



NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE ARIZONA

Technical Variance Request for Conservation Practices Brush Management (314) and Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315)

Purpose: Conservation practices Brush Management (314) and Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315) standards and specification found in Section IV of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) contain the criteria or requirements which must be met in planning and in application. The practice standards and specifications provide a range in criteria for planning, design, and application. Practices applied within the range of criteria established in the standard and specifications shall be considered adequately applied and certified. All vegetative management activities will be planned in accordance to practice standard criteria, specification requirements, including “Arizona Management and Control Methods” and documented in a 314 or 315 conservation practice job sheet. Operating outside these guidelines will require a variance approved by the State Resource Conservation (SRC). Variances are approved when there is a documented need to establish additional purposes for an existing standard or less restrictive criteria than those required in state practice standards or specifications.

Background: Technical variances allows the orderly evaluation of new technologies, materials, procedures, etc. that are not currently contained within practice standards and specifications and to determine if changes are necessary. Technical variances are not to be used to deviate from federal, state, or local program requirements, laws, or ordinances, nor are technical variances to be used to address already initiated or completed practices that do not meet current specifications. All technical variances must be approved prior to contracting approval. The State Conservationist has delegated authority for technical variance request approval to the SRC for conservation practices 314 and 315.

Action: Technical variance request shall include the specifics of the purpose for supporting a local need and the justification for the variance. Variances will include any requirements for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting needed to determine whether changes in practice standards are necessary.

Request for Variance justification shall address the following:

- Targeted invasive species where the level of infestation, documented by an appropriate level of rangeland inventory, exceeds the maximum allowable amount in the Reference or Desired Plant Community for the identified Ecological Site(s).
- Treatment location is documented to have sufficient herbaceous understory or potential for producing the desirable plant community within a sufficient timeframe to provide site protection and to meet practice objectives.
- Site characteristics (soils, slope, topography, etc) and potential for accelerated erosion.
- Target species growth characteristics, size, distribution and level of infestation across the treatment area are compatible with applicable treatment methods and cost.
- The average annual precipitation amounts and timing; including both recent climatic conditions and long-term trends are adequate to support vegetative treatment goals and objectives.
- Planned treatment techniques will not adversely affect wildlife species and their habitats.

- Livestock grazing will be adequately controlled through prescribed grazing activities or other conservation measures to achieve the desired outcomes.

Technical variance requests shall be submitted using the Variance Request Form, found in Section IV of the Arizona Field Office Technical Guide, and approved prior to practice implementation. The request shall be routed through the Area Office and reviewed by the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTC-FOs) or designated Area Technical Specialist.

- a) If the request is not concurred with at the Area level, documentation to support the decision shall be provided back to the originating office, as well as a copy to the appropriate State-level Technical Specialist.
- b) If concurred with at the Area Office level, documentation to support the decision shall be prepared by the Area Staff and submitted, along with Variance Request Form, to the SRC. Upon receipt of a variance request from the Area level, the appropriate State-level discipline and staff shall review and issue an approval or denial of the request. The decision and accompanying documentation shall be provided back to the area office as well as to the originating office.
- c) Approved variances will require an evaluation and monitoring period as noted in request form. Upon completion of the monitoring period, a final status report with a summary of variance results will be completed by the originating Field Office with assistance from the Area Office. The report will be submitted to the SRC for review of results and findings.