USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Early Successional Habitat Management
Shrubland, Patch Cuts, Feathered Edge

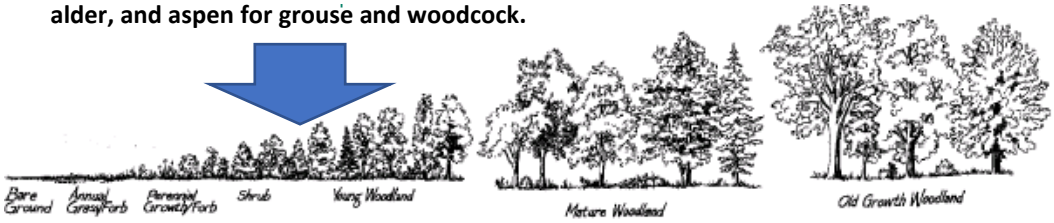
New Hampshire – Conservation Practice 647 ***April 2021***

Purpose
To provide habitat for species requiring early successional habitat for all or part of their life cycle.

36 species of birds in NH <u>require</u> shrublands

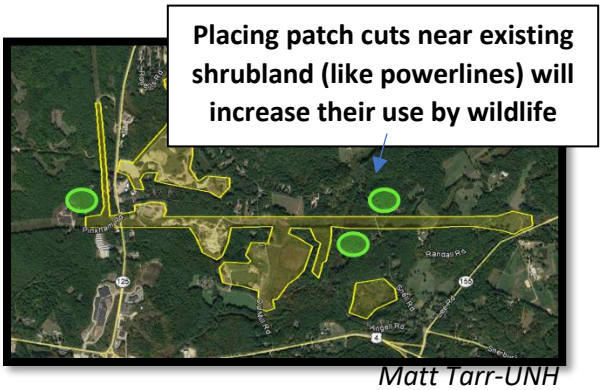
Shrublands and Young Forest
"Shrublands and Young Forest" are areas that are dominated by small trees and shrubs (<15 ft tall) with some grass and forbs. These include cutback borders or 'feathered edges' on edge of crop/hayfields.

Habitat in this stage provides bird nesting sites, an abundance of caterpillars, soft mast, like elderberry. Food and thermal cover for turtles. Pollen and nectar. Birch, alder, and aspen for grouse and woodcock.



Where to create this habitat

- Near other early successional habitats (like powerlines) attract more wildlife
- Stands with "pioneer" species such as pin cherry, aspen, alder, and birch
- Stands that have been "high graded" (i.e. all the best trees were removed)
- Old orchards, abandoned ag fields
- <u>Avoid</u> riparian zones, old growth, swamps



Matt Tarr-UNH

<u>Best Management Practices (timing)</u>

- When possible, avoid cutting between **April 15 -November 1** to protect the largest diversity of species.
- *Pollinators:* avoid all cuts before last frost in spring and first frost in Fall to preserve pollen and nectar. Avoid insecticide use or in drift zone.
- *Wood, spotted, blandings turtles* may not leave upland sites to hibernate until October then re-emerge in April. Winter cuts protect them.
- *Many shrubland and forest birds* nest between April 15-August 5.
- *Winter cuts* will protect the duff layer protecting salamanders and feeding areas for species such as towhees. Note some forest regeneration techniques require scarification.

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5 years after a forest patch cut

Forested areas Wildlife Patch Cuts (need Forest Mgt Plan):

- Cuts at least 2 ac promote shade intolerant trees and use by more shrubland birds, like Indigo Bunting.
- Cuts > 5 or 10 acres will attract more wildlife.
- Machines like a feller-buncher, brontosaurus may be used depending on the age of vegetation and access.
- Leave coarse wood and tree tops, snags, den trees.
- Sites provide young forest habitat up to 20 years.

