



**CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY
E666135Z2**

**CONSERVATION
STEWARDSHIP
PROGRAM**

**Reduce forest density and manage
understory along roads to limit wildfire risk**

Conservation Practice 666: Forest Stand Improvement

APPLICABLE LAND USE: FOREST

RESOURCE CONCERN ADDRESSED: Degraded Plant Condition – Wildfire Hazard

PRACTICE LIFE SPAN: 10 YEARS

Enhancement Description:

Opening the tree canopy along roads ("daylighting"), and providing space between ground vegetation and tree crowns, minimizes the spread of wildfires that often start along roads. Additionally, opening the canopy will allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor and promote flowering plants, and will reduce maintenance needs by allowing moisture to evaporate from roads.

The area along a forest road will have some trees removed through harvesting, cutting, mulching, or another option available at the site, with the objective of creating a partially open forest canopy bordering the road. The semi-open canopy provides a greater amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor, which with appropriate management will increase herbaceous ground cover. The open canopy and herbaceous understory minimizes woodland fuel and reduces the intensity of wildfires.

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.

- Remove about half (50 percent) of the trees in strips along on both sides of the road, if needed. Implement tree removal for a distance of 35 feet or more into the forest stand from the edge of the road.



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- 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 CPS Forest Trails and Landings (655), to protect soil and site resources from vehicle impacts.
- The enhancement will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and with States' Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality.
- Wetland compliance and highly erodible land regulations must be followed.
- Trees removed during the daylighting process having marketable quality may be sold. Retain desirable species with large healthy crowns, and trees and shrubs that provide a diversity of wildlife food sources. Remove trees that are:
 - At high risk of mortality or failure (unless retained as a wildlife tree at a safe distance from the road)
 - Of low crown vigor
 - Of poor stem form and quality
 - Less-desirable species.
- Trees that cannot be sold may be removed by cutting, mulching, firewood distribution, or other means to reduce the canopy and allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. Trees further away from the road may be killed and left standing as snags, if they will not fall onto the road.
- Minimize damage to residual trees during the daylighting process.
- Refer to criteria in CPS Integrated Pest Management (Code 595) to assist with site-specific strategies for pest prevention, pest avoidance, pest monitoring, and pest suppression. Time tree felling to avoid buildup of insect or disease populations.
- Where slash and debris will be generated, use 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 CPS Prescribed Burning (Code 338).

- The understory vegetation can be maintained by prescribed burning where appropriate. Use CPS Prescribed Burning (Code 338). If prescribed burning is not an option, alternative methods may be used to manage the understory vegetation, such as mowing or fall disking.
- The daylighted area may be treated with herbicides to control noxious and invasive plants and undesirable woody vegetation to promote herbaceous plants. 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).
- No daylighting activities should take place during the nesting season for ground nesting birds.

Documentation Requirements:

- Map showing the road to be daylighted, and the area of forest where partial canopy removal is applied.
- Identify the trees to be removed or retained along the targeted road.
- Document the rationale for treatments applied to daylight and maintain the area.
- Documentation that the road daylighting activity is completed, e.g. photos, receipts.
- Prescribed burn plan, if it is the treatment method chosen for managing understory vegetation. All necessary permits must be obtained. The burning plan must comply with state and local regulations, and with NRCS policy. A completed post-burn evaluation as required within the burn plan will be included in the documentation for this enhancement.
- Additional documentation as required by NRCS State Office.