



**CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY**

**E647D**

**CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM**

**Establish and maintain early successional habitat in ditches and bank borders**

**Conservation Practice 647: Early Successional Habitat Development /Management**

**APPLICABLE LAND USE: Crop (Annual & Mixed)**

**RESOURCE CONCERN: Animals**

**ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 5 year**

**Enhancement Description:**

This enhancement is to encourage the establishment of early successional, naturally occurring vegetation in ditches, side slope and bank borders to provide cover, critical nesting and brood rearing habitat as well as filtering overland flow and improving water quality. Ditches perform the critical function of removing water from agricultural lands. Allowing naturally occurring vegetation to develop along ditches, including side slopes, banks and borders, will help provide food and cover for wildlife while enhancing aquatic habitat and improving water quality. Ditches and ditch borders provide a foundation that supports a diverse wildlife community including Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) and other birds preferring early successional cover. Rabbits, furbearers, amphibians and many other species that inhabit agriculture areas will use this vegetative cover. These areas can also provide critical nesting habitat for the Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*).

**Criteria:**

This enhancement applies to crop, pasture, or range land use acres with existing ditches and ditch borders where adequate naturally occurring vegetation is not present.

- Develop a wildlife habitat management plan for the suite of species targeted.
- Allow ditches and bank borders to re-vegetate to naturally occurring vegetation.

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- Ditch borders will be a minimum of 20 feet wide and a maximum 60 feet wide.
- In circumstances where woody vegetation exists immediately adjacent to a farm ditch (e.g., such as along a spoil bank), an adjoining minimum 20 feet early successional, native vegetative border will also be established.
- Once established, ditches and borders may not be treated more than once every two years and may not be mowed, disked, grazed, dredged, cleaned, or sprayed with broadcast herbicides, or otherwise disturbed between treatments.
- Encroaching undesired woody vegetation may be controlled between the two treatment periods through spot spraying with approved herbicides.
- For the two approved treatments, light disking, mowing or herbicides may be used to control vegetation next to designated ditches, along ditch banks and borders.
  - These treatments must be applied outside of the primary wildlife ground nesting season.
  - Only herbicides approved for appropriate site conditions shall be applied.
  - Herbicides shall be applied following manufacturers label requirements.
- Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect.
- Multiple ditch borders on the same property must have varying maintenance schedules.
- Invasive species such as kudzu, cogongrass, Chinese tallow tree, etc. that may become established in the border area must be controlled by spot spraying with an approved herbicide.
  - A Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) specific to shallow water habitat on cropland, must be used to show that implementation of the Enhancement will improve wildlife habitat value from fair (planning criteria = 0.5) to good (planning criteria greater than 0.5 and less than or equal to 0.6) or from good to very good (planning criteria greater than 0.6).

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## Documentation and Implementation Requirements:

### Participant Will:

- Prior to implementation, meet with NRCS to review results of the wildlife habitat assessment conducted by NRCS and discuss range of management alternatives that would improve wildlife habitat conditions.
- Prior to implementation, meet with NRCS to obtain and review the Wildlife Habitat Management Plan.
- During implementation, follow the Wildlife Habitat Management Plan.
- During implementation, maintain field log to include:
  - Type of crop(s) grown.
  - Harvest date of crops grown on the applicable acres.
  - Date/time and description of all habitat management actions taken.
  - Digital photographs documenting the condition of the habitat provided.
- After implementation, provide the field log to NRCS for review to verify enhancement was implemented to meet criteria.

### NRCS Will:

- As needed, provide additional technical assistance to the participant.
- Prior to implementation, verify this enhancement will be applied to crop, pasture, or range acres with existing ditches and ditch borders where adequate naturally occurring vegetation is not present.
- Prior to implementation, assess habitat condition using the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide to calculate current WHEG score and anticipated WHEG score after implementation of Enhancement.  
**Existing WHEG score = \_\_\_\_\_ Planned Post Implementation WHEG score = \_\_\_\_\_**
- Prior to implementation, review results of the wildlife habitat evaluation with the participant and discuss range of management alternatives that would improve wildlife habitat conditions.
- Prior to implementation, develop a Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for targeted suite of species.
- Prior to implementation, meet with the participant to review the Wildlife Habitat Management Plan.

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- After implementation, reassess habitat condition using Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide; **Post Implementation WHEG score = \_\_\_\_\_**
- After implementation, review field log to verify enhancement was implemented to meet criteria.

### NRCS Documentation Review:

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and have determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contract Number \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Applied \_\_\_\_\_

Fiscal Year Completed \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date