

Brush Management (314)

Conservation Practice Information Sheet

314 OR-IS

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oregon

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Client: _____



OSU Photo of Western Juniper management
in eastern Oregon

Description

Brush management is used to control woody plants on a site where they exceed the desired or expected amount. This practice is an important tool that can be used to improve wildlife habitat, prevent or reduce soil loss, improve forage, or manage fire fuel loads.

Woody species have increased in many areas of Oregon due to several factors. Fire control measures have reduced the number of woody plants that are destroyed each season. Historic grazing management schemes may have favored woody plants. Expansion of housing developments has increased the desire for shade and increased the land protected from burning.

If you are dealing with a site that has experienced a woody plant expansion, it will be important for you to recognize the factors that are primarily responsible. This knowledge will allow you to implement an appropriate brush management scheme for your specific site by treating the cause(s) as well as the effects, thus greatly improving your chances for success and increasing the practice's lifespan.

Uses

Brush management can be used to achieve a variety of objectives: creating a desired plant community, reducing soil movement or loss, improving animal habitat for livestock and/or wildlife, and reducing fuel loads in areas that are subject to fire.

Desired plant communities should be consistent with what the site is capable of producing as well as the climate dynamics and range and degree of natural disturbances (such as fire, drought, or grazing) for the area. Use the [Web Soil Survey](#) and on-site determinations by a soil scientist and/or range specialist to establish which ecological site is on the area of interest. Use the [Ecological Site Information System](#) to obtain a description of the specific ecological site present, including plant communities.

Some woody plants can out-compete grasses, flowering plants, and other woody species for sunlight, moisture, and/or nutrients. This competition can reduce the population of various plant species, causing a reduction of soil surface protection and in turn making the soil more vulnerable to movement or loss from the site. In this situation, you can use brush control to reduce the amount of highly competitive woody plants on the property and to allow the existing, desired vegetation to increase. It may also be necessary to seed desired species if there are insufficient amounts in the current stand.

Brush management can also be used to favor different groups of livestock and wildlife. Just as cows prefer grasses while domestic sheep and goats prefer flowering plants and shrubs, some wildlife, such as elk, prefer grasses while others, such as deer, prefer flowering plants and shrubs. Some wildlife species need certain species of shrubs, such as sage grouse, sage sparrow, and others which depend on

sagebrush. The appropriate application of brush management to a site can improve habitat for certain animal species while discouraging unwanted species. Note that you may need to consult with a wildlife biologist and/or range specialist to make sure that the desired animal's needs can be met using this practice without harming critical habitat for other local species.

Application of this practice in a mosaic pattern across the landscape can be used to create a variety of conditions favorable to

hiding cover, nesting sites, and foraging areas for a variety of animals.

Timing

Brush management should be implemented when the target species is most vulnerable. For many woody species in Oregon, this is during the plant's dormant period of summer or fall. However, be sure to avoid conflicts with local wildlife uses of the site. For example, avoid implementing this practice during nesting season.

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