



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

E647139Z1

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Establish and maintain wildlife habitat continuity by providing early successional, naturally occurring vegetation in ditches and ditch bank borders

Conservation Practice 647: Early Successional Habitat Development /Management

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Crop (Annual & Mixed)

RESOURCE CONCERN ADDRESSED: Fish & Wildlife – Inadequate Habitat

PRACTICE LIFE SPAN: 5 years

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.



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- Allow ditches and bank borders to re-vegetate to naturally occurring vegetation.
- 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, 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 the primary wildlife ground nesting season.
 - Only herbicides approved for appropriate site conditions shall be applied.
 - Herbicides shall only 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.
- Any invasive species such as kudzu, cogongrass, Chinese tallow tree, etc. that may become established in the border area must be controlled by spot spraying of 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 Requirements:

- Copy of the wildlife habitat management plan for the targeted species suite (including the WHEG scores for present and planned conditions).
- A map showing the location and size of installed ditch borders.
- Documentation of all applied maintenance activities.
- Photographic documentation of site conditions before and after treatment.

The enhancement is considered adopted when the above criteria has been applied on the land use acre.