



Edwards Central Appraisal District

Wildlife Management Guidelines Intent and Primary Use Factors

The law requires agriculture to be the *PRIMARY USE* of the land. Wildlife management is an agricultural use under the law. Wildlife Management is a conversion from property that has 1-D-1 Valuation. The *primary use* requirement is particularly important for land used to manage wildlife. For example, land devoted to wildlife management can be used as a residence for the owner, but the land will not qualify if residential use is the land's primary use. Land that qualifies for an agricultural valuation is appraised at a special productivity valuation on the lands ability to produce something (commercial product and to protect/enhance natural resources) rather than on its market value. While many people refer to such land as having an "ag exemption," in fact there is no such exemption, instead it is called a *special valuation*.

The Edwards Central Appraisal District requires a minimum 50-acre land parcel for agricultural and wildlife management special valuation in Edwards County.

The degree of intensity standard for wildlife management land is determined in the same way as other agricultural uses. Wildlife management usually requires management of the land that encourages long-term maintenance of the population, and all activities and practices should be designed to overcome deficiencies that harm wildlife habitats such as:

Habitat Control (Habitat Management)

A wild animal's habitat is its surroundings as a whole, including plants, ground cover, shelter and other animals on the land. Habitat control—or habitat management—means actively using the land to create or promote an environment that is beneficial to wildlife on the land.

Erosion Control

Any active practice that attempts to reduce or keep soil erosion to a minimum for the benefit of wildlife is erosion control.

Predator Control (Predator Management)

This term means practices intended to manage the population of predators to benefit the owner's target wildlife population. Predator control is usually not necessary unless the number of predators is harmful to the desired wildlife population.

Providing Supplemental Supplies of Water

Natural water exists in all wildlife environments. Supplemental water is provided when the owner actively provides water in addition to the natural sources.

Providing Supplemental Supplies of Food

Most wildlife environments have some natural food. An owner supplies supplemental food by providing food or nutrition in addition to the level naturally produced on the land.

Providing Shelter

This term means actively creating or maintaining vegetation or artificial structures that provide shelter from the weather, nesting and breeding sites or "escape cover" from enemies.

Conducting Census Counts to Determine Population

Census counts are periodic surveys and inventories to determine the number, composition or other relevant information about a wildlife population to measure if the current wildlife management practices are serving the targeted species.

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Initial Conversion from Agriculture to Wildlife Management

All properties under agricultural/wildlife valuation must submit a **1-d-1 Application** and a **Wildlife Management Plan**. A wildlife management plan can be completed on the form prescribed by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) or prepared by the landowner. A copy of this wildlife management plan form may be obtained by contacting Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744-3291 or online through www.tpwd.state.tx.us or at the Edwards Central Appraisal District website, www.edwardscad.org. A chief appraiser may accept, but may not require, a wildlife management plan that is not on the form prescribed by TPWD if the wildlife management plan *contains all of the following required information:*

- Ownership information, property description and current use
- Landowner's goals and objectives for the tract of land
- Specific indigenous wildlife species targeted for management
- No less than **THREE** specific management practices and activities implemented in support of the specific indigenous wildlife species targeted for management.
- Map depicting where activities will be practiced

Annual Reporting

All annual reports are due every year on April 30th.

When submitting annual reports, property owners are reporting on activities done in the prior year and should provide supporting documentation as such.

A wildlife management property association may file a single annual report, if the report shows how the wildlife management plan was **implemented on each tract** of land in the wildlife management property association. The report will be completed on the form prescribed by TPWD and shall be signed by each landowner or an agent of the landowner designated. A landowner may file an individual annual report if they so desire.

Local Resources for Assistance

The following agencies may be of assistance during your wildlife management transition:

- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)...830-683-2187
 - Pond Erosion
 - Brush Management
- Texas Cooperative Extension Service...830-683-4310
 - Predator Control
 - Brush Management
 - Prescribed Burning
- Texas A&M of Sonora Experimental Station...325-387-3186
 - Range Management
- Texas Parks & Wildlife...830-703-6808
 - Wildlife Management Plans
 - Census Assistance
 - General Wildlife Questions

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Wildlife Management Activities

#1 Habitat Control (Habitat Management)

Habitat is defined as the physical and biological surroundings of an organism and provides everything that a living organism needs to survive and reproduce. The three basic requirements of any wildlife species to survive and reproduce are food, water, and shelter. Quite frequently, we as land managers tend to focus on a specific wildlife species and its needs as opposed to the habitat or community in which they live. The key to managing wildlife and our natural resources is to use a holistic approach and promote healthy ecosystems. Single species deserve less attention, while the system in which they thrive requires more. Knowing how a system functions and applying the techniques with which that system developed is imperative for its continued health and existence.

