

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

BRUSH MANAGEMENT

(Ac.)

CODE 314

DEFINITION

The management or removal of woody (non-herbaceous or succulent) plants including those that are invasive and noxious.

PURPOSE

- Create the desired plant community consistent with the ecological site.
- Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality or enhance stream flow.
- Maintain, modify, or enhance fish and wildlife habitat.
- Improve forage accessibility, quality and quantity for livestock and wildlife.
- Manage fuel loads to achieve desired conditions.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands except active cropland where the removal, reduction, or manipulation of woody (non-herbaceous or succulent) plants is desired.

This practice does not apply to removal of woody vegetation by prescribed fire (use Prescribed Burning (338)) or removal of woody vegetation to facilitate a land use change.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Brush management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community based on species

composition, structure, density, and canopy (or foliar) cover or height.

Brush management will be applied in a manner to achieve the desired control of the target woody species and protection of desired species. This will be accomplished by mechanical, chemical, prescribed burning, or biological methods either alone or in combination. When prescribed burning is used as a method, the Prescribed Burning standard (338) will also be applied.

When the intent is to manage trees for silvicultural purposes, use Forest Stand Improvement (666).

NRCS will not develop biological or chemical treatment recommendations except for biological control utilizing grazing animals. In such cases, Prescribed Grazing (528) is used to ensure desired results are achieved and maintained. NRCS may provide clients with acceptable biological and/or chemical control references.

Follow-up treatments may be necessary to achieve objectives.

Additional Criteria for Creating the Desired Plant Community Consistent with the Ecological Site

Use applicable Ecological Site Description (ESD) State and Transition models, to develop specifications that are ecologically sound and defensible. Treatments must be congruent with dynamics of the ecological site(s) and keyed to state and plant community phases that have the potential and capability to support the desired plant community. If an ESD is not available, base specifications on the best approximation of the desired plant community composition, structure, and function.

Additional Criteria for Restoring or Releasing Desired Vegetative Cover to Protect Soils, Control Erosion, Reduce Sediment, Improve Water Quality or Enhance Stream Flow

Choose a method of control that results in the least amount of soil disturbance if soil erosion potential is high and revegetation is slow or uncertain leaving the site vulnerable to long-term exposure to soil loss.

In conjunction with other conservation practices, the number, sequence and timing of soil disturbing operations shall be managed to maintain soil loss within acceptable levels using approved erosion prediction technology.

Additional Criteria to Improve Wildlife Habitat

Brush management will be planned and applied in a manner to meet the habitat requirements for wildlife species of concern as determined by an approved habitat evaluation procedure.

Conduct treatments during periods of the year that accommodate reproduction and other life-cycle requirements of target wildlife, threatened or endangered species, and pollinator species. Treatments are in accordance with specifications developed for Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644) and Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645).

Additional Criteria to Improve Forage Accessibility, Quality and Quantity for Livestock and Wildlife

Timing and sequence of brush management shall be planned in coordination with specifications developed for Prescribed Grazing (528).

Additional Criteria to Manage Fuel Loads to Achieve Desired Conditions

Control undesirable woody plants in a manner that creates the desired plant community, including the desired fuel load, to reduce the risk of wildfire, facilitate the future application of prescribed fire.

CONSIDERATIONS

Timing and sequence of brush management should be planned in coordination with a grazing management plan.

Consider soil erosion potential and difficulty of vegetation establishment when choosing a method of control that causes soil disturbance.

Consider the appropriate time period for treatment. Some brush management activities can be effective when applied within a single year; others may require multiple years of treatment(s) to achieve desired objectives.

Consider impacts and consequences to obligate species (species dependent on the target woody species) when significant changes are planned to existing and adjacent plant communities.

Consider impacts to wildlife food supplies, space, and cover availability when planning the method and amount of brush management.

State issued licenses may be required when using chemical pesticide treatments.

For air quality purposes, consider using chemical methods of brush management that minimize chemical drift and excessive chemical usage and consider mechanical methods of brush management that minimize the entrainment of particulate matter.

