

NRCS CPS 528

Background, Limitations, and Recommendations for NRCS Prescribed Grazing Management Standard

**David D. Briske, Texas A&M University
(and several holdover CEAP authors)**

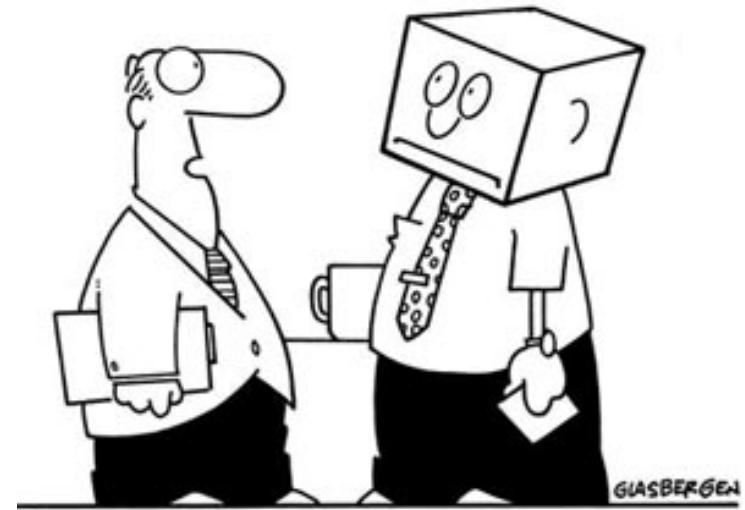
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Objectives

Simulate potential revisions of CPS 538

- Historical Background
- Rangeland CEAP
- Limits of CPSs
- Recommendations

Try to think outside the box!



Aldo Leopold – Early American Conservationist



- Promoted environmental ethics and land conservation in US
- 1887 – 1948
- Professor Univ. Wisconsin
- Founder wildlife management
- A Sand County Almanac 1949
- Legacy continues today

“Conservation will ultimately boil down to rewarding the private landowner who conserves the public interest” 1934.

Objectives of EQIP?

- 1996 Farm Bill emphasized maximizing the *environmental benefits* of conservation funding.
- Funds allocated to more specialized targeting of conservation priority areas.
- Funds increased from \$200 million in 1996 to \$1.3 billion in the 2002 Farm Bill.
- OMB requested that NRCS account for societal benefits of increased funding.

Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP)

- CEAP created “to improve efficacy of conservation practices and programs by quantifying conservation benefits and providing the science and education base needed to enrich conservation planning, implementation, management decisions, and policy” (Duriancik et al. 2008; USDA-CEAP).

Background Take Home

- Involvement in decades long effort to balance agricultural production and environmental quality concerns in Farm Bill appropriations.
- CEAP goals render CPSs ineffective.
- Ignore, modify or redesign?

Rangeland CEAP

- Comprehensive assessment unable to document benefits from CPs because the outcomes have not been monitored, especially multiple benefits.
- Minimizes innovation and learning to increase conservation efficacy.
- Jeopardizes continuation of investments in CPs that may achieve benefits.

Rangeland CEAP

- Rangeland CEAP emphasized CPSs, but not the conservation programs supporting them.
- Modification of CPSs alone may be insufficient to increase conservation effectiveness.
- Exclusive emphasis on facilitating practices without reference to adaptive management was a major concern of the CEAP assessment.

CPS 528 Limitations

- Is the CPS specification consistent with the available evidence?
- Did the CP achieve the desired effect on the ground?
- CEAP indicated that site-specific monitoring is required to determine outcomes.
- The first point could be greatly strengthened to increase accountability and efficiency.

CPS 528 Limitations

- The *current definition* of grazing management is not entirely consistent with the environmental quality goals identified by CEAP.
- CPs would be more effectively selected, designed and implemented with greater consideration of ecological site characteristics and known vegetation-management responses.
- Outcomes of CPs are dependent upon the current condition and potential of an ecological site.

Facilitating Practices

(51) **Facilitating Practice.**—A conservation practice that facilitates management or the function of another practice, or both, but does not achieve the desired effects on its own. Example: A fence is a facilitating practice for prescribed grazing. Prescribed grazing helps improve forage for livestock.

- Do facilitating practices equate to improved management or conservation?
- How are FPs linked to prescribed grazing?

Recommendations

- Emphasis on implementation of CPs leaves a major component of conservation effectiveness to the discretion of individual landowners with *limited guidance*.
- Many management guides and tools currently exist that could be directly linked to CPSs, but are not.
- For example, CPS 528 emphasizes the importance of proper stocking rate, but stocking rate calculators or drought monitoring programs are not recommended.
- Should these tools and guidelines be more directly linked to the CPS?

Recommendations

- Should contracts be lengthened to be more consistent with time required to achieve conservations goals on rangelands compared to croplands?
- Can incremental cost-share payments require that management be addressed at annual payment periods?

Conservation Program Assessment Network

- A platform organized around collaborative monitoring of CP outcomes by landowner-agency-scientist partnerships at representative locations.
- Primary objective is to establish the missing information feedback loops between implementation of CPs and their agricultural and environmental outcomes.
- Collectively, this information could be used to guide various conservation activities.