- **Grazing Management:**

Typically considers rotational grazing if fencing allows. Alternative would be high intensity short duration. Another method would be a 1 to 2-year lease with a rancher. Deferment from grazing only is allowed for two years. A report that states total deferment without a grazing management plan will be denied for habitat under this activity. High intensity - short duration grazing systems allow livestock to act as a tool to manipulate and enhance wildlife habitat and plant diversity.

- **Prescribed Burning:**

Burning can improve accessibility, increase both quantity and quality of forage and browse production, suppress brush and cactus, improve grazing distribution of livestock and wildlife, and remove excessive thatch and debris. Prescribed burning is a tool used to maintain desired vegetation composition and structure. A minimum of 15% of acreage burned over a 7-year period in the Edwards Plateau Region.

- **Range Enhancement (Range Reseeding):**

Managing, restoring, and/or protecting native grasslands is also considered range enhancement. This may or may not include actual reseeding but could include utilizing some of the “tools” to manage for the earlier successional stages of a native grasses. Enhancement should annually affect a minimum of 10% of the total area designated in the plan, or a minimum of 10 acres annually; whichever is smaller, until the project is complete.

- **Brush Management:**

Brush management is only part of a good habitat management program and should be planned carefully to address overall management goals. **The primary principles that drive any good brush management program are: 1) extent 2) pattern 3) selection and 4) method.**

The extent to which brush is going to be cleared is the first step in developing a program. Overall goals of the property should be examined and can help to dictate the amount of clearing needed to meet wildlife, livestock and/or aesthetic expectations. Clearing 100% of the brush may be best from a livestock production standpoint, but if your overall goal includes white-tailed deer management, you may only want to clear 50% or less. Removal of only individual plants may be all you need to do depending on the amount of brush you have. The pattern in which brush is cleared should consider wildlife cover and accessibility. This may include cover from predators, nesting cover, loafing cover or roosting cover. Maintaining travel corridors that link sections of brush is also very important. Selection includes both the site and the species of brush to be cleared. The site of brush clearing is important to make sure potential soil erosion is kept to a minimum. Soil type and slope should be considered. Certain soils may also be selected for clearing because of better forage production. Removal of desirable plant species used by wildlife for food and cover should be kept to a minimum. A total cost analysis, soil erosion issues, and the type or species of brush, which is being targeted, will determine the method(s) used. This practice should affect a minimum of 10% of the total area designated in the plan or a minimum of 10 acres annually, whichever is smaller.

- **Riparian Management and Enhancement:**

NOT APPLICABLE WHERE LIVESTOCK IS NOT PRESENT

If you have an area where this activity might be applicable, consult with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for planning assistance.

- **Habitat Protection for Species of Concern:**

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Habitat protection as it is defined here can include setting aside critical areas of habitat, managing vegetation for a particular species, maintaining overstory vegetation from degradation, and annually monitoring the species of concern. A minimum of one project must be implemented every 10 years to qualify. Management for migrating, wintering, or breeding Neotropical birds and should follow specific guidelines provided by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department specific to your ecological region. A minimum of one project must be implemented very 10 years to qualify. Contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for approved management guidelines before implementing activities designed to protect or enhance habitat for endangered species.

- **Prescribed Control of Native, Exotic, Feral Species**

The changing land management practices, combined with grazing pressure of too many deer, exotics, and livestock have degraded the quality of wildlife habitat across the state. There may be little or no groundcover to capture runoff, rainwater is lost, and groundwater is not recharged. The whole system is suffering. Using the gun, as a tool, to manage populations of white-tailed deer and other ungulates at or below the carrying capacity of the range is essential in providing quality wildlife habitat for a multitude of wildlife species. **White-tailed deer have a high reproduction potential, and in the absence of natural predators (mountain lions, etc.), can quickly overpopulate a range.** If white-tailed deer are allowed to overpopulate, they can have negative effects on the habitat for themselves and other wildlife species. The removal or control of exotic vegetation or the conversion of tame grass pastures must affect a minimum of 10% of the area designated in the plan, or 10 acres annually whichever is smaller.

