HABITAT BUFFERS FOR UPLAND BIRDS

Michigan CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM CRP – CP33

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) October 2006

Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

WHAT IS A HABITAT BUFFER FOR UPLAND BIRDS?

A habitat buffer for upland birds is a narrow band of native grasses, legumes, forbs, &/or shrubs located around the perimeter of cropland fields that provides habitat for bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasant, and other upland birds. In addition, habitat buffers for upland birds may limit sediment, nutrients, pesticides, and other contaminants from entering water bodies.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for this practice for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the land must have a cropping history (4 out of 6 years from 1996 - 2001).

Michigan has been allocated 2,400 acres for CP33 statewide. To ensure these limited acres will have a positive impact on habitat, this practice is **only eligible in Branch, Calhoun, Eaton, Hillsdale, Lapeer, Lenawee, and St. Clair Counties** on a first-come, first-served basis.

If your property is not located in Branch, Calhoun, Eaton, Hillsdale, Lapeer, Lenawee or St. Clair County, the site may be eligible for a habitat buffer for upland birds through other USDA cost-share programs.

CRP POLICY

CRP Habitat buffers for upland birds will be installed according to the Field Border Standard (386) in the local Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

CRP Habitat buffers for upland birds are only eligible around the perimeter of whole, FSA-officially measured **Cropland** fields. Habitat buffers for upland birds are designed to be adjacent to cropland; therefore, in Michigan, no more than 75% of a field may be enrolled as CP33.

The minimum width of the habitat buffer for upland birds **will be a minimum width of 30 feet from the edge of the field, and a maximum average width of 120 feet from the edge of the field.**

For CRP in Michigan, no more than **6.0 PLS lb/ac of at least 3 NATIVE Grasses** (Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass at no more than 0.5 lb/ac, Canada Wild Rye, etc.) **PLUS 0.5 PLS lb/ac Wildflowers will be required. NATIVE shrubs** may also be planted, but they must be planted in blocks as wide as the buffer and are limited to no more than 10% of the CP33 acres. Only NATIVE grasses, wildflowers, &/or shrubs may be planted for this practice **(see MI NRCS Biology Technical Note #13 for a list of native vs. non-native plants in Michigan).**

Habitat buffers for upland birds will NOT be used as turn rows, roads, or for storage of crops or equipment.

In addition, participating producers will be asked to annually keep track of the bird use of their buffers as a component of USDA's annual monitoring requirement. Your cooperation will help Michigan retain authorization to enroll CRP practices such as CP33.

All seeding and planting must be completed within 12 months of contract approval to remain in compliance. If circumstances beyond the landowner's control prohibit completion within the first 12 months, the local FSA County Committee may approve an extension to the next construction and planting season.

PLANTING

It is very important to plant native grasses & shrubs into a weed-free, firm seedbed. If the field is currently in cropland, weed control efforts should begin prior to planting. Use herbicide or tillage to eliminate competing vegetation. If necessary for erosion control, seed a temporary cover. Eliminate the temporary vegetation at planting time with tillage or herbicides.

If the site is currently in sod, begin weed control efforts using broad-spectrum herbicides in the fall. Apply herbicides again after the spring green-up prior to planting (if possible, a prescribed burn prior to spring green up to remove the dead litter from the fall treatment will provide best results).

Herbicides labeled for warm season grass establishment may also be used alone or mixed with broad-spectrum herbicides to provide residual weed control, which may result in faster establishment of the native grasses. Contact your local Michigan State University Extension Agent for specific herbicide recommendations. **Apply all herbicides according to the label**.

Plant grasses and shrubs according to the attached plan/design sheet, and apply lime and fertilizer according to needs determined by a soil test and MSU recommendations for the grasses.

Use a specialized no-till drill that is able to handle the native grass seeds (possibly available at some local Conservation District offices, DNR offices, Pheasants Forever chapters, etc). Plant the seeds **no deeper than** 1/8 inch.

If a grass drill is not available, the seed may be broadcast or aerial seeded. In either case, the seedbed must be worked up and firmed with a cultipacker or similar equipment. A carrier such as potash may also be needed in order to spread the seed evenly. **After seeding, the site must be rolled or cultipacked to ensure proper seed to soil contact.** Plant the seeds **no deeper than** 1/8 inch.

For grasses, mow, burn, or apply herbicides as needed to control unwanted vegetation until a ***Final*** Status Review is issued. Mow when competing weeds are taller than the planted vegetation, and at a height above the planted vegetation. **Native grasses will not be mowed lower than 12"** to ensure plant health.

For shrubs, until a ***Final*** Status Review is issued, 9 ft^2 around each shrub should remain weed-free to maximize growth. Fabric weed barriers are very effective at minimizing weed competition, and are eligible for limited cost-share (up to the amount of one follow-up herbicide treatment). **Mowing is not allowed for weed control for shrubs.**

For additional information on establishment and maintenance, see the following NRCS – Michigan Conservation Sheets (available at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/ technical/efotg/ in Section IV): "Tree/ Shrub Planting for: Reforestation, Windbreaks, and Wildlife", "Weed Control for Tree and Shrub Establishment", "Establishing Prairie Grass Buffer Strips", "Prescribed Burning", &/or others.

