

Animal Enhancement Activity – ANM51 – Establish and maintain early successional, naturally occurring vegetation in ditches and ditch bank borders for wildlife habitat and water quality protection



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.

Land Use Applicability

Cropland, Pastureland, Rangeland

Benefits

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*).

Conditions Where Enhancement Applies

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.

Criteria

Implement the following:

1. Develop a wildlife habitat management plan for the suite of species targeted.
2. Allow ditches and bank borders to re-vegetate to naturally occurring vegetation.
3. Ditch borders will be a minimum of 20 feet wide and a maximum 60 feet wide.
4. 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.
5. 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.



6. Encroaching undesired woody vegetation may be controlled between the two treatment periods through spot spraying with approved herbicides.
7. 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.
 - a. These treatments must be applied outside the primary wildlife ground nesting season.
 - b. Only herbicides approved for appropriate site conditions shall be applied.
 - c. Herbicides shall only be applied following manufacturers label requirements.
8. Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect.
9. Multiple ditch borders on the same property must have varying maintenance schedules.
10. 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.

Adoption Requirements

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

Documentation Requirements

1. Copy of the wildlife habitat management plan
2. A map showing the location and size of installed ditch borders.
3. Documentation of all applied maintenance activities.
4. Photographic documentation of site conditions before and after treatment.

References

Forest & Wildlife Research Center. 2005. Grassland bird response to agricultural field borders. Research Advances. Volume 8, No. 2. February. Mississippi State University, <http://fwrc.msstate.edu/pubs/grassland.pdf>

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. 2014. A guide for managing wildlife on private lands in North Carolina. Conserving North Carolina's wildlife resources. <http://www.ncwildlife.org/tarheelwildlife>.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. 2014. Brushy ditch banks, weedy field borders are beneficial to wildlife around farms. Life's better outdoors. March 20. www.dnr.sc.gov/news/yr2014/march20/march20_brushy.html