

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

RECREATION AREA IMPROVEMENT

**(Acre)
CODE 562**

DEFINITION

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

PURPOSES

To increase the attractiveness and usefulness of recreation areas and to protect the soil and plant resources.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any area planned for recreation use.

CRITERIA

Establishment

Criteria: Important landscape design principles which are involved in various recreational plantings consist of plant height, spread, texture, color of flower, leaf and stem in all seasons, and general habit.

Plant Species: Preference is generally given to native plants in most rural settings. However, in heavily used urban developments, exotic plants may better adapt to certain situations. Plant hardiness and soil suitability become determining factors in their choice.

Plant Spacing: Plants shall be spaced according to the planting plan or specifications. Spacing is determined by many factors such as plant height, spread, habit, effect desired, etc. Follow the standard and specification for conservation practice 612 Tree and Shrub Establishment as it relates to spacing.

Planting Methods, Time of Planting, etc., will follow Standard and Specification for conservation practice 612 Tree/Shrub Establishment. For grasses and forbs please see 342-Critical and Planting or other applicable standards and specifications for guidance.

Pruning

Pruning will follow standard and specification for conservation practice Tree/Shrub Pruning – 660A.

Limbs overhang trails, paths, and roadways will be pruned to a height of 8 - 12 feet to facilitate movement of people, vehicles, and livestock.

Remove dead, broken, diseased, or insect infested branches.

When limbs are removed which are not directly attached to the trunk, cuts will always be made near a union or crotch of another branch.

Remove branches, which cross or are detrimental to the shape and appearance of the plant.

When pruning shrubs - In order to retain flower buds in early blooming shrubs prune shortly after flowering. On shrubs with colored twigs, remove about one-third of the older wood every year to retain maximum coloration.

Thinning and Removal

Remove trees that are a hazard to users of the area such as those which are seriously defective or in danger of windthrow.

Remove stumps and debris and fill stump holes to the natural grade or grind stumps.

CONSIDERATIONS

Planning

When pruning is done to enhance an area by providing vegetative contrast or to screen contrasts determine if:

- The pruning will enhance the area by opening up vistas or screen out undesirable views;
- It will allow the addition of species in the plant community which will provide unique form, color, or texture to an area.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

When pruning is accomplished for safety along trails, roads, and paths the following should be considered:

- Will the plant be subject to sun scald;
- Are there species present which require shade to exist;
- What will be the visual impacts of the limbs if scattered, or should they be removed or chipped?
- What will be the vegetative response of the tree being pruned, i.e., will it sucker from the base or send out many new limbs from latent buds?

Trees and shrubs should be spaced to meet human requirements. In areas of dense shade or poor ventilation, remove trees to decrease shade and increase air circulation.

Remove trees to provide adequate space for trails, toilets, picnic tables, fireplaces, etc. Retain vegetation specimens, which have a unique appearance or beauty and are in a protected position.

Favor the retention of thrifty, deep-rooted trees, which are resistant to abrasion and traffic damage.

The prime consideration of recreational area pruning is the controlled maintenance of the natural habit or characteristics of each plant. The exception to this is when clipped hedges etc., are used for some special location or purpose.

In general, from the standpoint of plant growth, pruning can be done at practically any time of the year. However, consideration must be given to factors of food supply, flowering period, and winter hardiness. Foliage is necessary for photosynthesis and the pruning of new growth in the spring can be detrimental to subsequent growth and the general condition of the plant. In some instances late summer pruning may promote new growth which will not harden off sufficiently before freezing weather. Also, food reserves will be removed. With most plants, the ideal time to prune is during the dormant season prior to the beginning of new growth. Early flowering shrubs should be pruned shortly after flowering to maintain flower buds for the following season.

Water Quantity

Area improvement resulting from planting vegetation may decrease runoff through retarded

flows providing the opportunity for infiltration. Where increased infiltration exceeds increase evapotranspiration, deep percolation may occur.

Area improvement resulting from thinning and removal of unwanted vegetation may have minor impact on runoff.

The improvement of recreation areas may have minor impact on ground water quantity. Any impact should be a small increase in ground water quantity. Increases in infiltration may be generally offset by additional consumptive use of established vegetation.

Planners should recognize these considerations and develop plans that account for them both onsite and offsite.

Water Quality

The long-term effect of recreation improvement may be a reduction of sediment in surface water. Short-term sediment increases may be noted during and immediately after construction due to disturbing the soil surface. Surface water quality may be degraded in both the long and short term by an increase in chemicals in the form of fertilizers and pesticides used to establish or control vegetation. Surface water quality may also be degraded by organic waste, fuels, and other chemicals associated with recreation activity. Minor amounts of soluble chemicals such as nutrients and pesticides may percolate below the root zone when precipitation exceeds transpiration and root zone storage.

Planners should recognize these considerations and develop plans that account for them both onsite and offsite.

- Effects of erosion and the movement of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment-attached substances that could be carried by runoff. Important factors are short-term changes caused by construction (sediments, fuels, oils, and other chemicals) compared to long-term changes caused by the same substances resulting from recreation activities.
- Effects of changes in ground water from infiltrating soluble substances associated with vegetation management and recreation activities.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using

approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan or other acceptable documentation.

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):

Recreation areas will be periodically inspected and remedial repairs performed as needed.

Recreation areas may become the targets of acts of vandalism.

Contact the local NRCS conservationist immediately when unexpected problems, and/or questions arise during practice installation.