



Natural Resources Conservation Service
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
SILVOPASTURE

Code 381

(Ac)

DEFINITION

Establishment and/or management of desired trees and forages on the same land unit.

PURPOSE

- Provide forage, shade, and/or shelter for livestock.
- Improve the productivity and health of trees/shrubs and forages.
- Improve water quality.
- Reduce erosion.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.
- Improve biological diversity.
- Improve soil quality.
- Increase carbon sequestration and storage.
- Provide for beneficial organisms and pollinators.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice may be applied on cropland and forestland .

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Forages to establish will be planned using [Range Technical Note No. 4](#) (located in Section I of the FOTG), and documented in the [SD-CPA-4](#) (located in Section IV of the FOTG). Woody plant materials will be selected from the [Conservation Tree Shrub Group guide](#) in Section II of the Field Office Technical Guide, located under Statewide Soil and Site Information: 4. Windbreak Interpretations. In row spacing will be determined following guidance given in [Woodland Technical Note No. 42](#), located in Section 1 of the Field Office Technical Guide.

Forage plantings will consist of at least 5 native grass species and 5 native forb species. Woody plant materials to be established will be restricted to: Chokecherry, Bur Oak, Cottonwood, Black Walnut, and/or Ponderosa Pine.

Establish and maintain silvopasture in a forested condition that is at least 10-percent stocked by single-stemmed woody species of any size that will be at least 4 meters (13 feet) tall at maturity.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service [State office](#) or visit the [Field Office Technical Guide](#).

SDTG Notice 415
Section IV
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Do not plant species on the Federal or State invasive species or noxious weeds lists.

Manage grazing at appropriate levels to establish and maintain silvopasture productivity and function. Facilities for providing water, minerals, or supplemental feed will be located and distributed such that livestock will properly utilize forages in the silvopasture. Control livestock access to areas with sensitive soils (e.g., wetlands, riparian zones, habitats of concern, karst areas, etc.). Use NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Prescribed Grazing (Code 528).

Where trees, or a combination of trees and shrubs, are added to crop land, perform site preparation and tree/shrub planting as needed based on existing vegetation and soil conditions. Plan site preparation using Woodland Technical Note No. 38, located in Section 1 of the Field Office Technical Guide. Woody plant materials will be selected from the Conservation Tree Shrub Group guide in Section II of the Field Office Technical Guide, located under Statewide Soil and Site Information: 4. Windbreak Interpretations. In row spacing will be determined following guidance given in Woodland Technical Note No. 42, located in Section 1 of the Field Office Technical Guide. Design the tree planting based on site factors (e.g., climate, topography, aspect, wind, etc.) to optimize the amount of sunlight reaching the ground to maintain desired forages, while providing the desired shelter and/or shade for livestock.

Protect plantings from unacceptable adverse impacts from pests, wildlife, livestock, and/or fire. Refer to plant protection criteria in Woodland Technical Note No. 38 located in Section 1 of the Field Office Technical Guide, and Prescribed Grazing (Code 528).

When establishing silvopasture in existing forestland, remove a sufficient number of trees, and/or prune existing trees, to allow adequate light penetration for forage establishment and growth. For tree pruning, use criteria in NRCS CPS Tree/Shrub Pruning (Code 660). Forages to establish will be planned using Range Technical Note No. 4 (located in Section I of the FOTG), and documented in the SD-CPA-4 (located in Section IV of the FOTG).

Removal of products (e.g., trees, medicinal herbs, nuts, and fruits) is allowed, provided that silvopasture conservation purpose(s) are not compromised by the loss of vegetation or by harvesting disturbance.

Tree/shrub spacing needs to exceed width of equipment to be used in management (including hay harvest). This will typically be 18-22' between rows, but can be any width as long as it equals or exceeds the widths given in Woodland Technical Note No. 42 (located in Section 1 of FOTG).

Plantings may be single or multiple rows, or random, with forage species between the woody plants.

Additional Criteria to Provide Forage, Shade, and/or Shelter for Livestock

Use forage species that are suitable for the targeted livestock and compatible with the tree species. Livestock grazing shall be deferred until the average height of the tree's terminal bud exceeds the browsing height of the livestock or of sufficient size to resist breakage or until suitable use exclusion measures for the protection of the woody plants are established. Prior to livestock grazing, a forage crop (hay, silage, etc.) may be mechanically harvested during this period.

Additional Criteria to Improve Water Quality

Select trees and forages that have growth characteristics conducive to high nutrient uptake.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Erosion

Plant trees on or near the contour and use supporting erosion control practices as needed, such as NRCS CPS Grassed Waterway (Code 412).

Additional Criteria to Enhance Wildlife Habitat

Establish plant species that will provide forage, browse, seed, cover, or nesting habitat for the desired wildlife species. Refer to Biology Technical Note Number 15, located in Section I of the SDTG, for wildlife design criteria.”

