NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT

(Ac.)

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

Management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community structure (e.g., density, vertical and horizontal cover) and plant species diversity.

Where planting, or enhancement seeding following management, is needed, regionally adapted plant materials will be used.

Site preparation, planting dates, and planting methods shall optimize survival. Refer to Herbaceous Vegetation Design Procedures (550DP) for additional information.

Measures must be provided to control noxious weeds and invasive species. Planting of noxious weeds and invasive species is prohibited.

If using chemical methods of control, Pesticide Screening Tool (WinPST) shall be used to assess risks, and appropriate mitigation to reduce known risks shall be employed. The University of Nebraska Weedsoft Program can be substituted for leach loss potential when runoff solution/adsorbed is not a concern on the site. Identify the location of sensitive areas (i.e. streams, wetlands, etc.) and applicable setbacks on the plan map.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be in a targeted manner through the use of spot-treatments, including spraying or hand wick applicators, mechanical removal or other approved methods to protect grasses, forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

Management will be timed to minimize negative impacts to wildlife. Disturbance to habitat shall be restricted during critical periods (e.g., wildlife nesting, brood rearing, fawning or calving seasons). The primary nesting period is May 1 to July 15 which also coincides with fawning/calving dates for big game species.

Minimize soil disturbance in natural communities where soil integrity is essential, on steep slopes, on highly erodible soils, and where establishment of invasive species is likely following management treatments.

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.

Refer to the Early Successional Habitat Development/Management Design Procedures (647DP) for specific information related to suitable management techniques.

CONSIDERATIONS

Vegetative manipulation to maximize plant and animal diversity can be accomplished by disturbance practices that include, but are not limited to: selected herbicide techniques, brush management, forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, light disking, mowing, prescribed grazing, or a combination of these techniques.

This practice should be applied periodically to maintain the desired early successional plant community and rotated throughout the managed area.

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Wildlife habitat purposes often require lighter seeding rates than typically used for other conservation practices. Ensure that seeding rates are adequate to prevent excessive soil erosion concerns.

Design and install the treatment layout to facilitate:

- operation of machinery
- use of natural firebreaks
- development and maintenance of bare soil or
- vegetative firebreaks when using prescribed burning.

When using prescribed grazing, consider setting aside a paddock near the center of the pasture and defer grazing until after the critical nest and brood rearing period. Many grassland birds require more than 40 days to fledge their young.

When selecting plants and designing management treatments for this practice, consider the needs of pollinators and incorporate to the maximum extent practicable. Refer to Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) for additional information on pollinator habitat requirements.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Written specifications, application schedules and maps shall be prepared for each site. Specifications shall identify the amounts and kinds of habitat elements, locations and management actions necessary to achieve management objectives. Documentation can also be provided using the NE-CPA-14 Wildlife Habitat Development and Management Plan.

Specifications shall be transmitted to clients using approved specification sheets, job sheets, and customized practice narratives or by other written documentation approved by NRCS. Refer to Nebraska Conservation Planning Sheets 20A and 20B for specifications related to applying this practice into existing grassland habitats. Use the Grass Seed Job Sheet (NE-CPA-8) to provide necessary information when enhancement seeding is planned.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to insure 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).

Occasional disturbance may be incorporated into the management plan to ensure the intended purpose of this practice is continued.

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

REFERENCES

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