- **Wildlife Restoration:**

Wildlife restoration means restoring or improving habitat for targeted species as part of an overall reintroduction program in a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department approved restoration area.

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Wildlife Management Activities

#2 Erosion Control

Any active practice that attempts to reduce or keep soil erosion to a minimum. Erosion is a natural process that cannot be stopped; however, human activity such as earthmoving and tillage can accelerate the process. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture the United States loses more than 2 billion tons of topsoil each year to erosion. Erosion removes fertile soil rich in nutrients and organic matter, which reduces the ability of plants to establish, grow and remain healthy in the soil. A reduction in plant growth and subsequent plant residue causes less soil cover and allows the erosion process to perpetuate and become worse. This in turn affects wildlife species dependent upon the affected plant communities. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture the United States loses more than 2 billion tons of topsoil each year to erosion. Erosion removes fertile soil rich in nutrients and organic matter which reduces the ability of plants to establish, grow and remain healthy in the soil. A reduction in plant growth and subsequent plant residue causes less soil cover and allows the erosion process to perpetuate and become worse. This in turn affects wildlife species dependent upon the affected plant communities. **The project MUST provide habitat diversity and wildlife benefits.** It is very important to recognize the exact type of erosion problems you have.

- **Pond Construction and Major Repair:**

This practice involves building a permanent water pond to prevent, stop or control erosion as an ***approved Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) watershed project*** while providing habitat diversity and benefiting wildlife. Whenever possible, owners should use ponds to help create or restore shallow water areas as wetlands and for water management. A minimum of one project must be implemented and maintained every 10 years to qualify.

- **Gully Shaping:**

This practice involves reducing erosion rates on severely eroded areas by smoothing to acceptable grades and re-establishing vegetation. An area should be seeded with native plant species of the Edwards Plateau Region that provide food and/or cover for wildlife. A minimum of one project must be implemented and maintained every 10 years to qualify.

- **Streamside, Pond, Wetland Revegetation:**

This is not a typical practice in Edwards County. If you have an area where this activity would be applicable, please consult with our Natural Resource Conservation Service for plan and documentation assistance.

- **Plant Establishment on Critical Areas (for crop land areas):**

This is not a typical practice in Edwards County. If you have an area where this activity would be applicable, please consult with our Natural Resource Conservation Service for plan and documentation assistance.

- **Dike/Levee Construction or Management:**

This is not a typical practice in Edwards County. If you have an area where this activity would be applicable, please consult with our Natural Resource Conservation Service for plan and documentation assistance.

- **Establish Water Diversion:**

This is not a typical practice in Edwards County. If you have an area where this activity would be applicable, please consult with our Natural Resource Conservation Service for plan and documentation assistance. *Edwards Central Appraisal District* www.edwardscad.org Tel: 830-683-4189 ecad@swtexas.net

Wildlife Management Activities

#3 Predator Control

A common-sense approach should be taken when considering control of these species. The landowner or manager must evaluate the predicted outcome of control measures prior to starting any control. For example, in many parts of the Edwards

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Plateau, as well as the State and nationwide, there are too many white-tailed deer and controlling the predators that feed on them would cause increased populations and further loss of habitat for other wildlife species.

A landowner or manager should **first manage the wildlife habitat** on his or her property, increasing the plant diversity and abundance of species that provide food, shelter, and nesting cover for all wildlife species **prior** to implementing a full-scale predator control program for all predator species.

On properties throughout the Edwards Plateau, Cross Timbers & Prairies and across the State, landowners and managers have implemented every known control method for predators and yet they thrive. Landowners need to have a long-range wildlife management plan in place defining the goals of any of the activities occurring on the property including predator control. Once in place, activities can be monitored and results can be recorded to aid in future management decision making.

Feral hogs are a known problem. There are other methods other than trapping that can be used to control their populations. Feral hogs require cover, food and water.

