

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
WETLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

(Ac.)

CODE 644

DEFINITION

Retaining, developing or managing wetland habitat for wetland wildlife.

PURPOSE

To maintain, develop, or improve wetland habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, fur-bearers, or other wetland dependent or associated flora and fauna.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On or adjacent to wetlands, rivers, lakes and other water bodies where wetland associated wildlife habitat can be managed. This practice applies to natural wetlands and/or water bodies as well as wetlands that may have been previously restored (657), enhanced (659), and created (658) using one of these applicable conservation practice standards.

CRITERIA

A habitat evaluation or appraisal, approved by the NRCS state office, shall be used to identify habitat-limiting factors in the planning area. The Nebraska Wetland Functional Assessment Protocol (NE-CPA-FSA-Worksheet 10) is the primary method to be used to assess wetland habitat quality. Wetlands located within a larger wildlife habitat planning area may be assessed using the applicable Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Worksheet (NE-CPA-32 to 36, 43, or 45) for that land-use.

Additional evaluations or appraisals may be used including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) model for the target wildlife species.

Application of this practice shall remove or reduce limiting factor(s) in their order of significance, as indicated by results of the 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. The planned system must provide a total rating of 0.5 or higher for the conservation treatment unit.

Identify wildlife species management goals and objectives. For the desired species, identify the types, amount and distribution of habitat elements and the management actions necessary to achieve the management objectives. Refer to NE-CPA-14 Wildlife Habitat Development and Management Plan for suitable format and content.

Use references noted within this standard and other sources to adequately identify the habitat requirements of the target species. Identify opportunities to benefit at-risk species as described in Nebraska Biology Technical Note #77 – “The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project” as Tier I species.

Vegetation used will be adapted to the local soil/site conditions. Native plants will be used whenever possible. Natural regeneration of wetland plants is acceptable where an adequate seed bank of desired plant species is known to exist. Where feasible and available, use plant materials from within the same wetland or from nearby wetlands with similar features on portions of wetlands requiring re-vegetation. Techniques including transplanting sprigs, tubers, plugs, sod mats, cuttings, etc.; inoculating with donor topsoil; spreading wild hay harvested from mature wetland plants; or planting specialized woody plant materials may be appropriate. Refer to Nebraska Biology Technical Note #84 – “Wetland Vegetative Technical Specifications” for additional information on these techniques.

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Management options which shift the wetland toward a reference standard condition, which mimics the historic hydrologic and vegetative characteristics, are preferred. Imperiled natural communities associated with wetlands are noted in Nebraska Biology Technical Note #65 – “Terrestrial Natural Communities of Nebraska” and must be managed to maintain or restore their ecological integrity.

Vegetative manipulations to maintain or enhance habitat quality shall include natural processes such as prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, and water-level manipulations when feasible. Additional techniques may be needed to attain the desired outcome including mechanical treatments (haying or shredding), herbicide applications, and supplemental planting of annual species. Refer to the associated conservation practice standards for additional criteria.

Avoid vegetation disturbance during the primary nesting period (May 1 to July 15) and assess impacts to nesting birds beyond these critical dates. Refer to the Migratory Birds Guide Sheet on the NE-CPA-52 for additional requirements.

Sites containing hazardous waste will be cleaned prior to the installation of this practice.

Invasive plant species and federally/state listed noxious and nuisance species shall be controlled on the site. Refer to Nebraska Range and Pasture Technical Note #20 – “Quick Guide to Invasive Plant Treatment” for information on invasive plant control. Herbicides shall be applied using “spot treatment” methods where necessary to protect desired native plant species.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider effects management will have on disease vectors such as mosquitoes.

Consider effects on downstream flows or aquifers that would affect other water uses or users.

Consider effects on fish and wildlife habitats that would be associated with the practice.

Establishing vegetative buffers on surrounding uplands can reduce the delivery of sediment and soluble and sediment-attached contaminants carried by runoff and/or wind.

The nutrient and pesticide tolerance of the species planned should be considered where known nutrient and pesticide contamination exists.

Consider effects on temperature of water resources to prevent undesired effects on aquatic and wildlife communities.

Soil disturbance associated with the installation of this practice may increase the potential of invasion by unwanted species.

Adding dead snags, tree trunks or logs can provide structure and cover for wildlife and serve as a carbon source for food chain support.

For discharge wetlands, consider underground upslope water and/or groundwater source availability.

When determining which species to plant, consider macro and micro-topography features and different hydrology regimes.

Consider effects of management actions on compliance with state and federal hunting regulation (e.g., baiting).

Water level draw-downs may increase the potential for turtle mortality.

Consider effects of livestock grazing on runoff, infiltration, wetland vegetation and nesting success.

Adding artificial nesting structures that are appropriate for the region can increase utilization of these areas.

Locating this practice adjacent to existing wetlands and other water bodies will provide connectivity to these cover types. Use vegetative buffers and corridors consisting of perennial vegetation to increase connectivity among multiple riparian habitats.

The improved habitat that results from the installation of this practice may lead to increased crop depredation by wildlife on adjacent cropland.

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Consider adjacent wetlands or water bodies that contribute to wetland system complexity and diversity, decrease habitat fragmentation, and maximize use of the site by wetland-associated wildlife.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Document how habitat needs will be provided for the desired species of wildlife:

- required depth of water during the different seasons;
- types and sizes of structures required;
- desired native plant species and the means of establishing and maintaining them.

Specific information may be provided using appropriate job sheets or written documentation in the conservation plan. Details associated with seeding should be specified on the Grass Seed Job Sheet (NE-CPA-8) and on the Tree and Shrub Planting Plan (NE-CPA-15) where necessary.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

A plan for operation and maintenance at a minimum should include monitoring and management of structural and vegetative measures. The use of photo-point monitoring and mapping of vegetation communities on aerial photography is encouraged. Haying and livestock grazing plans, if haying or livestock grazing is used as a needed wildlife management tool, will be developed to allow the establishment, development and management of wetland and associated upland vegetation for the intended wetland and/or wildlife purpose.

Added water depth and duration may be utilized as a method to control unwanted vegetation (e.g., reed canarygrass).

REFERENCES

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