

**Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
Compatible Use Guidelines on Easements**

General Considerations

- 1) 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.
- 2) Compatible use implementation can provide management of plant succession and improve habitat diversity on easement lands.
- 3) Compatible uses that enhance a landowner's recreational right will provide incentive and vested interest in managing the easement area. Activities that maximize recreational values and are compatible with habitat values and management plan objectives are encouraged.
- 4) The activity must not adversely affect habitat for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species.
- 5) Compatible use activities must consider the target species and their habitat needs from the existing management plan (focus is on migratory birds and T & E species).
- 6) Compatible uses permits must show how the activity will benefit target species and what criteria or conditions will be incorporated into the authorization.
- 7) Compatible uses are not a right or guarantee to the landowner. They are authorized at the discretion of NRCS, in consultation with partners, for activities that provide wildlife benefits to the easement area.
- 8) Compatible use plans must specify activity and prescribe method, frequency, timing, intensity, and duration.
- 9) Compatible uses may be written and authorized for up to five (5) years in length.
- 10) Only the State Conservationist or the Assistant State Conservationist/Programs can authorize compatible uses.
- 11) Annual on-site monitoring is required for all easements with authorized compatible uses in effect. This close monitoring will insure that the prescribed use is consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the easement area.

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GRAZING

- The local NRCS representative, with input from the landowner, FWS, NRD, and the NGPC, will develop grazing plans.
- The grazing plan will be developed to ensure the long-term function of the easement area and restore, protect, or maintain the native plant communities on the site. The grazing plan must meet the needs of species of concern or target species from an attached management plan.
- The grazing will contribute to the establishment and maintenance of quality wildlife habitat and other wetland functions and values of the site.
- Grazing is not permitted in the same year on the same acreage as haying and mowing.
- Grazing is not permitted on areas planted to trees and/or shrubs, unless those species are well established and mature enough to withstand the timing and intensity specified.

WILDLIFE FOOD PLOTS

- The food plots must contribute to the life cycle needs or food requirements of target wildlife species or guild of species of concern and provide diversity of habitat.
- The food plots can not be harvested as a commodity crop.
- Location, configuration, and spatial arrangement are described by NRCS for the specific site and arranged to avoid or minimize fragmentation.
- Food plots are limited to not more than five (5) percent of the total easement area.
- If food plots are abandoned, the landowner is responsible for reseeding area to permanent native vegetation, if deemed necessary by NRCS.
- Use of food plots will not conflict with federal or state baiting laws.

HAYING OR MOWING

- The haying or mowing must further the protection and enhancement of the wildlife habitat and wetland functions and values. The haying/mowing plan must meet the needs of species of concern or target species from an attached management plan.
- Haying or mowing is limited to once over a three year period between July 15 and September 1.
- Haying or mowing is not allowed in the same year that the same portion of the easement area is grazed.
- Haying or mowing must be scheduled to ensure adequate re-growth to provide winter cover and spring nesting cover.
- Haying or mowing is not permitted on areas planted to trees and/or shrubs.

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COVER CROP PRIOR TO RESTORATION

- The cover crop is determined to enhance pending construction and seeding of the site.
- The cover crop seeding will not contain species considered invasive.
- The cover crop will provide a good seedbed for the grass seeding, requiring less seedbed preparation.
- The cover crop will aid in layout of the restoration practices, requiring less site preparation.
- The cover crop will not be harvested for grain.
- Any hay bales will be removed from the site by July 15.
- The cover crop will be seeded by the landowner at own expense.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

- On larger sites (sites over 100 acres), no more than half the site should be burned in any one year.
- Landowner assumes all responsibility for this activity and will obtain all necessary permits.
- Prescribed burning should be considered when:
 - controlling invasive tree or grass species,
 - need for reducing excessive litter, or
 - need for increasing tiller production of desirable grass species.
- Prescribed burning is not permitted on areas planted to trees and/or shrubs; unless the species is well established and adapted to withstand prescribed burning (i.e. suckering ability of American Plum).
- The prescribed burn will contribute to the establishment and maintenance of quality wildlife habitat and other wetland functions and values of the site. The prescribed burn plan must meet the needs of species of concern or target species from an attached management plan.