For additional information on herbicide controls, contact your local MSU Extension Agent. **Always apply herbicides according to labeled directions.**

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Undesirable plants, insects, and pests shall be controlled, including such maintenance as necessary to avoid detrimental effects to the surrounding land. Some of the most common pests that need controlled on CRP acreage include Autumn Olive, Multiflora Rose, Spotted Knapweed, Quackgrass, etc.

After the Final Status Review, maintain the planting according to your CRP conservation plan. Maintenance activities are allowed only on a spot basis and only if necessary to maintain stand health, maintain stand diversity, or control pests that will damage the CRP cover or adjacent lands. **MOWING** is only authorized between Aug 1st and Aug 20th to protect ground-nesting wildlife and to allow re-growth for winter cover. Other maintenance activities or Mid-Contract Management will only be allowed outside the designated dates to protect ground-nesting wildlife. Designated dates are from May 1st to August 1st. If management or maintenance activities are needed within these dates, the FSA County Committee **must** approve the management activity **prior to** the activity occurring.

For shrubs, replacement of dead individuals will occur to ensure at least 80% of them are living. The landowner is responsible for replacement costs.

Mowing for generic weed control or for cosmetic purposes is prohibited.

MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

All new CRP contracts must have mid-term contract management activities scheduled that are site specific and will ensure plant diversity, wildlife habitat, and protection of soil and water resources. Management activities that will ensure these benefits in filter strips include prescribed burning (according to an approved burn plan), disking, grass-specific herbicide applications, and interseeding of wildflowers or non-native legumes. All management activities must be performed according to NRCS Standards and Specifications as found in the FOTG, and CRP policy. Mid-Contract Management options will be selected by the participant.

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

For optimum wildlife habitat, plant a diversity of grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs. This mixture will provide winter and nesting cover, flowers for pollinating insects, as well as a good seed, berry, and insect source for food.

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PLANTING DESIGN WORKSHEET CRP CP-33

Landowner: **County:**

Farm Tract Field(s) Width/Acres **ft /** **ac** Date

RECOMMENDED SPECIES and SEEDING RATE (PLS #/ac = Pure Live Seed Pounds per Acre)

NATIVE MIX #1 (see map for location) GRASS ACRES =	RATE PLS#/ac	TOTAL = (RATE X Acres)	NATIVE MIX #2 (see map for location) GRASS ACRES =	RATE PLS#/ac	TOTAL = (RATE X Acres)
☐		0.0 Lb.	☐		0.0 Lb.
		0.0 Lb.			0.0 Lb.
		0.0 Lb.			0.0 Lb.
		0.0 Lb.			0.0 Lb.
		0.0 Lb.			0.0 Lb.
WILDFLOWERS		0.0 Lb.	WILDFLOWERS		0.0 Lb.
SHRUBS		Total Number	SHRUBS		Total Number

NOTES:

Recommended Wildflowers include:

Recommended Shrubs include:

BEFORE PLANTING:

☐ Herbicide$_1$ **(per label)**: Dates =
☐ Herbicide$_2$ **(per label)**: Dates =
☐ Tillage: Dates =
☐ Temporary Seeding:
☐ **Apply fertilizer and lime according to an approved soil test and MSU recommendations for "establishing native grasses".**
☐ Other:

PLANTING METHOD in Year:

☐ **Shrub Planting Method:** **:**

☐ **Grass Planting Method:**

Dates =

(If unforeseen circumstances prohibit the planting of the grass by this date, please contact our office as soon as possible)

SHRUB POST-PLANTING MAINTENANCE for Pest Control

☐ **Maintain a 9 ft^2 weed & grass-free area around each shrub for up to 3 years for optimal growth****

☐ Shrub Herbicide** **(per label)**: Dates** =

☐ Other:**

****NOTE: after the Final Status Review has been issued, other maintenance activities will be conducted outside the primary nesting season (May 1st – August 1st), and weeds will be treated on a "spot" basis only, unless prior approval is granted by the County Committee.**

GRASS AND WILDFLOWER POST-PLANTING MAINTENANCE for Pest Control

☐ **Mowing: BEFORE FINAL STATUS REVIEW = mow 12" high when the weeds are 12" taller than the planted grasses**

AFTER FINAL STATUS REVIEW* = 12" MINIMUM Mowing Height*

☐ Herbicide** **(per label)**:

☐ Prescribed Burning**: According to an approved plan

☐ Other:**

****NOTE: after the Final Status Review has been issued, other maintenance activities will be conducted outside the primary nesting season (May 1st – August 1st) , and weeds will be treated on a "spot" basis only, unless prior approval is granted by the County Committee.**

LOCATION AND LAYOUT SKETCH & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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Your cooperation in completing the following monitoring sheet of the wildlife use of your Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds is much appreciated. The information you provide will be used by elected officials in Washington to show that practices such as CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds are creating a positive impact on habitat, and may help Michigan to receive additional such funding opportunities in the future.

Each time you (or anybody else) observe your CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, please document the occurrence of any birds you see. Even if you see no birds, please document the hours and that no birds were seen. Please return this data to your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office annually (if additional sheets are needed, please contact your local FSA office).

Date	# Hours Observing	Activity	# Quail	# Pheasant	# Songbirds	I.D.?	# Other	I.D.?
		Farming Hunting Hiking Other						
		Farming Hunting Hiking Other						
		Farming Hunting Hiking Other						
		Farming Hunting Hiking Other						
		Farming Hunting Hiking Other						
		Farming Hunting Hiking Other						
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