



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY
E666132Z2

CONSERVATION
STEWARDSHIP
PROGRAM

**Reduce forest stand density to improve
a degraded plant community**

Conservation Practice 666: Forest Stand Improvement

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Forest

RESOURCE CONCERN ADDRESSED: Degraded Plant Condition

PRACTICE LIFE SPAN: 10 Years

Enhancement Description:

Reducing forest stand density creates open forest conditions with a low basal area which promotes the health and vigor of the residual trees. The open stand structure allows a significant amount of sunlight to reach the forest floor and stimulates the growth of understory vegetation. Understory vegetation management, along with the wide spacing between trees or clumps of trees, provides visual appeal, lowers the risk of wildfire, and provides habitat for many at-risk and listed wildlife species. The enhancement creates conditions that facilitate a follow-up treatment with prescribed burning.

This enhancement provides for management of the understory vegetation in a forested area, using mechanical, chemical or manual methods to improve the plant species mix and the health of the residual vegetation.

Criteria:

States will apply general criteria from the NRCS National Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) 666 as listed below, and additional criteria as required by the NRCS State Office.

- Develop or update a forest management plan in consultation with NRCS personnel and a professional forester to direct the management of the property.
- Thin the stand to a target basal area of 50 to 60 square feet/acre. This creates an open stand and stimulates the growth of herbaceous vegetation on the forest floor. Preferentially remove unhealthy individual trees, undesirable species, and trees with visible defects including forked or broken tops, thin crowns or damaged trunks. Retain desired species and individual trees with large healthy crowns and undamaged trunks.



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- The stand may have been previously thinned or may be in need of thinning. Merchantable trees may be sold. Reduce stand density sufficiently to get light to the forest floor. The overstory thinning must be completed prior to the understory treatment.
- Trees that cannot be sold may be cut or killed to reduce the canopy and allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. Use NRCS CPS Woody Residue Treatment (Code 384) as needed to treat felled wood.
- Minimize damage to residual trees during the thinning process.
- Time tree felling to avoid buildup of insect or disease populations.
- Understory vegetation in fire-adapted forest types will receive the greatest benefit from treatment with prescribed burning. Use NRCS CPS Prescribed Burning (Code 338), and follow all applicable federal, state and local laws. If prescribed burning is not feasible or not appropriate for the site, understory vegetation may be treated with mechanical methods like mulching, mowing, chainsaws, or small dozers.
- Control measures should be used on undesirable competing vegetation, to favor the development of desirable vegetative communities on the site. Vegetation may be treated by chemical methods such as spraying or single stem treatments, or mechanical methods like a heavy duty brush cutter or similar equipment. Refer to criteria in NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Integrated Pest Management (Code 595).
- Implement forest stand improvement activities in ways that avoid or minimize soil erosion, compaction, rutting, and damage to remaining vegetation, and that maintain hydrologic conditions. Protect site resources by selecting the method, felling direction and timing of tree felling, and heavy equipment operation. For temporary access use NRCS CPS Forest Trails and Landings (Code 655), to protect soil and site resources from vehicle impacts.
- Where slash and debris will be generated, use NRCS CPS Woody Residue Treatment (Code 384) to appropriately treat slash and debris, as necessary, to assure that it will not present an unacceptable fire, safety, environmental, or pest hazard. Remaining woody material will be placed so that it does not interfere with the intended purpose or other management activities. Do not burn vegetative residues except where fire hazard or threats from diseases and insects are of concern or when other management objectives are best achieved through burning. When slash and other debris will be burned onsite use NRCS CPS Prescribed Burning (Code 338).



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- Where machinery is being used, operate under dry conditions when the machinery will not cause rutting and/or soil compaction.
- Do not conduct activities during the nesting season for ground nesting birds.
- The enhancement will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and with States' Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality.

Documentation Requirements:

- Map showing the stand to be treated.
- Identify trees to be removed or retained in the thinned stand.
- Documentation that thinning is completed (e.g. photos, sale receipts, plot data-trees per acre-diameter classes – basal area, etc.).
- Documentation that the understory vegetation is being managed to promote desirable herbaceous plants.
- If prescribed burning is used, a prescribed burn plan is prepared and followed along with applicable state, local and federal laws. Documentation will include a completed post-burn evaluation as required within the burn plan.
- Additional documentation as required by NRCS State Office.