mall 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.
Stocking Densities: Goats will be stocked in woodlands at three or less animals per acre.

Rotational Grazing: Proper rotational grazing management is key to sustaining the browsing resource. Without it animals can continuously over-browse and significantly weaken the plants, minimizing the ability of the plants to regenerate more browse in a timely manner. It is possible that dry-matter production may decline with repeated grazing periods. A deferment period of a year or more may be necessary to allow the favored browsing plants to recover adequately before initiating another grazing period.

The small ruminants will be rotated at least every 14 days, or sooner if they remove 50 percent of the favored vegetation in the paddocks.

Woodland paddocks must rest at least 60 consecutive days after each rotational grazing period. Additional rest may be required before another grazing period begins and will be regulated by availability of preferred vegetation.

Monitoring of vegetation removal is necessary to avoid over-grazing or over-browsing the favored vegetation. Monitoring using photographs or exclusion cages is acceptable.

Other woodland type practices such as prescribed burning or tree stand improvement may be needed to maintain a usable stand of browse and forage for the small ruminants.

Woodland grazing must follow the grazing calendar for each region in Alabama (Figure 1).

Grazing plans are needed to implement the Prescribed Grazing practice. The plans may include Conservation Practice Standards such as Fence (382), Watering Facilities (614), and Critical Area Planting and Land Clearing (460).

Timber Stands and Management: For planted or natural stands of forestland, thinning of the stand may be needed so the understory vegetation can flourish and support the goats. Well managed woodlands that are properly thinned will usually provide suitable amounts of usable understory vegetation.

According to the publication "Management of Southern Pine Forests for Cattle Production," forage production is lowest and does not improve when there is about 45 percent canopy or greater. However, forage production does increase significantly as the canopy coverage decreases beginning at 30 percent canopy, or a basal area of 75.

Watering Facilities: Providing an adequate water supply for small ruminants may be essential for the health of the animals and successful implementation of the prescribed grazing practice. Generally, a water trough system supplied by well water or a rural water system is the preferred water supply.

Animal Shelters: Shelters may be needed to protect animals from inclement weather. Use of this practice is encouraged, but is at the discretion of the producer.

Plans and Specifications

Specifications for applying this system will be prepared for each site and recorded using approved NRCS procedures.

The conservation plan will provide details of the criteria to be followed when implementing the prescribed grazing practice.

Figure 1. Calendar of Prescribed Grazing of Woodlands by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Calendar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>May 1 – September 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and South</td>
<td>April 15 – September 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Timber Stands and Management: For planted or natural stands of forestland, thinning of the stand may be needed so the understory vegetation can flourish and support the goats. Well managed woodlands that are properly thinned will usually provide suitable amounts of usable understory vegetation.

According to the publication "Management of Southern Pine Forests for Cattle Production," forage production is lowest and does not improve when there is about 45 percent canopy or greater. However, forage production does increase significantly as the canopy coverage decreases beginning at 30 percent canopy, or a basal area of 75.