Title of the Practice: Prescribed Grazing (NRCS Conservation Practice 528)

Definition: Managing the harvest of vegetation with grazing and/or foraging animals.

Purposes: Prescribed grazing improves or maintains desired species composition and vigor of plant communities, quantity and quality of forage for grazing and browsing animals’ health and productivity, soil condition, surface and/or subsurface water quality and quantity, watershed function, while reducing accelerated soil erosion.

General Expectations: Removal of herbage will be in accordance with site production limitations, rate of plant growth, the physiological needs of forage plants, the nutritional needs of the animals and other management goals. See <http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/NC/ForageFactsGrazingGuiderevSept2012.pdf> for “stop/start” forage specific grazing heights (or search NCSU forage facts grazing guide). Develop a grazing plan utilizing C-GRAZ (or other approved tools) to calculate and document the estimated balance between forage produced or available in the grazing management unit and livestock herd nutritional requirements in the current and planned pasture management system.

Additional management considerations:

* At all times livestock shall be supplied with adequate water. Provide shelter in the form of windbreaks, sheds, shade structures and other protective features where conditions warrant protection from severe weather, intense heat/humidity and predators. Grazing plans should seek to reduce animal stress and mortality resulting from toxic and poisonous plants. Ensure biosecurity safeguards are in place to prevent the spread of disease between on-farm classes of livestock and between farm units.
* Manage kind of animal, animal number, grazing distribution, length of grazing and/or browsing periods, and time of use to provide grazed plants sufficient recovery time.
* Manage grazing and/or browsing animals to maintain adequate vegetative cover on sensitive areas (e.g. wetlands).
* Develop contingency plans to deal with expected potential climatic events (e.g. drought). Plans should locate any needed feeding and sacrifice areas away from environmentally sensitive areas such as streams/creeks/riparian areas. Plan for managing vegetation in sacrifice areas.
* Utilize forage stockpiling to extend duration of the grazing season.
* Protect soil, water, air, plant and animal resources when locating livestock feeding, handling and watering facilities. Design these facilities to improve and/or maintain animal distribution in order to minimize stress, spread of disease, parasites and contact with harmful organisms and toxic plants.
* Where practical and beneficial, start the grazing sequence in a different management unit each growing season.
* Consider using native warm season grasses as part of the prescribed grazing system to provide cover for a variety of wildlife species and as potential drought tolerant alternatives to cool-season forage species.

Additional management considerations for specific resource concerns:

* To improve health and vigor of plant communities, base livestock movements on rate of plant growth and utilization rate, not calendar date or paddock residence time. Plan periodic deferment from grazing and/or browsing to maintain or restore the desired plant community following episodic events such as severe drought. Perform soil tests on all pastures and hay fields at a minimum very three years and maintain adequate nutrient and pH levels based on those tests. Control weedy invasive species.
* To maintain quantity and quality of forage for animal health and productivity, enhance diversity of pasture plants to optimize delivery of nutrients to the animals. Base dietary needs of livestock on the National Research Council’s “Nutrient Requirements of Domestic Animals” (or similar), adjusted for increased energy demand required by browsing or grazing animals foraging for food and travelling to and from pasture sites. Supplemental feed and/or minerals will be balanced with forage consumption to meet the desired and appropriate nutritional level for the animals.
* To protect water quality and riparian function minimize concentrated livestock areas to enhance nutrient distribution and improve or maintain ground cover. Plan intensity, frequency, timing and duration of grazing and/or browsing to minimize deposition or flow of animal wastes into water bodies, minimize animal impacts on stream bank or shoreline stability, provide adequate ground cover and plant density to maintain or improve infiltration capacity and reduce runoff, maintain or improve filtering capacity of vegetation, enhance nutrient cycling by providing more uniform manure distribution and increased rate of decomposition.
* To reduce soil erosion and maintain soil condition, minimize 1) concentrated livestock areas, 2) trailing and 3) trampling to reduce soil compaction, excess runoff and erosion.

Plans and Specifications: Prepare a grazing plan for all planned grazing management units where grazing and/or browsing will occur based on livestock rotation. The plan will include producer goals and objectives, an existing resource inventory (conditions and concerns, opportunities, location and condition of structural improvements such as fencing, forage inventory, including expected forage quantity, species and current and planned grazing efficiency in each grazing management unit, a forage/animal balance analysis using the C-GRAZ or other approved tool, identification of grazing management units, period of grazing and/or browsing, rest, and other treatment activities for each grazing management unit in the rotation, stop-start heights for grazed forages in the units, location of planned watering facilities, contingency plans for episodic events and a monitoring/recordkeeping plan.

Operation and Maintenance: Prescribed grazing will be applied on a continuing basis throughout the occupation period of all planned grazing management units. Adjustments based on monitoring and recordkeeping will be made as needed. Soil testing on all pastures and hay fields will take place every three years at a minimum. The Prescribed Grazing Checklist must be completed annually.

Practice financing (2014):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Practice | Component\* | Unit | Practice Rate NC/SC |
| Prescribed Grazing | Pasture Intensive (five or more paddocks) HU\* | Acre | $23.31/27.94 |
| Prescribed Grazing | Pasture Standard (minimum of four paddocks) HU\* | Acre | $13.92/13.15 |

\*HU = Historically Underserved and Beginning Farmer Rates