



# FACT SHEET



## Natural Resources Conservation Service's Compatible Use Authorization Guidelines

*Wetlands Reserve Program, Floodplain Easement Program, and Healthy Forests Reserve Program*

Compatible uses are important management tools to achieve wetland functions and values and maximize wildlife habitat. Compatible uses further the long-term protection and enhancement of the wetland and other natural values of the easement area, but also offer the landowner flexibility in the management of their land. Implementation can provide management of plant species and stages and improve habitat diversity on easement lands. Any activity that affects vegetation or alters water levels requires a compatible use permit.

### How to Apply

Landowners may request a compatible use authorization through their local field office. A Compatible Use Authorization Request form (AD-1160) and supporting documentation are required. Supporting documentation may include:

- maps clearly showing the location of the activity,
- description of the timeframe (what time of year?), duration (how many days/months/years?) and intensity of the activity (how often will it be implemented?)
- a detailed weed control or management plan
- seeding or planting list
- prescribed burn plan developed by a certified planner
- other supporting documentation as required

The Compatible Use Authorization request will be evaluated by the NRCS, in consultation with United States Fish and Wildlife Service and other technical partners as needed. Approval is not guaranteed, and if the proposal is approved, NRCS will provide detailed limits for the approved activity. Sites with active compatible use authorizations will be monitored more frequently to ensure the activity is not detrimental to the site. Compatible use authorizations may be revoked at any time.

### Common Types of Compatible Use Requests

**Trails:** Access trails and nature/hiking trails require approval. Approved trails may not exceed 10-foot in width. Mowing cannot occur more than once per year, and must take place at designated times to minimize disturbance to wildlife. The total area of all trails and food plots combined will not exceed 5% of the easement acreage. A map designating the location and length of the trails must be included with the compatible use authorization request.

**Food Plots:** If authorized, food plots are permitted on no more than 5% of the easement acreage. The total area of trails and food plots combined will not exceed 5% of the easement acreage. Food plots may be annual or perennial in nature, but may not be harvested. Food plot specifications will follow the Indiana NRCS Field Office Technical Guide Standard 645 Upland Wildlife Management. Only one-third of the total acreage allotted to annual food plots may be planted in any given year, and rotated through the designated area. Additional food plot information is available at: [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2\\_029904.doc](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2_029904.doc)

**Vegetative Management:** Landowners may be interested in maintaining a specific habitat type on their property. This may include the maintenance of grassland/prairie or early-succession habitats that require regular disturbance. Disturbance activities include, but are not limited to strip disking, strip spraying and prescribed burning. Note that prescribed burning compatible use authorization requests must include a copy of a burn plan prepared by a qualified individual.

Landowners may also be interested in enhancing the natural vegetation on their property with additional plantings. A complete list of species to be planted should be provided as part of the compatible use authorization request.

**Noxious Weed Control:** Noxious weed control is the responsibility of the landowner, and required by the Warranty Easement Deed. The methods landowners use for controlling weeds must be written in a compatible use authorization prior to weed control activities. See Vegetative Management section above.

**Timber Harvest:** For both the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and Floodplain Easement Program (FPE), forest stand improvement will only be considered in instances where it is required to achieve or protect wildlife habitat and function. Typical harvests of marketable timber do not meet this criterion, and are generally not consistent with the long-term protection of the easement. Any forest stand improvement proposal will require a harvest plan developed in consultation with a wildlife or forestry professional. The Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) contains provisions for timber harvest. Landowners with HFRP easements must work closely with their local field office and a professional forester to develop a comprehensive harvest plan consistent with program requirements.

**Wetland Enhancement:** Landowners may be interested in managing or enhancing the wetland hydrology. These may include the management of water levels, or diversifying the topography of the site to target specific species of wildlife (for example mudflat management for shorebirds). Landowners are encouraged to work with the local NRCS field office and a wildlife biologist to develop a plan to be included with the compatible use authorization request that will benefit the target species.



*Woodducks on Wabash River WRP*