Considerations should be concentrated on minimizing their habitat by spot cutting cedar (where hogs prefer to live) and protect watering and feeding areas from them as well. The Edwards Central Appraisal District will consider these activities a form of predator control.

When implementing predator management, you must know if there is a predation problem on your targeted species. Consideration should include asking yourself is there a predation problem, are the predators outnumbering the population of your target species, are the target species declining due to this predator, and is there a balance between the two populations?

- **Predator Management:**

Predator Control alone will not be an applicable practice unless it is part of an overall plan to manage the habitats and populations of the target species. **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department advocates elimination of feral/exotic predators, with the thoughtful management of native predators as an integral part of functioning natural systems.**

The predator control plan should be prepared or approved by a competent professional and include the list, duration and intensity of methods to remove the target species annually. *Edwards Central Appraisal District www.edwardscad.org Tel: 830-683-4189 ecad@swtexas.net*

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Wildlife Management Activities

#4 Providing Supplemental Water

Many people mistakenly believe that water sources suitable for livestock are also suitable for wildlife. Unfortunately, that is not always the case, particularly for young wildlife and many bird species. Wildlife water developments are in addition to those sources already available to livestock and may require protection from livestock. EXSISTING TROUGHS SHOULD BE MODIFIED. Watering sources must be specific for species being managed.

- **Wildlife Watering Facilities:**

This practice can provide supplemental water for wildlife and provide habitat. Owners also may drill wells if necessary and/or build pipelines to distribute water. Building devices—known as wildlife water guzzlers—to collect rainfall and/or runoff for wildlife in areas where water is limited also helps protect wildlife, but these devices must be a part of an overall habitat management program.

- **Spring Development and/or Improvements (must be approved through NRCS):**

Improvements can be designed to protect the immediate area surrounding a spring. Excluding and/or controlling livestock around springs may help to maintain native plants and animal diversity. Other ways to protect areas include moving water through a pipe to a low trough or a shallow wildlife water overflow to make water available to livestock and wildlife while preventing degradation of the spring area from trampling.

Improvements also could include restoring a degraded spring by selectively removing appropriate brush and revegetating the area with plants and maintaining the restored spring as a source of wildlife water. Maintaining critical habitat, nesting and roosting areas for wildlife and preventing soil erosion must be considered when planning and implementing brush removal. This practice should be planned and implemented gradually and selectively over a period of time.

#5 Providing Supplemental Supplies of Food

Most wildlife environments have some natural food. An owner supplies supplemental food by providing food or nutrition in addition to the level naturally produced on the land.

- **Food Plots**

This activity is typically NOT recommended for this area due to rainfall types and amounts. This practice may cause soil erosion in the majority of this region.

- **Feeders and Mineral Supplementation**

Once a feeding program has been initiated, it is important to keep it implemented. It is also important to clean all feeders regularly to avoid contamination from aflatoxin. Harmful aflatoxin in feed should not exceed 20 parts per billion.

A minimum of one free-choice feeder per 320 acres in use during the recommended time period, with a minimum of 16% crude protein feed (See Appendix F for deer), recommended to qualify. Spin cast feeders do not qualify as a supplemental feeder. Corn may be used to harvest, collect census data, and feed during extreme cold spells. Edwards Central Appraisal District www.edwardscad.org Tel: 830-683-4189 ecad@swtexas.net

Wildlife Management Activities

#6 Providing Shelter

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Although supplemental shelter can be provided in many ways, it will never take the place of good conservation and management of native habitats. When land is properly managed for wildlife habitat, quality cover and shelter will usually be available. Unfortunately, in much of Texas, many areas have been so altered, neglected, and abused that one or more of the key requirements of wildlife (including shelter) is absent or in short supply. This is where the opportunity exists for developing additional shelter for wildlife. The best shelter and cover for wildlife is provided by a well-managed habitat. Some practices can be implemented to provide types of shelter that may be limited in the habitat.

