



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Water Quality and Wildlife Enhancement Activity –ANM06- *Extending Existing Riparian Herbaceous Cover for Water Quality Protection and Wildlife Habitat*



Extend existing Herbaceous Riparian Buffers

Where existing buffers are utilized, extend them to gain more efficiency in intercepting overland flow and reducing the transport of nutrients, pesticides and agro-chemicals.

Land Use Applicability

This enhancement is applicable on cropland and pasture land.

Benefits

Widening existing herbaceous buffers that currently meet NRCS conservation practice standard criteria can provide food and cover for native and game species as well as enhancing aquatic habitat by providing shade, input of carbon to the stream, and stabilizing streambank conditions. Additionally, these extended buffers offer more surface area to filter out sediments and agro-

chemicals.

Riparian herbaceous habitats are important transition zones between terrestrial landscapes and aquatic zones. Wildlife species utilize these transition zones because they provide a unique combination of cover, access to water and often provide important travel corridors. Extending existing buffers not only enhances wildlife habitat but it increases the effectiveness of water quality protection they provide to the streams.

Criteria for Extending Existing Riparian Herbaceous Buffers

Existing buffers must meet minimum state requirements for width. Extend the existing buffer for a total of 60 feet or more to enhance habitat and water quality functions.

The extended buffer must be composed of at least 5 species of non-noxious, wildlife friendly grasses and/or perennial forbs best suited to site conditions. Include species that provide pollinator food and habitat where possible.

- All site preparation and plant establishment shall be accomplished according to the appropriate NRCS conservation practice standard criteria and specifications.
- Herbaceous riparian buffers shall consist of a diversity of plant species of which the majority are capable of producing nutritious food sources to wildlife.
- Any use of the herbaceous buffer must not compromise its intended purpose.



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- To the extent possible the buffer areas and extended buffer areas will be vegetated to increase overland flow interception and increase water quality values of the stream or water body.

For full implementation of this enhancement, continuous buffers (herbaceous or forested) must be used on all lands adjacent to streams, lakes and ponds where annual crops are produced.

Operation and Maintenance:

- Once established, buffers must not be mowed, disked, grazed, or otherwise disturbed, until after the primary wildlife ground nesting period has ended.
- Buffers will be regularly maintained for its intended purpose through the life of the contract. This includes any removal of vegetation, including grazing. Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect.
- Buffers will have a wildlife management plan to maintain established plant communities through the life of the contract. The wildlife plan will maintain the plant community and its structural diversity and provide habitat for intended species, remove duff, and control woody vegetation.
- Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect that maintains the buffer's intended purpose.

Documentation Requirements

1. A map showing the location and size of enhanced riparian herbaceous buffers.
2. Documentation of the type and rates of vegetation planted in the new riparian herbaceous buffers.



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Additional guidance for extending existing riparian herbaceous cover:

Existing riparian herbaceous buffers must meet NRCS Practice Standard 390 minimum width requirement per side, which includes the first bench of the floodplain, or be at least 1½ times the stream width (2½ times for water quality concerns) or 15 feet for water bodies (35 feet for water quality concerns). The herbaceous cover will be extended to at least 60 feet wide.

Wildlife Friendly Species

Wildlife friendly grass and forb species include all native perennial plant species typically represented by a diverse mixture as described in the representative ecological site description. Native grass species typically include streambank wheatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass, tufted hairgrass, mannagrass, western wheatgrass, prairie cordgrass, blue-joint reed grass and basin wildrye. Native forbs and legumes can include yarrow, globemallow species, flax, lupine, American vetch, and penstemon species. **Any use of the riparian herbaceous cover must not compromise its original intended purpose.**

For additional information, refer to the following documents:

Idaho NRCS Plant Materials Technical Note 24, *Grass, Grass-like, Forb, Legume and Woody Species for the Intermountain West*. ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/ID/programs/technotes/tn24_seedspecies

Idaho NRCS Plant Material Technical Note 24, Supplement: *Intermountain Planting Guide*, USDA-ARS Forage and Range Research Lab/Utah State Extension, AG 510. <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/ID/programs/technotes/tn24supplement>.

Idaho NRCS Plant Materials Technical Note 38, *Wetland Species and Grasses for Riparian Areas*. ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/ID/programs/technotes/herb_wetland_plants.pdf

USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. *Riparian Buffer Design Guidelines for Water Quality and Wildlife Habitat Functions on Agricultural Landscapes in the Intermountain west*. General Technical Report GTR-203. www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr203.pdf

USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station. *Conservation Buffers: Design Guidelines for Buffers, Corridors and Greenways*. General Technical Report SRS-109. http://www.unl.edu/nac/bufferguidelines/docs/conservation_buffers.pdf.

Site preparation and plant establishment must meet NRCS Practice Standard 390 requirements.