

# Early Successional Habitat Development/Management *Drum Chopping*

## *Virginia Conservation Practice Job Sheet*

**647(c)**



### Definition

Drum chopping is the use of a heavy track vehicle to pull one or two large metal cylinders (drums) with longitudinal cutting blades to displace woody roots and reduce sprouting.

### Purpose

Drum chopping is used to maintain an early successional habitat by controlling invasion of woody vegetation where there are large amounts of small diameter woody stems within an area. It stimulates establishment of annual plants that provide food and cover for early successional wildlife species. Drum chopping is allowed in cutover areas to maintain early successional habitat.

### Requirements

Drum chopped areas should be control burned the year after chopping for best results. VDOF, VDGIF or another certified burner should be consulted for a fire management plan.

This practice should be applied outside of the primary nesting season (April 15 – August 15).

Drum chopping should not be performed on soil types that are at a high risk of compaction.

Limitations include sites with debris or residual timber six inches or larger in diameter, excessive slope, extreme wetness, and large rock or other debris incapable of being chopped.

### Operation and maintenance

Summer chopping, after August 15<sup>th</sup>, is usually the best time due to reducing sprouting along with providing adequate dry fuels necessary to burn the area.

The equipment generally covers the entire area in one direction, but “Double Chopping” at right angles, usually applied 6 weeks later, has the best results. A proper prescribed burn a year following this operation is typically conducted for best results.

### Specifications

Site-specific requirements are listed on the back page and additional provisions are entered on the job sketch sheet. Specifications are prepared in accordance with VA NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. Refer to practice standards Prescribed Burning code 338, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management code 645, and Early Successional Habitat Development code 647.