



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Wildlife/Water Quality Enhancement Activity – Wildlife/Water Quality, Widen Buffers

Wildlife-Water Quality, Widen Buffers

The loss of buffers in agricultural landscapes has resulted in the decline of many native wildlife species and increased the degradation of aquatic resources. Further the loss of stream-side vegetation has resulted in decreased filter capability to intercept and deposit sediment, agro-chemicals and nutrients both in solution and attached to soil particles.

Benefits

Widening *existing conservation buffers* (contour buffer strips, filter strips, riparian forest buffer, riparian herbaceous cover, vegetative barriers, grassed waterways, field borders) *that currently meet NRCS conservation practice standard criteria* can provide food and cover for native and game species as well as enhancing aquatic habitat by providing shade, input of wood or carbon to the stream, and stabilizing streambank conditions. Additionally, these extended buffers offer more surface area to filter out sediments and agro-chemicals.

Options

Level 1: Extending buffer 30 feet above the *existing buffer*

Level 2: Extending buffer at least 25 feet above Level 1

Criteria for Widening of Buffers:

The extended buffer width will be at least 30 feet wider than the *existing buffer* and be composed of at least 5 species of non-noxious, wildlife friendly grasses, perennial forbs, shrubs, and/or trees best suited to site conditions.

- All site preparation and plant establishment shall be accomplished according to the appropriate NRCS conservation practice standard criteria and specifications as provided by the field office job sheet for your site.
- Forested riparian buffers shall consist of a diversity of tree and shrub species suited to the site, of which the majority are capable of producing fruit or nuts and when mature, will achieve at least 60% canopy closure.
- Any use of the buffer must not compromise its intended purpose.
- To the extent possible the buffer areas and extended buffer areas will be vegetated to increase overland flow interception and increase water quality values of the stream or water body.

- Minimum widths required for *existing buffer*:

Contour Buffer Strips	15 feet
Field Border	20 feet
Filter Strip	20 feet
Grassed Waterway	30 feet
Riparian Forest Buffer	35 feet
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	20 feet



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Operation and Maintenance:

- Once established, buffers must not be mowed, disked, grazed, or otherwise disturbed, until after the primary wildlife ground nesting period has ended (July 15th).
- Buffers will be regularly maintained for its intended purpose through the life of the contract. This includes any removal of vegetation, including grazing. Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect.
- Buffers will have a wildlife management plan to maintain established plant communities through the life of the contract. The wildlife plan will maintain the plant community and its structural diversity, provide habitat for intended species, remove duff, and control woody vegetation.
- Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect that maintains the buffer's intended purpose.

Examples of acceptable management for herbaceous buffers – (haying or grazing is not appropriate for riparian forest buffers):

- Haying after July 15th and prior to September 1st.
- Grazing, incidental to gleaning of crop stubble, for a period not to exceed 60 days.
- Site-specific management plans may be developed to meet the intended purpose of this enhancement.

References:

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Burger, L. W., Barbour, P. J., Hamrick, R. and M. Smith. 2006. Conservation Buffers: Wildlife Benefits in Southeastern Agricultural Systems. In Brasher, K., editor, Research Advances. Mississippi State University, Vol. 9, Number 2. 2006

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