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SUPPLEMENTAL WATER

- This activity will contribute to the establishment and maintenance of quality wildlife habitat and other wetland functions and values of the site. The supplemental water plan must meet the needs of species of concern or target species from the attached management plan.
- Timing and duration of the supplemental water will be supported by the habitat needs identified in the management plan.
- Supplemental water into the easement area will not change the vegetative composition to plant species other than the historic wetland community.
- Supplemental water will provide habitat conditions particularly critical for shorebirds, wading birds, and waterfowl. This habitat will also benefit resident wetland dependent wildlife.
- The NRCS is not responsible for any damage (real or perceived) to adjacent property from this activity.
- The landowner is responsible for obtaining any necessary permits and complying with local, state and federal regulations.
- From a landscape scale perspective, supplemental water will provide additional hydrology that has been significantly altered by activities such as land leveling, excavated pits, road ditches, and changes in river pulses/flows.

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TREE AND SHRUB PLANTING

- All plant species included in compatible use plans will be native to the appropriate Vegetative Zone – Refer to Section II of the FOTG. Species native to local site are highly recommended. Nebraska Biology Technical Note #65, “Terrestrial Natural Communities of Nebraska” will serve as a primary reference for determining suitability.
- Trees and/or shrubs will not be included in compatible use plans for any playa wetland, eastern saline wetland, western alkaline, or Platte River floodplain wetland (west of MLRA 106) or any upland area contiguous to these wetlands.
- Trees and/or shrubs will not be included in compatible use plans for wetland acres that are seasonally inundated or wetter or other sites that are likely to flood or pond for one month or longer during the growing season.
- Trees and/or shrubs may be allowed in compatible use plans for MLRA’s 107, 106, 102B, and 63B.
- Trees will rarely be allowed in compatible use plans for MLRA’s 71, 73, and 75. Shrubs are optional and may be allowed and will generally be limited to river/stream floodplains.
- Trees will not be allowed in compatible use plans for MLRA’s 60A, 64, 65, 66, 67, and 72. Shrubs are optional and may be allowed.
- Trees and/or shrubs should be planted in a configuration that complements natural features (i.e. clump plantings).
- All tree and/or shrub compatible use requests will be documented on the NRCS Tree and Shrub Planting Plan NE-CPA-15 and follow FOTG standards and specifications.

TREE REMOVAL

- Tree and/or shrub removal can be allowed in compatible use plans for any playa wetland, eastern saline wetland, western alkaline, or Platte River floodplain wetland (west of MLRA 106) or any upland area contiguous to these wetlands.
- Tree and/or shrub removal can be allowed in compatible use plans for wetlands that are seasonally inundated or wetter or other sites that are likely to flood or pond for one month or longer during the growing season.
- Tree and/or shrub removal will generally not be allowed in compatible use plans for MLRA’s 107, 106, 102B, and 63B.
- Tree removal will frequently be allowed in compatible use plans for MLRA’s 71, 73, and 75, especially areas outside of river/stream floodplains. Shrub removal is optional and may be allowed.
- Tree removal will be allowed in compatible use plans for MLRA’s 60A, 64, 65, 66, 67, and 72. Shrub removal is optional and may be allowed.
- Tree removal and disposal will be according to NRCS standards and specifications.

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OBSERVATION BLINDS

- Allowing blinds on WRP lands will enhance recreational opportunities and provide motivation for landowner management of the easement area for the wetland function of migratory bird habitat.
- The blind shall not impact the wetland functions or use by migratory birds.
- All blinds will be temporary; i.e. having no foundation or poured concrete.
- The dimensions of the blind will not exceed 120 square feet and additional blinds cannot be located closer than 200 yards.
- Aesthetics – above ground blinds can not exceed a height of 5 feet; below ground blinds can not extend higher than 1 foot above original ground and will blend with the natural topography.
- No fill will be placed in wetland when installing the blind.
- Excavation can not pierce the clay layer when installing the blind.
- Below ground blinds will remain covered when not in use.