2018 Farm Bill Update

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Every five years, Congress passes legislation that sets national agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and forestry policy, commonly referred to as the “Farm Bill”. The 2018 Farm Bill was passed on December 12, 2018 and enacted on December 20, 2018.

The 2018 Farm Bill is intended to provide support, certainty, and stability to our Nation's farmers, ranchers, and land stewards by enhancing farm support programs, improving crop insurance, maintaining disaster programs, and promoting and supporting voluntary conservation.
The 2018 Farm Bill builds upon many of the crucial programs that serve America’s agricultural producers. USDA is implementing this new bill, which includes seeking public input on programs and provisions and designing guidelines. In the meantime, programs authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill are available to serve producers now.
OneUSDA
What is OneUSDA?

OneUSDA is a call to action, an operating model, a reminder to all of us that we are part of one team, working together to provide the best service to our customers.

Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)

The USDA’s Farm Production and Conservation Agencies – Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm Service Agency Risk Management Agency – have national headquarters offices in Washington, DC.
What is Conservation Client Gateway?

Conservation Client Gateway is a secure web portal that lets you work with NRCS online. Landowners and land managers, whether operating as individuals or authorized representatives of business entities, can track their payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance, and electronically sign documents. Conservation Client Gateway provides users the flexibility to determine when they want to engage with NRCS online and when they prefer in-person conservation planning assistance.
Our Vision

Farmers.gov provides farmers, ranchers, private foresters, and agricultural producers with online self-service applications, educational materials, engagement opportunities, and business tools to increase efficiency and productivity while preserving and fostering long-held traditional relationships between local USDA offices and producers.
Fiscal Year 2019 EQIP

EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application "cut-off" or submission deadline dates for evaluation, ranking and approval of eligible applications. Applications submitted by the 1st signup batching deadline of January 25, 2019 and 2nd signup batching deadline of April 25, 2019 will be evaluated to be considered for funding in Fiscal Year 2019. Applications received after that date will be accepted and evaluated for future rounds of funding.
Conservation Stewardship Program for Forestland Managers

Have you ever looked across your land and thought about some operational management goals you would like to take to the next level? Maybe we can help.

No one knows more about your land than you do, and no one knows more about conservation than we do. Together we can develop a plan tailored to your operation and your goals to help you increase productivity and protect the value of your land.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers an opportunity for forestland managers to enhance their agricultural operations while adopting conservation activities that can improve crop quality, improve soil health, and improve water quality. CSP can help you plan and implement conservation practices and enhancements that address natural resource concerns on your operation.

What’s New?

Forestland managers continue to benefit from all the CSP has to offer. There are a number of enhancements for forest production. Examples of enhancement options available to forestland managers include prescribed burning, precision pesticide application and wildlife habitat management.

The new CSP provides adaptive management options to better respond to market and weather conditions, allowing participants to choose enhancements, or bundles of enhancements, that best fit their unique circumstances.

Is CSP for You?

CSP helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve tree stands, suppress weeds, or develop wildlife habitat, we can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. We can help you schedule timely planting of pollinator plants, implement grazing management to improve wildlife or develop forest riparian areas. If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals. CSP contracts are for five years, with the option to renew for another five years.

Types of Assistance

NRCS provides free technical assistance to agricultural producers. To participate in CSP and receive financial assistance, producers must control or own the land and be in compliance with highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements, and have current farm records with USDA Farm Service Agency. Learn more at www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill.

The Next Step

To learn more about CSP opportunities, producers should contact their local USDA service center and set up an appointment with NRCS staff. A Local Service Center Directory is available online at www.nrcs.usda.gov, then click “Contact Us.” You can also visit our CSP page online at www.nrcs.usda.gov/CSP.
Conservation Stewardship Program

CSP Enhancements to assist Forestland Managers

(This is not an exhaustive list.)