When managing deer, brush piles serve no purpose. Cover can be broken down into three categories: nesting, escape, and feeding, with some overlapping of the three. Nesting boxes for birds are some of the most visible and enjoyable COVER projects. Cavity nesters such as bluebirds, and wrens are delightful to watch and easy to attract. Leaving snags, dead or dying trees may seem unattractive, but many birds depend upon them for their “natural” shelters. Most wildlife species are edge dwellers, and escape cover is necessary to provide protection from predators. Wildlife is not comfortable out in the wide open, and foods that they search out are not always readily available in dense wooded situations. *The line where these two areas meet compose the edge.*

Although supplemental shelter can be provided in many ways, it will never take the place of good conservation and management of native habitats. ***When land is properly managed for wildlife habitat, quality cover and shelter will usually be available.*** Unfortunately, in much of Texas many areas have been so altered, neglected, and abused that one or more of the key requirements of wildlife (including shelter) is absent or in short supply. This is where the opportunity exists for developing additional shelter for wildlife.

Before beginning on any wildlife management practice, you must determine what wildlife species you are managing for and what its *specific* cover needs are.

Mowing can be deferred in certain areas to allow grasses and weeds (forbs) to mature and provide food, cover and nesting sites for some species of wildlife. Trees, shrubs, and vines along fence lines can be allowed or encouraged to grow up in areas where cover is limited. Mesquite or other brush can be half-cut early in the growing season on provide low growing, ground cover in areas where this is lacking.

- **Nest Boxes, Bat Boxes:**

Number and location of nest boxes should be consistent with **habitat needs and territorial requirements of the target species**, and sufficient over the area to provide a real supplement to the target population and address an identified severe limiting factor as part of a comprehensive wildlife management plan.

- **Brush Piles and Slash Retentions:**

This practice also INCLUDES SLASH RETENTIONS, meaning to leave the dead brush on the ground (not stacking) where it was cut to provide protection for seedlings of desirable plant species. This practice means stacking post or limbs in tepees in a planned area with lack of cover. A minimum of 1% of the designated area must be treated annually to qualify.

- **Half-Cutting Trees or Shrubs:**

Cut trees and shrubs near the vertical midpoint and leave the cut foliage where it falls.

Wildlife Management Activities

#7 Conducting Census Counts to Determine Population

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Census counts are periodic surveys and inventories used to determine the number, composition or other relevant information about a wildlife population. They may be used to determine if the current wildlife management practices are producing or sustaining the targeted species. Such surveys also help evaluate the management plan's goals and practices. Specifically, this activity estimates species numbers, annual population trends, density or age structure using accepted survey techniques. Annual results should be recorded as evidence of completing this practice.

- **Spotlight Counting:**

Spotlight counting animals at night along a predetermined route using a spotlight should follow accepted methodology with a minimum of three counts conducted annually. (*Spotlight surveys are not a reliable method for determining white-tailed deer densities on small acreages.*)

- **Aerial Counting:**

Aerial counts using a fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter to count animals also should follow accepted methodology for the region and be performed by a trained individual.

- **Daylight wildlife Composition Counts:**

Daylight wildlife composition counts are driving counts used to census wildlife in daylight hours. Annual population trends on dove, quail, turkey and deer, as well as sex/age structure on deer; should be determined by sightings along a standardized transect of a minimum of five miles at least three times during a season.

- **Harvest Data Collection/Record Keeping:**

Harvest data and record keeping means tracking annual production of wildlife. Age, weight and antler development from harvested deer, and the age and sex information.

- **Browse Utilization Surveys:**

Browse utilization surveys annually examine deer browse plant species for evidence of deer use on each major vegetative site on the property. The surveys should be conducted in a way that can be repeated. Landowners should seek assistance by a professional.

- **Census and Monitoring of Endangered, Threatened or Protected Wildlife:**

Census monitoring through periodic counts can improve management and increase knowledge of the local, regional or state status of the species.

- **Census and Monitoring of Nongame Wildlife Species:**

Census and monitoring of nongame wildlife also can improve management or increase knowledge of the local, regional or state status of the species. These practices can include developing checklists of wildlife diversity on the property and should be a part of a comprehensive wildlife management plan. One of the most important things for a landowner to remember when designing a census protocol for nongame species on their property is the ability to be consistent. In other words, be able to do the same thing in the same way at the same time each and every time the census is conducted.

- **Miscellaneous Counts:**

Miscellaneous counts include: designing special survey techniques unique to a specific species. These may include the following and should be addressed in the management plan: Time/area counts; Roost counts; Song bird transects and counts; Quail call and covey counts; Point counts; Drift fences and pitfall traps; Small mammal traps; Bat census (ex. Departures).

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