



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

E666R

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Forest songbird habitat maintenance

Conservation Practice 666: Forest Stand Improvement

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Forest, Associated Ag Land, Farmstead

RESOURCE CONCERN: Animals

ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 10 Years

Enhancement Description

Adopts guidelines and methods developed by the Forest Bird Initiative of the Vermont Audubon Society, to preserve habitat features following a forest stand improvement treatment designed to create habitat for a suite of forest-dwelling neotropical migratory songbirds. It includes developing or updating a forest management plan, inspecting and tending forest habitat, and monitoring bird populations. It protects investments in habitat creation by providing for follow-up activities that require the expertise of a professional forester or biologist. This enhancement is appropriate for states in forest songbird flyways, and is applicable in middle-aged, older-aged, or all-aged forests.

Criteria

States will apply general criteria from the NRCS National Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Forest Stand Improvement (Code 666) as listed below, and additional criteria as required by the NRCS State Office.

- This enhancement is used periodically following an initial treatment designed to create habitat elements specifically for neotropical migratory forest songbirds; habitat creation may include forest gaps, snags, cavities, supplemental plantings of trees or shrubs, removal of undesirable invasive species, etc. States will determine when to use the enhancement; one year following the initial treatment is the soonest it should be applied, and after that it should be used every three to five years to check for changed conditions.



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- Update the current Forest Management Plan (FMP) to include guidelines to maintain habitat for forest birds. The FMP will include guidelines for inspection and monitoring, identify the types of forest health impacts or stand damage to look for during inspections, and will describe the types of activities that may be needed to preserve existing habitat conditions.
- A forestry specialist will inspect the stand and identify species of harmful insects, tree diseases, invasive plants, as well as other biotic and abiotic (i.e. ice storms, drought, flooding, etc.) impacts on forest growth, health, structure and/or composition.
- The forestry specialist will make recommendations for short-term treatments as needed. A skilled laborer will implement appropriate activities, such as applying mechanical and spot chemical treatments.
- The forestry specialist will make recommendations for additional practices needed to correct undesirable forest health conditions. Practices may include: NRCS Conservation Practice Standards Integrated Pest Management (Code 595), Brush Management (Code 314), and Herbaceous Weed Control (Code 315).
- A forestry or wildlife specialist will evaluate and report on the condition of songbird habitat elements using protocols in “Bird Habitat Inventory Field Procedures” from Audubon Vermont (http://vt.audubon.org/sites/g/files/amh751/f/bidhab_protocol_web_0.pdf), or a similar set of protocols adopted by the respective state’s wildlife management agency or equivalent state-level entity. The forestry specialist will recommend initial treatments and additional practices, if needed, to the participant(s) and NRCS.
- During the bird breeding season, a trained forestry or wildlife specialist will conduct a bird census according to protocols adopted by the respective state’s wildlife management agency or equivalent state-level entity.
- The participant will control access to the stand as needed to prevent resource damage, and to reduce disturbance to songbirds and other wildlife.



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Documentation and Implementation Requirements:

Participant will:

- Prior to implementation, review the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Forest Stand Improvement (Code 666) or appropriate state guidance document and use the information to meet the criteria of this enhancement. Also review Forest Bird Initiative guidance from the Vermont Audubon Society at <http://vt.audubon.org/conservation/working-lands/forest-bird-initiative-1>, or equivalent state-level guidance provided by NRCS.
- Prior to implementation, the participant will obtain a current or updated Forest Management Plan (FMP) that includes activities required to implement this enhancement. The FMP will include guidelines for inspection and monitoring, the types of forest health impacts or stand damage to look for during inspections, and potential activities that may be needed to preserve existing habitat conditions. The participant will make the FMP available for NRCS review.
- Prior to implementation, make arrangements for a forestry and/or wildlife specialist to inspect the stand and complete a habitat monitoring report, conduct a bird survey, and accomplish other tasks called for in the enhancement.
- During implementation, notify NRCS if there are any planned changes, to verify that they meet enhancement criteria.
- During implementation, keep a written log and take digital photos.
- After implementation, retain a map showing the location of activities, and photos. Make the map and photos available to NRCS for verification.
- After implementation, notify NRCS that the work was completed, and make the following information available to NRCS: dates that inspection was conducted, methods used, reports on bird surveys and habitat monitoring, photos, and a map showing bird monitoring points.
- After implementation, control access to the stand as needed to prevent resource damage, and to reduce disturbance to songbirds and other wildlife.



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NRCS will:

- Prior to implementation, verify the enhancement activity is planned for acres that meet the criteria in the enhancement guide sheet, by reviewing the existing FMP or other documentation of treatment objectives and implementation, and through field verification.
- Prior to implementation, assist with the interpretation of a current or updated FMP on acres targeted by this enhancement.
- Prior to implementation, provide and explain the following NRCS Conservation Practice Standards as they relate to implementing this enhancement:
 - Forest Stand Improvement (Code 666)
 - Integrated Pest Management (Code 595)
 - Brush Management (Code 314)
 - Herbaceous Weed Control (Code 315)
- As needed, prior to implementation, NRCS will provide technical assistance by:
 - Providing and explaining the Forest Bird Initiative guidance from the Vermont Audubon Society at <http://vt.audubon.org/conservation/working-lands/forest-bird-initiative-1>, or equivalent state-level guidance on habitat for migratory forest-dwelling birds.
 - Providing methods to be used for conducting bird surveys, using protocols adopted by the state wildlife management agency or equivalent state-level entity.
 - Preparing specifications for applying this enhancement for each site using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation, and will discuss the details with the participant.
- During implementation, provide technical assistance if requested by the participant.
- During implementation, evaluate any planned changes to verify they meet enhancement criteria.



- After implementation, certify that the enhancement was completed according to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Forest Stand Improvement (Code 666) specifications and the enhancement criteria.

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NRCS Documentation Review:

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and have determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

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Participant Name _____ Contract Number _____

Total Amount Applied _____ Fiscal Year Completed _____

NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature

Date

