

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**PRESCRIBED GRAZING**

(Acres)

**CODE 528A**

**DEFINITION**

The controlled harvest of vegetation with grazing or browsing animals, managed with the intent to achieve a specified objective.

**PURPOSES**

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to accomplish one or more of the following purposes:

- Improve or maintain the health and vigor of selected plant(s) and to maintain a stable and desired plant community.
- Provide, improve or maintain food, cover, and shelter for wildlife.
- Improve or maintain quality and quantity of forage for livestock.
- Improve or maintain water quality and quantity.
- Reduce accelerated soil erosion and maintain or improve soil condition.
- Promote economic stability through grazing land sustainability

**CONDITIONS WHERE THIS PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice may be applied on all lands where grazing and/or browsing animals are managed.

**CRITERIA**

The design of prescribed grazing systems will consider the objectives, desires, abilities, understanding, and available time of the client.

Removal of herbage will be in accordance with production limitations, plant sensitivities and management goals using Sections I & II of the FOTG and other references as guidance.

Minimum stubble heights to be maintained for improved pasture under optimum environmental conditions are as follows:

Minimum Height (inches)

Forage	Begin Grazing	Graze To
Alfalfa, Grazing Types	10	4
Bahiagrass	6	2
Bermudagrass, Common	5	2
Bermudagrass, Improved	6	3
Clover, White & Sub	5	1
Clovers, All Others	6	2
Dallisgrass	6	3
Eastern Gamagrass	15	8
Fescue, Tall	6	3
Johnsongrass	18	10
Indiangrass	12	6
Lespedeza, Annual	5	2
Orchardgrass	8	3
Pearl Millet	24	10
Ryegrass	6	3
Sericea	8	4
Small Grains	8	4
Sorghum-Sudan Hybrids	24	10
Sorghum, Forage	24	10
Switchgrass	18	10

On grazed forest, native pasture, or range land no more than 50% (by weight) of the annual growth of high or medium preferred grazing species will be utilized for grazing. See table 1 in *Grazing Lands Reference 20-3 Forestland Grazing: A Guide for Service Foresters in the South* for preferred grazing species.

Frequency of defoliations and season of grazing will be based on growth rate, physiological, and environmental conditions for plant growth. Grazing periods should be short (1 to 14 days) provided enough pastures are available in the grazing system to allow 15 to 21 days regrowth during optimum growing conditions and 21 to 45 days for regrowth during less than optimum conditions. A minimum of 3 or more paddocks of the same forage type (warm season or cool season) will be required for a complete grazing management unit.

Duration and intensity of grazing will be based on desired plant health and expected productivity of key forage species to meet management unit objectives. Prescribed grazing schedules will be used only as an initial guide. Flexibility is a necessity in prescribed grazing.

Warm season perennial grasses will require close grazing or mowing prior to overseeding cool season legumes and annual grasses to facilitate their establishment.

Where practical, start the grazing sequence in a different management unit each growing season.

Application of this practice will manipulate the intensity, frequency, duration, and season of grazing to:

- Ensure optimum water infiltration.
- Maintain or improve riparian and upland area vegetation,
- Protect stream banks from erosion,
- Manage for more even distribution of fecal material protecting water bodies from higher levels of nutrients and organics by deposition.
- Promote economically and ecologically stable plant communities which meet landowner objectives on both upland and bottom land sites.

### **Animal Health and Productivity**

Movement of animals will be in a manner to improve and/or maintain animal health and performance, and to reduce or prevent spread of disease, parasites, and contacts with harmful insects.

Grazing should be applied in accordance with forage quality and quantity criteria that best meet the production requirements for the kind and/or class of animal.

### **Water Quality**

Duration, intensity, frequency, and season of grazing in or near surface waters will be applied in such a manner that the impacts to vegetation and water quality will be positive or of no effect.

Duration, intensity, frequency, and season of grazing will be applied to enhance nutrient cycling by better manure distribution and increased rate of decomposition.

Manage grazing animals to maintain adequate vegetative cover on sensitive areas (i.e. riparian, wetland, habitats of concern, karst areas).

### **Soil Erosion and Quality**

Duration, intensity, frequency, and season of grazing shall be managed to minimize soil compaction or other detrimental effects.

Duration, intensity, frequency, and season of grazing shall be applied to sustain an average of at least 90% vegetative cover to minimize soil erosion.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas, trailing, and trampling to reduce soil compaction, excess runoff and erosion.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Supplemental feed may be necessary to meet the desired nutritional levels for animals of concern. Placement of supplemental feed should be considered to reduce negative impacts to soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources.

Use of natural or artificial shelter will be included as part of this practice where conditions demand.

Animal husbandry requirements which can affect the design of the grazing prescription will be considered.

Prescribed Grazing should consider the needs of other enterprises utilizing the same land, such as wildlife and recreational uses.

Prescribed Burning-338 may be useful in rejuvenating certain species of grasses, controlling certain diseases, and encouraging high quality forage growth.

Manage for diverse plant communities along with plant height structures and density for desired wildlife habitat.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

A Prescribed Grazing plan will be prepared for all fields and pastures incorporating any grazing for the operating unit or portion of an operating unit being addressed. Grazing schedules will be recorded in a manner that is readily understood and useable by the decision maker in their operation. The manner of documentation will depend upon the size and complexity of the operating unit and the details required for a grazing prescription.

A prescribed grazing plan will include the following information:

1. Goals and Objectives clearly stated
2. Resource Inventory – (i.e. Resource condition, existing structures, facilities, and soil).
3. Forage Inventory of the expected forage quantity, quality and species for each management unit(s), i.e., pastures during the grazing season.
4. Forage-Animal Balance developed as a sustainable grazing plan for the management unit, which insure forage produced or available meets forage demand of livestock of concern.
5. Grazing Plan developed for livestock that identifies periods of grazing, rest, and other treatment activities for each management unit.
6. Contingency Plan developed that details potential problems, i.e., drought, and a guide for adjusting the grazing prescription to ensure resource management and economic feasibility without resource degradation.

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

The manager will apply Prescribed Grazing on a continuing basis, making adjustments as needed to ensure that the concept and objectives of its application are met.

Maintenance. All facilitating practices (i.e. Fence, Watering Facilities, Pest Management, Heavy Use Areas) that are needed to effect adequate grazing distribution as planned by this practice standard will be maintained in good working order.

## **REFERENCES**

Forestland Grazing: A Guide for Service Foresters in the South. Forestry Report SA-FR10. Rev. August 1980. Missouri Grazing Manual. Edited by Jim Gerrish and Craig Roberts. 1997.

Southern Forages. Ball, D., Hoveland, C., and Lacefield, G. 2002.