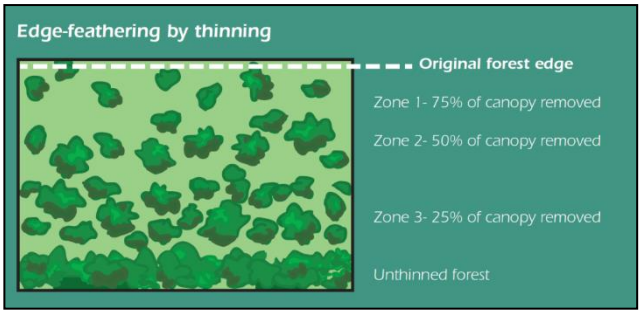
Early Successional Shrublands

Eventually a skid-steer mounted or brontosaurus mower may need to re-set the growth

- Old ag fields, orchards, gravel pits, alder swales.
- Size needed depends on adjacent land and wildlife needs but areas of 3-5 acres provide key habitat.
- On larger sites split management into blocks and stagger ~5 years apart for diversity.
- Selectively cut trees shading beneficial shrubs with chainsaw a brontosaurus or brush-cutter.
- **Or** completely re-set areas where most vegetation growing out of shrub stage.
- Cutting cycle can be 5,10, 15, or 20 yrs.
- Retain mast trees like apples, dogwood, elderberry shrubs.

Feathered edges

- Cutback borders form a gradual shrubby transition between crop, hay, or field edges to forest.
- Should be at least 50 feet wide, however larger is better (150 ft).
- Cut only trees whose tops will touch the open field when cut (if 50 ft edge), or break into zones as seen in diagram. Clearcut is also viable prescription.
- Edge of open field can also be allowed to revert as part of a feathered edge.
- Keep some mast trees like cherry, oak.
- Scalloping or making wavy edges can create microhabitats where bats might forage for insects.
- To gain light for high tunnels and crops, edge should be 1.5 times height of the surrounding trees.



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Conservation Practice - Implementation Requirements *NH-647*

Producer:		**Planner:**	
Address:		**County:**	
Farm/Tract:		**Date:**	

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

☐ Early successional shrubland ☐ Re-treat existing patch cut in Forest

☐ Feathered Edge for wildlife ☐ New Forest Patch Cut

SPECIFICATIONS (pick your habitat):

☐ **Early Successional Shrubland:** Treat shrub dominated (overgrown orchards, alder, dogwood, etc) patch(es) by cutting woody vegetation >2" DBH to regenerate shade intolerant species. May selectively retain mast producing native shrubs. <10 trees per acre may be left.

Field	Acres	Management Activity Detail (e.g. equipment used, plants to retain, other notes)	Timing (e.g. after Oct)	Applied as Planned	Acres Applied
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	

☐ **Patch Cut in Forestland:** Cut the forest overstory, to provide light to seedlings. Patches should be > 2 acres or positioned next to existing young habitat. Retain 0-10 overstory trees per acre for wildlife habitat. Focus cut in hardwood or mixed wood.

Field	Acres	Management Activity Detail (e.g. equipment used , retention trees, other notes)	Timing (e.g. after Oct)	Applied as Planned	Acres Applied
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	

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☐ **Feathered Edge:** Create a transitional zone of habitat by cutting back the border where the forest edge abruptly joins grassland or cropland. The cut-back borders should be 50 feet or wider but larger, 150 feet will benefit forest and non-forest wildlife.

Field	Size (ft/ac)	Management Activity Detail (equipment used, retention trees, other notes)	Timing (e.g. after Oct)	Applied as Planned	Acres Applied
				☐	
				☐	

See plan map showing the location of the proposed practice and practice components.

REMARKS:

Plans Meet NRCS Standards and Specs:
Planner Signature: _____

Date:_____

Participant Agrees to the outlined plan:
Participant Signature:_____

Date:_____

Certification
Practice Installed to Meet NRCS Standards and Specifications.
◉ Yes ○ No

Planner signature:_____

Date:_____

Remarks:

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