



**CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY**

**E645B**

**CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**

**Manage existing shrub thickets to provide adequate shelter for wildlife**

**Conservation Practice 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat**

**APPLICABLE LAND USE: Crop (Annual & Mixed), Crop (Perennial), Range, Pasture, Associated Ag Land, Farmstead, Forest**

**RESOURCE CONCERN: Animals**

**ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 5 year**

**Enhancement Description**

Existing shrub thickets provide an instant and important cover for wildlife. Various wildlife species may use shrubs as winter/thermal cover, summer shade, roosting, or as escape cover from predators. Proper management ensures that these shrubs will continue to provide the desired benefits for the local wildlife. A combination of herbicide treatments, cutting and trimming branches, and removal of other competing vegetation will occur. An eligible existing shrub thicket needs to have a canopy cover of 750 square feet, with an end goal of expanding to 1500 square feet. Any existing shrub thicket (not hand planted within the last 5 years) are eligible for this enhancement. Shrub thickets found within fence rows may now be very wide, but still meet the 750 square feet, are eligible.

**Criteria**

Multiple activities may need to occur to properly manage existing shrubs. Any activities involving tree removal will be coordinated with a Forester. Options for management of existing shrubs are described below:

- A. Encouraging new growth on existing plants
  - 1. Pruning and cutting back of plants is best done when the shrubs are dormant. Cutting back shrubs close to the ground encourages growth of new stems at ground level, which provides more protection for animals using the interior of the shrub. Leaving

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the cut branches on the ground adjacent to the thicket, will provide cover until new branches grow back .

2. Cutting back dead limbs is best done when the plants are actively growing, in order to observe which branches are alive, and which branches are dead. Leaving the dead branches on the ground and adjacent to the shrub thicket can provide additional cover at ground level.
  3. Before cutting branches and leaving them adjacent to the thicket, prepare the ground by creating bare ground for the branches to lay on.
- B. Creating bare ground for easier access by wildlife and encourage suckering of new growth.
1. Applying herbicide underneath and adjacent to shrub thicket(s) will create bare ground, which encourages suckering of new plant growth by eliminating vegetation and opening the canopy. Also, bare ground will allow smaller wildlife species to move more freely under the shrubs.
  2. Application of herbicide should be timed and applied carefully in order to not harm shrub plants. Pre-emergent or post-emergent herbicides may be desired.
  3. Herbicide usage on adjacent agricultural lands should be applied carefully to prevent drift and harm to shrub thickets.
  4. Utilization of a slow creeping fire through the shrub thickets will have similar effects and stimulate new growth. Some plants may be killed at the ground level, but new branches and stems will be created.
- C. Eliminating predator perches and opening escape paths in and near shrub thickets.
1. All trees found growing within, or close to shrub thickets create predator perches, and eliminates escape routes for bird species which may flush from the shrub thicket.
  2. Any trees found growing within shrub thickets shall be removed. Immediate stump treatment to prevent regrowth may be desired for some species.
  3. Undesirable trees found adjacent to shrubs (within 50 feet) will also be removed. Stump treatment to prevent regrowth may be desired for some species.



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4. Hinge-cutting trees with numerous branches adjacent to thickets can provide additional shrubby type cover. Prepare the ground by creating bare ground prior to dropping and leaving trees. Large tall trees with few branches are not desirable for hinge cutting, and should be removed from the site to prevent creating predator habitat.
- D. Additional maintenance activities
1. Exclusion of livestock may be warranted immediately following management activities.
  2. Avoid damage (chemical and mechanical) done by adjacent agricultural practices.



**Documentation and Implementation Requirements**

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STEWARDSHIP  
PROGRAM**

**Participant will:**

- Prior to implementation, provide a map showing the location of proposed shrub thickets to be managed with notes on land use adjacent to proposed areas to discuss with NRCS staff.
- During implementation, follow management guidance provided by NRCS in the state specifications for NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Cover Upland Wildlife Habitat (Code 645).
- After implementation, provide a list of management and/or maintenance activities carried out to manage the habitat areas and the dates on which those activities occurred.

