NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD AND SPECIFICATIONS

RECREATION AREA IMPROVEMENT

(acre)
CODE 562

DEFINITION

Establishing grasses, legumes, vines, shrubs, trees, or other plants or selectively reducing stand densities and trimming woody plants to improve an area for recreation.

PURPOSES

- Enhance recreational use.
- Protect the soil from erosion.
- Provide plant cover for intensive use areas, screenings, barriers, windbreaks, and beautification.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any area planned for recreation use.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

All required site smoothing, grading, shaping, drainage work, and installation of recreation facilities shall be completed prior to seedbed preparation.

When feasible, native species should be used, enhanced or preserved.

Plant Materials – Herbaceous. For site and seedbed preparation, soil fertility and lime, temporary cover, seeding and sodding methods, companion crops, and planting dates, use NRCS conservation practice standard CRITICAL AREA PLANTING (342). For mulching requirements, refer to NRCS conservation practice standard MULCHING (484).

When establishing vegetation on intensive use areas, select sod-forming grasses rated excellent for erosion control in CRITICAL AREA PLANTING (342). Select the grass species based on growth characteristics suited to the site and desired use of the stand.

When establishing perennial herbaceous vegetation on areas where low use is anticipated and erosion control is not critical, select suitable grass and legume seeding mixtures and rates from the CONSERVATION COVER (327) or RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RARE AND DELCINING HABITATS (643).

Plant Materials - Trees and Shrubs. For site preparation, spacing requirements, planting methods, and species selection, follow procedures in the TREE/SHRUB ESTABLISHMENT (612) and TREE/SHRUB SITE PREPARATION (490).

On recreational areas prune woody vegetation for safety, better visibility, or improved appearance and health.

Pruning scars can be unattractive. Keep pruning activities to a minimum in intensive-use recreation areas.

Prune as close as possible to the trunk. Do not cut into the branch collar to improve the trees ability to seal off the wound. It is important to avoid tearing the bark from the trunk during pruning operations. Refer to TREE/SHRUB PRUNING (660)

Tree and shrub removal should be kept to a minimum. Restrict cuttings to the following purposes:

- Vistas: Plan vista cuttings at places where a view is rewarding - panoramic

views, bodies of water, and/or unique landscape patterns.

- Roadside: Minimize uniform monotonous corridors. Cut at uneven intervals to provide variety, contrast and irregularity along borders. Restrict cuttings to less than one acre. Favor flowering trees and shrubs and plants with unusual shape, form or color.
- Edge transitions: Reduce abrupt changes from open areas to forests. Create transition zones by leaving groups of trees and clumps of shrubbery. Encourage plants with showy flowers, attractive fruit, or bright fall colors.
- Open woods: Reduce canopy cover to 40 percent or less in intensive use areas. Thin intermediate and co-dominate trees. To decrease hazards from wind-thrown branches, do not reduce canopy over more than 40 percent in any single cutting. To prevent sprouting, treat stumps with appropriate herbicides. Retain old growth trees and species that produce light shading such as birch, Kentucky coffee tree, eastern black walnut, and shortleaf pine.
- Safety: Remove trees and shrubs that pose a hazard (e.g. dead, dying, vision obstruction) to user safety. Vehicles and people should be fully visible at all road intersections. Cut trees and shrubs flush with the ground line. Eliminate poison ivy from intensive use areas.

CONSIDERATIONS

Vegetative plantings may decrease runoff through retarded flows providing the opportunity for increased infiltration.

Short term sediment increases may be noted due to construction activities. The long term effect of recreation improvements may be a reduction of sediment in surface water. Surface water quality may be degraded by an increase in fertilizers, pesticides, organic wastes, and other chemicals associated with recreational activity.

Site diversity and vegetation form, color, texture and size are important features to recreational users.

Before beginning recreation area improvements, inventory and classify potential recreation settings. Determine land and water acreage and identify unique features of the area such as wetlands, bluffs, and areas with exceptional scenery. Safety hazards should also be noted.

Monitor ash species in the area for possible infestations of emerald ash borer (EAB). Remove any infected trees immediately or treat with appropriate chemicals.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for recreation area improvement shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the essential requirements to achieve the intended purposes.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Provide annual fall fertilizer topdressings.

Do not mow on set schedules. Not more than one-third of the top growth should be removed at any one mowing.

When possible, limit the mowing period to protect ground-nesting birds.