United States Department of Agriculture

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Key Practices for Wildlife

Since 1996, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has helped farmers address resource concerns on private land. EQIP, NRCS' principal program for delivering conservation technical and financial assistance to those who need it most, supports the needs of all agricultural operations, offering ideas, science-based solutions, and guidance for successful and sustainable conservation farms and forestlands. Just select and install any of the practices described below--and many others--once you develop a conservation plan designed to address your specific resource concerns. EQIP solves problems for farmers, graziers and forest landowners.

Riparian Forest Buffer (Conservation Practice Standard 391)

Riparian Forest Buffers are areas predominantly made of trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to and uphill from permanent or intermittent streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands and areas used for ground water recharge. Where existing perennial vegetation is already established, the riparian forest buffer will be planted to the landward side of the existing vegetation. Reasons for planting riparian forest buffers include but are not limited to:

- Create shade to lower water temperatures to improve habitat for aquatic organisms.
- Create wildlife habitat and establish wildlife corridors.
- Reduce excess amounts of sediment, organic material, nutrients and pesticides in surface runoff.
- Provide protection against scour erosion within the floodplain.
- Restore natural riparian plant communities.

Shallow Water Development and Management (Conservation Practice Standard 646)

By developing shallow water areas, landowners provide habitat for wildlife such as shorebirds, waterfowl, wading birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and other species that require shallow water for at least a part of their life cycle. This practice applies:

- On lands where water can be impounded or regulated by diking, excavating, ditching, and/or flooding.
- On floodplain areas that provide refuge habitats for waterfowl and native fish during high flow periods.

Conservation Cover (Conservation Practice Standard 327)

Retiring small parcels of fields and establishing grasses, legumes and wildflowers that are wildlife-friendly can greatly enhance the wildlife habitat value of the whole farm when done strategically as part of a wildlife habitat management plan. This practice specifies the seeding mixes appropriate for the site and beneficial to wildlife. EQIP gives special emphasis to areas established for pollinator habitat which include native wildflowers preferred by variety of local bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

Streambank and Shoreline Protection (Conservation Practice Standard 580)

Protection of streambanks and shorelines applies to streambanks of natural or constructed channels and shorelines of lakes, reservoirs, or estuaries where they are susceptible to erosion. Treatments are applied to avoid adverse effects to endangered, threatened, and candidate species and their habitats, whenever possible. Reasons for this practice include, but are not limited to:

- Maintain the flow capacity of streams or channels.
- Reduce the offsite or downstream effects of sediment resulting from bank erosion.
- Improve or enhance the stream corridor for fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and recreation uses.

Photo: Natural Land Institute

Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats (Conservation Practice Standard 643)

Restoration of prairies and savannas once common in Illinois but now rare, can provide habitat for rare and declining wildlife species that depend on these special habitats, as well as restore native plants to our landscapes. Conservation Cover (327) and Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) conservation practices can be used to establish native prairie grasses, wildflowers and scattered trees and shrubs that make up prairies and savannas. Brush Management (314) and Herbaceous Weed Control (315) conservation practices can be used to manage existing remnant natural areas to restore their diversity and eliminate exotic species.

Wetland Restoration (Conservation Practice Standard 657)

Restoring wetlands on sites that were once naturally wet will greatly enhance the wildlife habitat value for species that use wetlands. Restored wetlands will attract many kinds of wildlife species that landowners can enjoy and these areas can provide many different kinds of recreational opportunities. Along with the objectives of the landowner, restoration goals usually restore natural vegetation and water that the wetland once supported. Supporting practices often include Conservation Cover (327), Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) and structural measures that support the hydrology needed for the wetland.

Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (Conservation Practice Standard 647)

Early successional habitats provide for species who require habitats that endure frequent disturbances. Development and management of these plants adapted to disturbance, benefits desired wildlife and/or natural communities on all lands that are suitable to that wildlife and species. Management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community structure (e.g., density, vertical and horizontal cover) and plant species diversity. Measures must be provided to control noxious weeds and invasive species.

Tree/Shrub Establishment (Conservation Practice Standard 612)

Trees/Shrub establishment introduces woody plants to an area by planting seedlings or cuttings, direct seeding or natural regeneration. Once established, woody plants provide wildlife habitat, potential forest products, and long-term erosion control. They also improve air and water quality, sequester carbon, and enhance area aesthetics. Considerations include:

- Suitable species selection
- Type & purpose of stock
- Planting density/rate for intended purpose
- Size & quality of stock/seed
- Appropriate site preparation needs
- Continued control of plant/weed competition following establishment

Hedgerow Planting (Conservation Practice Standard 422)

Planting shrubs along field edges, roads and building sites provides food and cover for wildlife. Hedgerows are often used to create a safe travel corridor between two other patches of habitat. They can also be designed to provide a food source for pollinators offer a visual screen and barrier to noise and dust.