**NRCS will:**

- Prior to implementation, assess habitat condition using the appropriate state Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) to calculate current WHEG score and anticipated WHEG score after implementation of Enhancement. **Benchmark WHEG score = \_\_\_\_\_ Planned Post Implementation WHEG score = \_\_\_\_\_**
- Prior to implementation, identify target wildlife species and appropriate desired conditions for existing shrub thickets for target species. Document on the state approved Wildlife Habitat Management Plan.
- Prior to implementation, provide and explain State specifications for NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Upland Wildlife Habitat (Code 645).
- After implementation, verify successful completion of management (per criteria above).



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**NRCS Documentation Review:**

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and have determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contract Number \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Applied \_\_\_\_\_ Fiscal Year Completed \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature

Date



## Alabama Supplemental Guidance for CSP Enhancement

### **2024 CSP ENHANCEMENTS – GUIDANCE & PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATION**

ENHANCEMENT NUMBER AND TITLE:

**E645B – Manage existing shrub thickets to provide adequate shelter for wildlife**

**Conservation Practice 645: Upland Wildlife Habitat Management**

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ENHANCEMENT:

Existing shrub thickets provide an important cover for wildlife. Various wildlife species may use shrubs as winter/thermal cover, summer shade, roosting, or as escape cover from predators. Proper management ensures that these shrub thickets will expand and will provide additional cover which will benefit the local wildlife.

**Some important things to note:**

- An eligible existing shrub thicket needs to have a canopy cover of 750 square feet, with an end goal of expanding to 1500 square feet.
- Any length and width that totals 750 square feet is eligible, even if a narrow thicket along a fencerow.
- The goal should be to have at least four existing shrub thickets within a ¼ mile stretch of field edge or early successional habitat.
- Use chainsaw felling, mulching or other equipment to remove unwanted trees within the area of intended expansion of shrub thickets. In addition, remove all trees located within the existing shrub thicket. Herbicide treatments will likely be necessary to keep trees from reoccupying the area before shrub thickets can expand to fill the unoccupied space.
- If adjacent brush is small enough, foliar herbicide treatment may be all that is necessary to remove unwanted brush to allow for expansion of shrubs. Be careful not to impact the shrub patch with overspray and to consider the impacts of soil active herbicides (do not spray soil active herbicides close to existing shrubs).
- A very *light* application of fertilizer will boost fruit production, root/rhizome suckering and expansion of shrubs into adjacent areas. Apply fertilizer at the rate of ½ pound of 13-13-13 per 100 square feet (10 foot by 10-foot equivalent). Applications can be made twice per year; once in spring and once in mid-summer. *Fertilizer is often overapplied, which can damage or kill plants. Be sure to spread as evenly as possible and do not apply more than the recommended amount.*

ATTACH COPIES OF REQUIRED DOCUMENTS AS NOTED BY THE ENHANCEMENT JOB SHEET. CHECK THE BOX OR OTHERWISE IDENTIFY THE SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION.

- MAPS OF THE LOCATION(S) WHERE THIS PRACTICE WAS APPLIED

## Alabama Supplemental Guidance for CSP Enhancement

- REPRESENTATIVE IMAGES/PHOTOS OF SHRUB PATCHES **BEFORE** ENHANCEMENT APPLIED AND INDICATE AREA OF EACH ON MAP
- REPRESENTATIVE IMAGES/PHOTOS OF SHRUB PATCHES **AFTER** ENHANCEMENT APPLIED AND INDICATE AREA OF EACH ON MAP
- DOCUMENT IN WRITING DATES OF COMPLETED ACTIVITY ALONG WITH DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

The attached documents support the full implementation of this Conservation Stewardship Enhancement.

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CSP Participant Name

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Date