

## Part 518 – Conservation Security Program

### 518.155 Technical Reference Document

#### A. Wildlife Habitat Assessment Criteria

Tier III minimum level of treatment requirement for wildlife is considered achieved when the current level of treatment and habitat management results in an index value of at least 0.5 of the habitat potential using either a general or species specific habitat assessment guide, as determined by the State Conservationist. This exhibit provides specific guidance to States on wildlife assessment criteria for Tier III eligibility requirements and for Tier II requirements when wildlife is selected as the third resource concern.

The following procedure will be used to determine the minimum eligibility criteria for fish and wildlife resources in CSP:

1. The general wildlife habitat appraisal guide used to assess the wildlife component of a resource management system, or a model developed for a species of conservation concern will be the basis for assessing minimum eligibility for the wildlife resource in CSP.
2. The Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) will be the basis for assessing minimum eligibility for stream fish and other stream-dependent aquatic resources in CSP.
3. The following is a list of the key wildlife and aquatic resource components that must be assessed in establishing minimal criteria, by land use. All of the assessed components must be controlled by the landowner/applicant.
4. A set of key questions (based on the general wildlife habitat appraisal guide, species of conservation concern models, and SVAP) will be developed by States to address minimal eligibility requirements for fish and wildlife.
5. Minimum eligibility criteria for wildlife will be assessed at the 0.5 level based upon the general wildlife habitat appraisal guide. Minimum eligibility for species of conservation concern and stream habitat for aquatic resources will be based on 50 percent of the potential habitat being met, using species specific models or the SVAP, respectively.
6. Each State must define their own minimal criteria for each of the listed components of a general habitat model or SVAP based upon its own unique sets of conditions. It is recommended that this action be completed with advice from the State Technical Committee.

#### Rangeland

- Natural and diverse plant community suited to ecological site. Natural and diverse plant community condition for wildlife is defined by the State.
- Prescribed grazing plan will specify what fish and wildlife considerations are required. Stocking rates, frequency, time and duration of grazing suitable for wildlife habitat management are described.
- Invasive plant management. Invasive species are defined at the state level.
- Vegetative height management during nesting seasons. Minimum foliage height of grass cover during nesting season is defined.
- Lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, if present. Minimum conditions for lakes, ponds, wetlands, and streams are defined (e.g., livestock exclusion, controlled access).

#### Cropland

- Non-cropland vegetative cover (i.e., inclusions), such as grassy areas, odd areas, wetlands, brushy draws, hedgerows, seeps, riparian areas, field borders, center pivot dry corners, and windbreaks are managed for wildlife. Amount, size, interspersions, and condition (criteria) must be defined at the State level and criteria for all four components must be met for all cropland fields.
- Amount – minimum percent or ratio that is in non-cropland vegetative cover within or adjacent to offered cropland.
- Size – minimum dimension for all non-cropland vegetative cover.
- Interspersions – minimum “distance to” non-cropland vegetative cover (applies to all parts of all cropland fields).
- Condition – minimums for composition and structure of non-cropland vegetative cover. Examples are ratios of grasses and broadleaves, minimum plant heights, and management criteria/constraints (restricted mowing, harvesting, or spraying).

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- Lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, if present. Minimum conditions for lakes, ponds, wetlands, and streams are defined (e.g., buffer widths).
- Cropland condition (residue management). Minimum levels of residue management for wildlife are defined (e.g., residue amounts).

### Hayland

#### Option A: (Hayland Management)

- Hayland includes wildlife considerations in the species mix. The species composition of hayland that benefits wildlife is defined by the State.
- Hayland management includes wildlife habitat considerations. Define the foliage height and timing of harvest that benefits wildlife.
- Lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, if present. Minimum conditions for lakes, ponds, wetlands, and streams are defined (e.g., buffer widths).

#### Option B: (Non-hay Inclusions)

- Non-hayland vegetative cover (i.e., inclusions), such as grassy areas, odd areas, wetlands, brushy draws, hedgerows, seeps, riparian areas, field borders, center pivot dry corners, and windbreaks are managed for wildlife. Amount, size, interspersion, and condition (criteria) must be defined at the state level and criteria for all four components must be met for all hayland fields. (See cropland for examples).
- Lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, if present. Minimum conditions for lakes, ponds, wetlands, and streams are defined (e.g., buffer widths).

### Pasture

#### Option A: (Pasture Management)

- Pasture includes wildlife considerations in the species mix. The species composition of pasture that benefits wildlife is defined by the State.
- Grazing management includes wildlife habitat considerations. Define the foliage height and timing of harvest that benefits wildlife.
- Lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, if present. Minimum conditions for lakes, ponds, wetlands, and streams are defined (e.g., buffer widths).

#### Option B: (Non-pasture Inclusions)

- Non-pasture vegetative cover (i.e., inclusions), such as grassy areas, odd areas, wetlands, brushy draws, hedgerows, seeps, riparian areas, field borders, center pivot dry corners, and windbreaks are managed for wildlife. Amount, size, interspersion, and condition (criteria) must be defined at the State level and criteria for all four components must be met for all pasture fields. (See cropland for examples).
- Lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, if present. Minimum conditions for lakes, ponds, wetlands, and streams are defined (e.g., buffer widths).

### Models for Species of Conservation Concern

#### Minimum Criteria for Models for Species of Conservation Concern:

- The species of conservation concern are selected because they represent important fish and wildlife habitats. Species may be selected because they represent habitats that are in a significant state of decline (e.g., the sage grouse is representative of the degrading sagebrush ecosystem) or are representative species that are of significant regional importance (e.g., amphibians, bog turtle, bobwhite quail). Species of conservation concern can include federally and State listed Threatened and Endangered Species. The State Conservationist is responsible for determining the species of conservation concern.
- As described in the National Biology Manual and Handbook, habitat assessment procedures (including species specific models) must define the habitat elements (food, cover, and water) that are required and rate those elements based upon the degree to which they are present within the assessment area.
- Minimum eligibility criteria for CSP will be based on whether 50 percent of the habitat potential for the species of conservation concern is met.
- A set of key questions (based on the selected species model) will be developed to address minimal CSP eligibility.

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