

Prescribed Grazing Information Sheet

Including Woodlands in Small Ruminant Grazing Systems



Small ruminants are often allowed to browse woodlands. Under the Alabama Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Prescribed Grazing (528) Conservation Practice Standard, certain stands of woodlands may be included to supplement a grass-based prescribed grazing system.

Inclusion of certain woodlands may serve to:

- provide a limited, but sustainable source of browsable dry matter and provide sources of tannins often needed by small ruminants
- allow herbaceous forages an opportunity to rest and recover from grazing
- facilitate parasite management by moving goats to other paddocks while the parasite populations decline.

Suitable Lands

Stands of trees consisting of pines, hardwoods, or mixed stands of both may be used.

Woodland sites must meet the definition of forestland and the site evaluation minimum criteria which consider soils; tree basal area; existing browse and other vegetation; threatened and endangered species; and other site conditions.

The sites must have an understory layer of shrubs, forbs, or grass, and be able to support 2-3 goats per acre during the designated grazing periods (see Figure 1).

NRCS is available to help with site evaluations to determine suitability.

Criteria

In the Prescribed Grazing Conservation Practice Standard, small ruminants will not be used to “clean up” woodlots, but may use the woodland browse and associated forage in a sustainable manner. Woodlands must be used in conjunction with nearby grass pastures as part of the full rotational or prescribed grazing system. Grass pastures will be within one-fourth mile of the woodland sites.

Operations will have at least one acre of perennial grasses and/or forbs in an existing grazing system for each two acres of planned woodland grazing.

The grasses are to provide at least six months of grazing for the herd whether the system is based on warm-season or cool-season forages, or a combination of both.

All fields in the grazing system will follow the Prescribed Grazing (528) Conservation Practice Standard.

When needed, woody vegetation will be cleared to accommodate boundary fences for woodland paddocks. These lanes will be 20 feet or less in width. The installation of net wire or high tensile electrical fence systems will be used to sustain and manage a rotational grazing system following the Fence (382) Conservation Practice Standard. Land clearing will follow the Land Clearing (460) Conservation Practice Standard. Cleared land will be vegetated using the Critical Area Planting (342) Conservation Practice Standard.

