall be used to identify habitat-limiting factors in the planning area.

Application of this practice shall remove or reduce limiting factor(s) in their order of significance, as indicated by results of an approved habitat evaluation.

Application of this practice alone, or in combination with other supporting and facilitating practices, shall result in a conservation system that will enable the planning area to meet or exceed the minimum quality criteria for wildlife habitat established in Section III of the FOTG.

Establish additional criteria for components of this practice including, but not limited to:

- vegetation establishment for shelter, food and to enable movement;
- structural measures to provide shelter, food or enable movement;
- manipulation of vegetation to sustain desirable habitat conditions over time; and,
- Locate food and cover to maximize access by target species, minimize their predation, and to minimize impacts to sensitive or protected habitats.

Plant material specifications shall include only high quality and adapted species.

Planting of noxious weeds and invasive species is prohibited.

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

Equipment travel, grazing, haying and other disturbance to habitat shall be restricted during critical periods such as nesting, brood rearing, fawning or calving seasons. States may establish exceptions when certain disturbance causing activities are necessary to maintain the health of the plant community and control noxious weeds.

Control of regulated noxious weeds and invasive plants shall be specified. Invasive species shall be controlled at 15% or less areal coverage.

Chemical control of undesirable plants will use targeted, precision pesticide/herbicide applications to minimize over-spray. Pesticides will be evaluated with NRCS' WIN-PST tool, and appropriate pesticide mitigation measures will enacted as needed.

Peer-reviewed habitat management guidelines developed for New England or Maine will be used when available.

Minimize soil disturbance in natural communities where soil integrity is essential, on steep slopes (> 8%), on highly erodible land, during seasons when rutting and erosion is most likely to occur, and where invasion of noxious species is likely.

Avoid and minimize soil compaction.

Criteria Applicable to Forestland.

During harvests do not encircle and isolate vernal pools, ponds, wetlands, deer wintering areas, or other protected or high value habitat.

Do not install permanent stream crossings when there are other viable, economical alternatives to gain stand access.

Criteria Applicable to Hay or Pastureland

The timing, extent and form of haying and grazing will be managed to retain, establish or enhance plant species composition, vigor, palatability, and form to benefit target wildlife.

An acceptable alternative to deferring grazing or haying during April 15th to August 1st is an early harvest during May (no later than May 31st), with a minimum of 65-days before the next haying (e.g., No haying from May 27th to Aug 1st). Perlut et al. (2011) has such haying is successful in balancing forage production with grassland bird recruitment.

Exclude livestock from sensitive and important ecological sites which includes, but is not limited to: permanent or ephemeral wetlands, seeps, springs, watercourses, water bodies, riparian and shoreline zones, and rare or exemplary natural community.

Rotational flash grazing may be allowed in some sensitive habitats on a site specific basis to achieve a clearly defined habitat management objective. A goal-specific grazing management plan will be required.

Haying will not occur at dawn, dusk or night, and equipment will not travel concentrically from outside field edges inward.

CONSIDERATIONS

All land use and land management impact wildlife; therefore, carefully consider the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of management decisions on target species as well as non-target species. Especially consider the effects of this practice on species with declining populations.

Generally the number of species present in a given area is positively correlated with horizontal interspersion and vertical structural diversity of habitat.

Conversely, species that are habitat specialists often have very specific, narrow habitat requirements. Many species in decline are habitat specialists.

Consider the problems of habitat fragmentation when using this practice.

Consider prioritizing or focusing management on “umbrella” species (e.g., American marten, Canada lynx, American woodcock) which are indicators of habitat condition or habitat types that provide important ecological services. species, Focusing management on such species or habitats will provide benefits to a wide range of co-existing species which may be lesser known.

Consider management beneficial to native pollinators during planning.

Consider native species plantings or regeneration over planting of non-native species.

Use of locally adapted native plant material genotypes should take precedence over use of non-local genotypes.

Supplemental feeding and food plot establishment and management is expensive, time consuming, and should be minimize when management of natural communities is an alternative.

In general, wider hedgerows, corridors, buffers, filter strips provide greater benefits for wildlife.

Consider aggressive tree thinning proximal to other land uses to produce a gradual transition or “feathered edge”.

Consider the use of temporary stream crossing structures that can be removed after management activities are concluded.

For forest operations consider winter or green roads and trails for stand access, rather than permanent gravel roads and trails.

Consider seasonal road or trail closures on non-essential roads during high movement periods (e.g., breeding, nesting, dispersal periods).

Where essential habitat structural features are lacking (e.g., cavity trees, downed large woody debris, snag trees, etc.), consider artificial nesting structures, brush piles, and creation of snag trees.

Wildlife habitat quality and resultant animal health is directly related to soil quality. To maximize benefits and outcomes consider directing some wildlife habitat enhancements to productive land rather than “wasteland”.

Wildlife population control may be necessary to protect and maintain certain habitats. Control is

a responsibility of the landowner. State and federal regulations may apply to population control methods.

Maintaining undisturbed areas of sufficient size during management activities may sustain disturbance-intolerant animals and plants.

Many other conservation practices can be used in conjunction with this practice to create a wildlife management plan include.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

NRCS shall ensure that plans and specifications for this practice are prepared by persons with adequate training in the fields of wildlife management, biology or ecology.

Written specifications, schedules and maps shall be prepared for each planning area and each habitat type.

Specifications shall:

- Identify the amounts and kinds habitat elements, locations and management actions necessary to achieve the client's management objectives.
- Describe the appropriate method, timing and intensity of management needed to produce the desired habitat conditions and sustain them over time.

Specifications shall be transmitted to clients using NRCS approved job sheets or other written means of sufficient detail to properly establish, manage and maintain the practice.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to ensure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life:

- Evaluate habitat conditions on a regular basis in order to adapt the conservation plan and schedule of implementation.
- Annually inspect and repair structural or vegetative components of this practice.
- A site-specific operation and maintenance plan will be provided to Client's to ensure the practice is properly maintained.

REFERENCES

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