Select diverse seed mixes that include native forbs and/or legumes to benefit wildlife.

Additional Criteria to Improve Biological Diversity

Select plant species/varieties that provide the desired biological diversity. Selected species may vary in attributes such as timing of flowering, production of leaves and fruit, or attractiveness to wildlife and pollinators of interest.

Additional Criteria to Increase Carbon Sequestration and Storage

Select stocking rates and tree species to optimize growth rates and lifespans, suited to site capability, to enhance and sustain carbon sequestration. Use forage species that are deeply rooted and allocate higher amounts of carbon to below-ground portions.

Additional Criteria to Provide Habitat for Beneficial Organisms and Pollinators

Manage silvopasture consistent with National Organic Program (NOP) guidelines for organic and transition-to-organic agricultural systems. Select a diverse variety of plant species that provide dietary, nesting, and cover requirements for desired beneficial organisms (e.g., soil microflora, pollinators, predatory and parasitic insects, spiders, insectivorous birds and bats, raptors, etc.), during critical periods for controlling target pests and pollinating desired plants, at a minimum, and ideally year-round.

Protect beneficial organisms from harmful pesticides and chemicals.

During vegetation establishment, natural mulches, such as wood products or hay can be used to control competing vegetation as an alternative to using herbicides.

CONSIDERATIONS

Failure to maintain adequate forage for livestock may result in excessive tree damage and/or loss. Browsing of some conifer species, such as Ponderosa Pine, may cause abortion of calves. Consider deferring grazing until foliage of treated slash turns brown.

Consider adjusting the grazing regime periodically to cause enough disturbance to break up the allelopathic effect of decomposing needles.

Rows or plantings should be oriented in an east-west orientation where feasible and practical to allow maximum sunlight onto grass strips.

Failure to maintain adequate shade and shelter can lead to excessive soil compaction beneath tree canopies, damaging tree roots and leading to mortality.

Management practices such as no-till seeding, rotational grazing, and soil fertility maintenance can support greater soil biodiversity and health.

Integrated pest management techniques may be used for pest prevention, avoidance, monitoring and suppression.

Where new tree/shrub plantings are being protected through grazing deferral, forages may be harvested for hay, silage, etc.

If grazing does not maintain reduced fuel loads, consider using NRCS CPS Prescribed Burning (Code 338), as needed for habitat maintenance and reduction of fuel loads, providing the desired woody plants are fire-adapted and will not be damaged.

Silvopasture establishment is not appropriate in certain existing forest and woodland communities (e.g., sites with high conservation value, sites supporting species of concern that may be sensitive to grazing or changes in forest density, areas where soil erosion or nutrients are difficult to manage, etc.).

In areas that receive less than 18" of precipitation per year, availability of supplemental irrigation should be considered. Supplemental irrigation can either be provided as a fixed system or applied by bucket or more sophisticated method.

Considerations for Organic Agricultural Systems

If needed, pests may be managed through augmentation or introduction of predators or parasites, and development of habitat for natural enemies of pests; nonsynthetic controls such as lures, traps, and repellents may be used.

If needed, invasive plant species may be controlled through mulching with fully biodegradable materials; mowing; livestock grazing; hand weeding and mechanical cultivation; pre-irrigation; flame, heat, or electrical means.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare specifications for applying this practice using job sheets or other acceptable documentation. At a minimum, provide—

- Objective(s).
- Drawings to illustrate installation or implementation requirements.
- Map showing the location of the silvopasture and any areas planned for planting.
- Soils map, and description of soils and ecological sites (where available).
- Establishment methods.
- Number of trees/shrubs to be planted , by species.
- Timing of establishment relative to considerations for seasonal factors, disease, insects, wildlife impacts, etc.
- Mitigation measures, if needed, to reduce wildfire hazard or the potential for pest damage.

- The South Dakota Silvopasture Establishment practice job sheet SD-JS-381.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

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

- Manage trees, forages, and shrubs as needed to provide appropriate light conditions for forages, and shade/shelter conditions for livestock.
- Inspect the site at an appropriate time following planting to determine whether the tree and shrub survival rate meets practice and client objectives. Replant or provide supplemental planting when survival will result in less than 25% canopy cover when the trees/shrubs are mature .
- Control competing vegetation and livestock impacts until plantings are established.
- Apply nutrients as needed for establishment and to maintain plant vigor.
- Inspect trees and/or shrubs periodically following establishment, and protect them from adverse impacts including insects, diseases, competing vegetation, wildfire, livestock, wildlife, etc.
- Where wildlife habitat enhancement is an objective, maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb vegetative cover during the primary reproductive period (e.g., nesting period) of wildlife which is May 1 – August 1. Exceptions can be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community.
- Aim to maintain a 25%-35% Canopy cover for optimal forage production and livestock use, averaged for the entire field.
- The use of tree tubes is encouraged where wildlife damage is expected, however, it will probably be impractical for most applications.

REFERENCES

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