This practice is likely to occur in areas where Cultural Resources or Endangered Species habitat may be found. Follow NRCS Planning Policy to address these concerns.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for the treatment option selected by the decision maker will be prepared for each field or management unit where brush management will be applied.

Plans and specifications will be based on the practice standard and may include narratives, maps, drawings, job sheets, or similar documents. These documents will contain the following data as a minimum:

Goals and objectives clearly stated.

Pre-treatment cover or density of the target plant(s) and the planned post-treatment cover or density and desired efficacy.

Maps, drawings, and/or narratives detailing or identifying areas to be treated, pattern of treatment (if applicable), and areas that will not be disturbed.

A monitoring plan that identifies what should be measured (including timing and frequency) and

that documents the changes in the plant community (compare with objectives) will be implemented.

For Mechanical Treatment Methods: Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 4, above, plus the following:

- Types of equipment and any modifications necessary to enable the equipment to adequately complete the job.
- Dates of treatment to best effect control
- Operating instructions (if applicable)
- Techniques or procedures to be followed.

For Chemical Treatment Methods: Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 4, above, plus the following:

- Acceptable chemical treatment references for containment and management or control of target species
- Evaluation and interpretation of herbicide risks associated with the selected treatment(s). Use risk analysis tools such as WIN-PST Soil Pesticide Interaction Loss Potential and Hazard Rating Report, in formulating alternatives with the client.
- Acceptable dates or plant growth stage at application to best effect control and dampen reinvasion
- Any special mitigation, timing considerations or other factors (such as soil texture and organic matter content) that must be considered to ensure the safest, most effective application of the herbicide
- Reference to product label instructions

For Biological Treatment Methods: Plans and specifications will include items 1 through 4, above, plus the following:

- Kind of biological agent or grazing animal to be used, if applicable
- Timing, frequency, duration and intensity of grazing or browsing
- Desired degree of grazing or browsing use for effective control of target species

- Maximum allowable degree of use on desirable non-target species
- Special mitigation, precautions or requirements with the selected treatment(s), especially when using insects or plants as control agents.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Operation: Brush management practices shall be applied using approved materials and procedures. Operations will comply with all local, state, and federal laws and ordinances.

Success of the practice shall be determined by evaluating post-treatment regrowth of target species after sufficient time has passed to monitor the situation and gather reliable data. Evaluation periods will depend on the methods and materials used.

Maintenance: Following initial application, some regrowth, resprouting, or reoccurrence of brush may be expected. Spot treatment of individual plants or areas needing re-treatment should be completed as needed while woody vegetation is small and most vulnerable to desired treatment procedures.

REFERENCES

- Branson, F. A, G. F. Gifford, K. G. Renard, R. F Hadley, and E. H. Reid, ed. 1981. Rangeland Hydrology, 2nd ed., Society for Range Management, CO.
- Heady, H. F. and D. Child, 1994. Rangeland Ecology and Management, Westview Press, CO.
- Holechek, J. L., R. D. Pieper and C. H. Herbel. 2000. Range management principles and practices, 5th edition. Prentice Hall, NJ.
- Krausman, P. R., ed. 1996. Rangeland Wildlife. Society for Range Management, CO.
- Monsen, S. B., R. Stevens, and N.L. Shaw, comps. 2004. Restoring Western Ranges and Wildlands, Volume 1. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS GTR-136-1, USDA, Forest Service, Fort Collins, CO.

United States Department of Agriculture,
Natural Resources Conservation Service.
2003. National Range and Pasture Handbook.
Washington, DC.

United States Department of Agriculture,
Natural Resources Conservation Service.
2008. General Manual: Title 190 – Ecological
Sciences: Part 404 – Pest Management.
Washington, DC.

Valentine, J. R., 1989. Range Developments
and Improvements, 3rd ed. Academic Press,
MA.

Vavra, M., W. A. Laycock, R. D Pieper, eds.
1994. Ecological Implications of Livestock
Herbivory in the West. Society for Range
Management, CO.