

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

(Ac.)

CODE 645

DEFINITION

Provide and manage upland habitats and connectivity within the landscape for wildlife.

PURPOSE

Treating upland wildlife habitat concerns identified during the conservation planning process that enable movement, or provide shelter, cover, food and water in proper amounts, locations and times to sustain wild animals that inhabit uplands during a portion of their life cycle.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

Land where the decision maker has identified an objective for conserving a wild animal species, guild, suite or ecosystem. Land within the range of targeted wildlife species and capable of supporting the desired habitat.

CRITERIA

I. A habitat evaluation or appraisal, approved by the NRCS state office, shall be used to identify habitat related 'limiting factors' in the planning area.

- Wildlife Habitat Evaluation/Appraisal Guides are found online in the [NRCS New Mexico FOTG Section II](#). If one is not provided for the desired target species or habitat, contact the NRCS NM State Biologist for assistance.
- 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 as established in the [NRCS FOTG Section III](#).

II. Establish additional criteria for components of this practice including, but not limited to:

- vegetation establishment for food, cover and to enable movement,
- structural measures to provide food, cover and to enable movement,
- vegetation management to sustain desirable habitat conditions over time.

III. If planting, plant material specifications shall include only high quality and adapted species.

- Native species and/or local ecotypes will be used wherever possible.
- Site preparation, planting dates, and planting methods shall optimize vegetation survival and growth.

IV. Disturbance to habitat shall be restricted during critical periods such as nesting, brood rearing, fawning or calving seasons.

- Disturbances include: grazing, haying, forage harvest, construction, etc.
- States may establish exceptions when certain disturbance causing activities which are necessary to maintain the health of the plant community and control noxious weeds. Contact your State Biologist.

V. Control of regulated noxious weeds and invasive plants shall be specified in the plan.

- Utilize Integrated Pest Management (a combination of Biological, Mechanical and/or Chemical) using environmentally sensitive methods. *Example:* prevention, scouting, spot treatment, and follow-up. Refer to NRCS practice Integrated Pest Management (595).
- Refer to USDA Plants Database, NM invasive and noxious weeds. www://plants.usda.gov
- Refer to [NRCS Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 24, Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) and Wildlife](#).

CRITERIA (continued)

VI. Users of this standard shall comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations. This standard does not provide the details of each required law.

- All necessary local, state, and federal permits shall be obtained by the landowner (or designee) prior to the restoration.

CONSIDERATIONS

The Wildlife Habitat Management Plan may include supporting or facilitating practices to implement the plan.

This practice may affect the target species, as well as non-target species. Consider effects of this practice on all potentially impacted species. Including, but not limited to:

- unintentional mortalities by collision with utility lines, fences, wind turbines etc,
- increased nest parasitism or predation,
- increased disease transmission,
- habitat alteration. i.e. targeting habitat to benefit one species may be detrimental to another wildlife species or guild, or plant.

Undisturbed areas should be conserved on a sufficient extent of the area to sustain disturbance-intolerant species.

Consider how land use and habitat in the associated landscape may influence the ability to achieve restoration and management objectives.

Consider the potential effects of site development and management actions on compliance with state and federal hunting regulations. Example: Federal law prohibits dove/quail hunting if bait is present that could lure or attract birds. Example: Wildlife food plots are not considered bait, *provided that* the seed is planted in a manner consistent with NMSU Cooperative Extension Service's recommendations for planting food plots or for producing a crop.

Consider the effects on unique or rare upland flora. Refer to the New Mexico Rare Plants list, found at <http://nmrareplants.unm.edu>.

When selecting plants and designing management for this practice, consider the needs of pollinators and incorporate to the maximum extent practicable.

Consider the accessibility of the site for installation, management and maintenance.

Artificial nesting structures can be used to increase wildlife reproductive success in areas where natural nest sites are unavailable or unsuitable. Although artificial nesting structures cannot replace natural nesting habitats, they can increase the number of nesting sites available in an area. Refer to [NRCS Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 20, Artificial Nesting Structures](#).

Soil disturbance associated with the installation of this practice may increase the potential of invasion or spread of invasive plant species. Use mitigation techniques to prevent or reduce any negative effects.

Livestock grazing or haying or prescribed burning may be used as management tools to maintain or improve the vegetation structure and plant composition for wetland wildlife habitat. Refer to NRCS practice Prescribed Grazing (528), Prescribed Haying (528), and Prescribed Burning (338).

- Consider effects on nesting success, concealment cover, infiltration/compaction, and damage to sensitive areas such as playas, saturated soils, wildlife breeding grounds, etc.
- Refer to [NRCS Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 37, Importance of Disturbance in Habitat Management](#).

Wildlife population control may be necessary to protect and maintain certain habitats. This is a responsibility of the landowner. State and federal regulations may apply to population control methods.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

NRCS shall ensure that plans and specifications for this practice are prepared by persons with adequate training in the fields of wildlife management, biology or ecology.

Site specific planning for this practice shall follow the Standard and Specifications, and be recorded using the appropriate, approved job sheet(s). Narrative statements in the conservation plan or other documentation may provide supplemental information.

In addition to conservation plan requirements, the plan shall identify and describe:

- the baseline (pre-treatment) condition,
- the targeted wildlife species, group, or guild of species (e.g. grassland birds),
- the habitat-limiting factors being addressed,

Note: remove or reduce limiting factor(s), in their order of significance, as indicated by results of the habitat evaluation.

- the desired natural plant community and/or desired habitat type(s),
- the required habitat elements (food, water, cover, etc.) including the amount and distribution of those elements,
- Structural and vegetative implementation actions necessary to achieve the goals and objectives,
- management actions necessary to achieve the goals and objectives. Including the method, timing and intensity of each action (i.e. a prescribed grazing plan etc.).

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to ensure that this practice functions as intended. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance):

- Habitat conditions shall be evaluated and compared to desired conditions on a regular basis; to be able to quickly adjust the conservation plan and ensure the desired habitat conditions are met. Specify the appropriate timing in the Operation & Maintenance schedule.
- Annually inspect and repair structural or vegetative components of this practice.
- Any adjustments to treatments and/or management must be made in consultation with the local NRCS conservationist.

REFERENCES

- Bolen, Eric and William Robinson. 2002. *Wildlife Ecology and Management* 5th Edition. Prentice Hall, 656 pp.
- Rayne, Neil F. and Fred C. Bryant. 1994. *Techniques for Wildlife Habitat Management of Uplands*. McGraw-Hill, Inc., 841 pp.
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. 2006. [Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for New Mexico](#). New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Santa Fe, New Mexico. 526 pp + appendices.
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- USDA, NRCS, Wildlife Habitat Management Institute. 2006. [Importance of Disturbance in Habitat Management](#). Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet No. 37. Technical Note 190-52