**Agroforestry Crops**
- Prescribed Burning
- Nutrient Management
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Convert Loblolly and Slash Pine Plantations to Longleaf Pine
- Crop Tree Management for Mast Production
- Forest Soil Quality Improvement

**Pest Management**
- Integrated Pest Management
- Biological Suppression of Brush, Weeds and Invasive Species
- Precision Pesticide Application
- Pollinator Habitat

**Wildlife**
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- Pollinator and Beneficial Insect Habitat
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Tree Planting for Wildlife Food and Cover
- Pine Straw Raking for Wildlife Habitat

**Livestock**
- Manage Livestock Access to Water
- Grazing Management to Improve Wildlife Habitat
- Rotation of Supplement and Feeding Areas
- Grazing Management Monitoring Activities

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**FAQ**

**How can I find out if I am eligible?**
The best way to determine eligibility is to contact your local field office. You must meet Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) requirements and have a Farm Tract Number with FSA. Land already enrolled in some USDA Farm Bill programs, such as CRP and some easement programs, may not be eligible.

**Is there a minimum number of acres needed to be enrolled?**
No, but entire operation must be enrolled.

**Is there a minimum contract payment?**
Yes, $1,500 annually.

**What are “resource concerns?”**
NRCS conservation specialists conduct resource inventories on agricultural land to evaluate natural resources including soil, water, air, plant, and animal resource bases to determine their condition. If there is a cause or threat to that resource, that can result in what we refer to as a resource concern. Examples of resource concerns are erosion, degraded water quality, and plant health.

**What are “enhancements?”**
Enhancements are management activities that go above and beyond the minimum practice requirements helping the producer achieve a higher level of conservation.

**What are “bundles?”**
Bundles are suites of conservation enhancements designed to address multiple resource concerns. Bundle options are offered at a higher payment rate.

**Do I have options to pick the enhancements that are best suited for my operation?**
Yes. The variety of CSP practices that are offered give you a lot of freedom to select enhancements that help you meet your management goals.
BRUSH MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION
The management or removal of woody (non-herbaceous or succulent) plants including invasive and noxious plants.

PURPOSE
- Create the desired plant community consistent with the ecological site.
- Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality or enhance stream flow.
- Maintain, modify, or enhance fish and wildlife habitat.
- Improve forage accessibility, quality and quantity for livestock and wildlife.
- Manage fuel loads to achieve desired conditions.

Brush Management applies on all lands except active cropland where removal, reduction or manipulation of herbaceous vegetation is desired.

CRITERIA
Brush Management will be accomplished by mechanical, chemical, biological, prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, or a combination of these methods to achieve desired control of the target woody species and protection of desired species.

Before starting a brush control treatment, it is important to identify the plants targeted for control and any non-target plants that are to be maintained and enhanced. It is important to understand the life cycles of both types of plants and to time the treatment of the targeted plants when they are most vulnerable. Implement treatments to minimize negative impacts to non-target species.

MANAGEMENT METHODS
For all methods, properly dispose of invasive species materials after treatment to prevent reseeding or spread to new areas.

Chemical: When using chemical control, spot treatment methods should be used whenever feasible to apply herbicides. Apply herbicides at the correct rate, under favorable weather and recommended plant conditions. Examples of chemical treatments are stump treatment, foliar application, and basal bark treatment. Refer to extension systems recommendations. Also, see ACES recommendations: http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0500-A/ or http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0500-B/.

Herbicides must be handled and applied in accordance with the product label and any federal, state, or local regulations.

Manual and Mechanical: Manually or mechanically removing brush species can be successful if done repeatedly over the growing season and over multiple years. Brushy species tend to re-sprout, and follow-up treatments will be necessary. Examples of manual/mechanical methods are hand pulling, cutting and girdling.

Prescribed Fire: Prescribed fire can be an effective tool for brush management by suppressing undesirable species and removing thatch layers. Success will greatly depend on the species present, time of the year applied, and the temperature of the fire. In general, fire applied in late spring or fall will be most effective at controlling brush. Refer to Prescribed Burning (338) standard and job sheet.

Biological: Grazing with livestock can be an effective tool to manage invading brush species in conjunction with...
DEFINITION

The removal or control of herbaceous weeds including invasive, noxious and prohibited plants.

