



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Early Successional Habitat Development/Management

Prescribed Mowing

Virginia Conservation Practice Job Sheet

647(e)



Definition

Mowing for wildlife is the process of cutting existing vegetation in an area.

Purpose

To enhance the wildlife habitat value by encouraging a more diverse forb/legume community or greater structural diversity. Typically, mowing does not provide the type of benefits the other disturbance activities do. However, in some cases it may be the best method to use to control brush or provide increased stand diversity. Mowing may be all that is needed when other desirable characteristics, such as low stand density or species diversity, are already present.

Requirements

Early successional fields must be established for a minimum of three years before initiating prescribed mowing.

Do not mow during the primary nesting season (April 15 – August 15).

No more than 1/3 of the field will be mowed in any one year. This requirement is waived for fields less than 20 acres.

Prescribed mowing of any one area is limited to no more than once every three years.

If mowing only part of the field, it shall be done in blocks no larger than 20 acres. Alternate mowed blocks with unmowed areas.

For cool season grasses, mowing will be done between July 16 and August 16. Warm season grasses will be mowed between November 1 and February 28.

Cutting height shall be at least 4 inches for cool season grasses and 8 inches for warm season grasses.

Mowing residue should be shredded or well distributed to prevent deep litter accumulation or smothering existing plants.

Erosion on mowed areas will not exceed tolerable limits.

Mowing shall not be performed in the following areas:

- Areas where mowing will have minimal affect or potentially cause a negative impact on existing cover.
- Areas planted to trees and/or shrubs.
- Riparian forest buffers

These areas should be protected from livestock.

Operation and maintenance

Invasive and noxious weeds shall be controlled.

Participants should be wary of tile blowholes, groundhog holes, fallen tree limbs, and other hazards that may have developed since they were last in the field.

Mowing may be a good choice on areas where other practices involving soil disturbance would cause soil erosion or water quality concerns.

Specifications

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

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