



Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

LAND CLEARING

CODE 460

(ac)

DEFINITION

Removal of trees, stumps, and other vegetation from wooded areas.

PURPOSE

This practice may be applied to achieve the following purpose:

- Facilitate land use adjustments in the interest of natural resource conservation.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to areas that require the removal of trees, stumps, brush, and other vegetation to implement a conservation objective.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Implement land clearing and disposal operations appropriate for site and soil conditions. Implement the practice in a manner that will prevent -

- Soil erosion,
- Adverse air and water quality effects,
- Risk to public safety and property
- Damage to adjacent forestland, vegetation, and hydrologic function.

Do not dispose of cleared woody debris in standing or green timber. Locate debris piles at least 100 feet from adjacent woodland, buildings, or roads. Avoid placement where channels or flooding could transport the debris.

Refer to criteria in NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Woody Residue Treatment (Code 384) for the treatment of woody debris, such as piling, burning, or chipping to reduce fire, safety, environmental, or pest hazards.

Refer to criteria in NRCS CPS Obstruction Removal (Code 500) for the removal and disposal of structures, universal waste, or nonhazardous secondary materials encountered during land clearing operations.

Leave cleared land in a condition that facilitates the planned land use. Refer to applicable criteria in NRCS CPSs Critical Area Planting (Code 342) for revegetating cleared areas or Precision Land Forming (Code 462), and Land Smoothing (Code 466) grading cleared areas for agricultural production.

CONSIDERATIONS

General Considerations

When possible, increase buffer widths next to water bodies (e.g., lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, or vernal pool settings) beyond widths recommended by the state, tribal, or local best management practices.

Schedule major land clearing operations during seasons of low potential sediment runoff. Schedule land clearing and associated activities to avoid buildup of insect or disease populations in removed and stacked trees, stumps, and other vegetation.

When a salvage harvest is performed prior to land clearing, leave stumps at a height greater than 1 foot to facilitate final clearing and grubbing activities.

Additional Considerations for Fish and Wildlife Resources

Special attention should be given to preserving habitat for fish and wildlife. Strip clearing, windrowing debris, and preserving den and food trees can minimize impacts on wildlife.

Additional Considerations

Debris piles should include open gaps for equipment access. Locate and orient firebreaks to promote curing of the debris and allow for surface water runoff.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare plans and specifications for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose.

Include the following information in the plans and specifications:

- A plan view of the limits of land to be cleared, including ingress and egress to site, vehicle staging area, salvage log stacking location, trails and roads, temporary rubbish or soil disposal/salvage sites, and other operational features, as applicable.
- Description of the work, extent of removal, and method of soil salvage or debris disposal.
- Layout, size, and disposal requirements of cleared woody debris.
- Location and description of trees or woody vegetation and other areas to be left undisturbed.
- Requirements to control erosion, water pollution, and air pollution, as applicable.
- Site-specific specifications that describe the condition of the cleared area for the planned land use.
- Vegetative requirements for areas denuded and disturbed, as applicable.
- Description of biosecurity safeguards to prevent the unintended spread of plant pests and diseases.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Prepare an operation and maintenance plan for use by the client. As a minimum, include—

- Protection measures for watercourses and water quality after land clearing operations.
- Performance of periodic inspections and timely repair of areas that may compromise the intended purpose.
- Maintenance of vegetative cover while controlling undesirable exotic or noxious vegetation.
- Restrictions for use of mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, pesticides, or other chemicals that may compromise the intended purpose.
- Guidance on crossing cleared areas with heavy equipment when the ground is saturated.

REFERENCES

USDA NRCS. 1985. National Engineering Handbook (Title 210). Section 19, Construction Inspection, Section Clearing and Grubbing: p.2-17

<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=18374.wba>