PURPOSE

- Enhance accessibility, quantity, and quality of forage and/or browse.
- Restore or release native or create desired plant communities and wildlife habitats consistent with the ecological site.
- Protect soils and control erosion
- Reduce fine-fuels fire hazard and improve air quality

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands except active cropland where removal reduction, or manipulation of herbaceous vegetation is desired.

This practice does not apply to removal of herbaceous vegetation by prescribed fire or removal of herbaceous vegetation to facilitate a land use change.

For all methods, properly dispose of invasive species materials after treatment to prevent reseeding or spread to new areas.

Chemical: When using chemical control, spot treatment methods should be used whenever feasible to apply herbicides. Apply herbicides at the correct rate, under favorable weather and recommended plant conditions. Refer to extension systems recommendations. Also, see ACES recommendations:


Herbicides must be handled and applied in accordance with the product label and any federal, state, or local regulations.

Manual and Mechanical: Manually or mechanically suppressing (mowing) herbaceous plant species can be successful if done repeatedly over the growing season and over multiple years. However, hand pulling, chopping or hoeing may actually kill the offending plants.

Prescribed Fire: Prescribed fire can be an effective tool in controlling some plants, suppressing undesirable species and removing thatch layers. Refer to the Prescribed Burning (338) standard and job sheet.

Biological: Grazing with livestock can be an effective tool to manage undesirable herbaceous species in conjunction with other treatments. It may take multiple efforts to fully manage unwanted species.

Small ruminants (especially goats) may be used to control or eliminate many types of herbaceous or other noxious plants.

Grazing management plans will include the type of grazing animal, the timing and duration of grazing or browsing as well as any protections needed for threatened or endangered species. The Prescribed Grazing (528) standard will be followed.

Approved biological agents may be used. Plans will identify the agent to be used and any special precautions or requirements when using biological agents.

By itself, any one of the above biological control methods may not completely eradicate targeted plants. When multiple methods are used together, eradication may be possible and may be less expensive.
Cogongrass

Background
Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.), is a very aggressive exotic perennial grass that was introduced to Mobile, Alabama, in 1911 in packing material from Japan. Designated as the world’s seventh worst weed, it is on the Federal list of noxious weeds and has been identified on six continents.

Cogongrass is spreading rapidly across Alabama and the southeast, reducing forest productivity, destroying wildlife habitat, encroaching in pasture and hayland, and impacting rights-of-way. If left unchecked, it can quickly become the dominant understory, choking out desirable vegetation.

Cogongrass thrives where fire is a regular occurrence. It is highly flammable and creates a severe fire hazard. It burns extremely hot, especially in winter (Figure 6). The extreme temperatures generated when cogongrass burns can kill seedling trees and native plants. In a controlled burn, it can cause harm to healthy pine stands because it intensifies the heat that can generate stress in mature pine stands leading to disease and insect infestation like the southern pine beetle.

Dense stands of cogongrass can also destroy wildlife habitat. Cogongrass out-competes native grasses and forbs that are important to many threatened species like the gopher tortoise, Eastern indigo snake, Bachman’s sparrow, Henslow’s sparrow, and bobwhite quail.

Cogongrass is sometimes called japgrass, bloodroot grass (red varieties), and Red Barron (red varieties), and may be mistaken for other grasses. The red varieties continue to be sold in the U.S., although its sale is illegal in the state of Alabama.

Identification
Cogongrass has some distinctive vegetative features that aid in identification (Figure 1). It is rarely found as a single plant, but it quickly forms patches or infestations, often in a circular pattern. Cogongrass grows in full sunlight to partial shade, and, thus, can invade a range of sites. It aggressively invades rights-of-way, new forest plantations, open forests, old fields, and pastures. The plant is absent in areas of frequent tillage.

Plants vary in height, even in the same patch, from 1 to 4 feet (Figure 5). Taller leaves lean over in late summer. Leaves measure .5- to 1-inch wide and are commonly 12 to 30 inches long. They rarely have a lush green color and appear yellowish green. The leaves may turn a reddish color in the fall, correlating to extreme changes in temperature.

Figure 1. Cogongrass has a whitish upper midrib on a mature leaf that is often not centered on the blade.
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