

## 2013 Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative Activities List

# ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

Land that previously had a conservation practice or activity applied with financial assistance through the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI) is not eligible for enrollment in MBHI during FY 2013. All applications for MBHI must meet EQIP producer and land eligibility requirements to be eligible for enrollment in MBHI.

**ACTIVITY #1:** shown as “Late Season Shallow Water w/ Manipulation” under CPS code 647 in the MBHI payment schedule.

- Name: Shorebird Habitat
- Duration: May 1 through July 31
- Objective: To provide a diverse habitat of shallow water, mud flat, and moist soil habitats to benefit a variety of shorebird species during the mid to late summer migration.
- Eligible Site: An eligible site will contain 8” to 18” of water on May 1, and be capable of providing the habitat that meets that objective of the Activity. The field must not contain more than 25% woody cover.
- Required Management:
  - Structures will remain closed, catching and holding all available precipitation, until **July 31**.
  - Vegetative manipulation of the site will be triggered if after June 15, the site becomes dry with emergent vegetation covering 50% or more, at a height of 6 inches or more. Manipulation by rolling or disking to bring the majority (75% or more) of the vegetation at or below the soil surface. Rolling is the preferred method of manipulation to maintain soil quality.

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:**

- *This activity targets a “mudflat” habitat without relying on the need to pump water onto the field. Stockpiling water, early in the season, at a depth of 8” to 18” should allow for gradual water losses, ultimately providing some mudflat habitat for early arriving wading/shore birds, lasting through July.*
- *The need for vegetative manipulation will be triggered by the above stated scenario. One manipulation is planned into the payment scenario. However, multiple manipulations may be needed to achieve the desired habitat response. Additional costs will not be added to accommodate the possibility of multiple manipulations.*
- *Grazing and/or haying of these fields are allowed, provided the desired habitat, meeting the goals of the program, are achieved and maintained. Grazing and/or haying should be closely monitored so that habitat degradation is avoided.*
- *This activity is identified in the Payment Schedule as “Late Season Shallow Water w/ Manipulation” under CPS code 647.*

**ACTIVITY #2:** shown as “Extended Late Season Shallow Water w/ Manipulation” under CPS code 647 in the MBHI payment schedule.

- Name: Extended Shorebird Habitat
- Duration: May 1 through August 31
- Objective: To provide a diverse habitat of shallow water, mud flat, and moist soil habitats to benefit a variety of shorebird species for an extended period during the mid to late summer migration.
- Eligible Site: An eligible site will contain 8” to 18” of water on May 1, and be capable of providing the habitat that meets the objective of the Activity. The field must not contain more than 25% woody cover.
- Required Management:
  - Structures will remain closed, catching and holding all available precipitation, until **August 31**.

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- Vegetative manipulation of the site will be triggered if after June 15, the site becomes dry with emergent vegetation covering 50% or more, at a height of 6 inches or more. Additional manipulations will likely be required, triggered by the same conditions, should they occur again. Manipulation by rolling or disking to bring the majority (75% or more) of the vegetation at or below the soil surface. Rolling is the preferred method of manipulation to maintain soil quality.

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:**

- *This activity targets a “mudflat” habitat without relying on the need to pump water onto the field. Stockpiling water, early in the season, at a depth of 8” to 18” should allow for gradual water losses, ultimately providing some mudflat habitat for early arriving wading/shore birds, lasting through August.*
- *The need for vegetative manipulation will be triggered by the above stated scenario. Two manipulations are planned into the payment scenario. However, more manipulations may be needed to achieve the desired habitat response. Additional costs will not be added to accommodate the possibility of more than two manipulations.*
- *Grazing and/or haying of these fields are allowed, provided the desired habitat, meeting the goals of the program, are achieved and maintained. Grazing and/or haying should be closely monitored so that habitat degradation is avoided.*
- *This activity is identified in the Payment Schedule as “Extended Late Season Shallow Water w/ Manipulation” under CPS code 647.*

**ACTIVITY #3: shown as “Close risers by November 1 – February 15” under CPS code 644 in the MBHI payment schedule.**

- Name: Migratory Waterfowl
- Duration: November 1 through February 15
- Objective: To provide seasonal, shallow water habitat for migratory waterfowl and wading birds.
- Eligible Site: The site must be capable of holding between 6 to 18 inches of water for the duration of the activity.
- Required Management:
  - Structures for water control affecting eligible sites will be closed by November 1 and remain closed through February 15. While not required, water depths of 6 to 10 inches provide maximum benefit to targeted species. Water depths should not exceed 18 inches for any extended period.
  - Manipulation can occur prior to holding water. No large scale (greater than 80%) manipulation is allowed during the water holding period.

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:**

- *Manipulation prior to water holding is allowed. However, manipulation should be conducted in a manner that promotes and enhances the growth of desirable vegetation.*
- *Large scale manipulation, such as water leveling and other full-width tillage operations, is not allowed.*
- *This activity has no minimum depth of water requirement. Participant will only be required to keep structures for water control closed during activity period.*
- *This activity is identified in the Payment Schedule as “Close risers by November 1 – February 15” under CPS code 644.*

**ACTIVITY #4: Manipulate, Catch Rainfall, October 1 – February 15 shown as two items in the MBHI payment schedule: 1) “Close risers by November 1 – February 15” under CPS code 644; and 2) either “wetland mowing” or “wetland disking” under CPS code 647. For the vegetative manipulation payment, use “wetland mowing” for the area bush hogged and/or use “wetland disking” for the area lightly disked. This activity has a maximum of one (1) manipulation payment (“wetland mowing” or “wetland disking”) per acre per year.**

- Name: Migratory Waterfowl w/Manipulation
- Duration: October 1 through February 15

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- Objective: To provide seasonal, shallow water habitat for migratory waterfowl and wading birds where vegetative manipulation may be needed.
- Eligible Site: The site must be capable of holding between 6 to 18 inches of water for the duration of the activity.
- Required Management:
  - Vegetative manipulation by either lightly disking or bush hogging the majority of the contracted acres (50 – 80%) between October 1 and October 31. Manipulation shall not be done in a large, continuous block. Strip disking/mowing, mosaic patterns, or other irregular patterns is required. No large scale (greater than 80%) manipulation is allowed during the water holding period.
  - Structures for water control affecting eligible sites will be closed by November 1 and remain closed through February 15. While not required, water depths of 6 to 10 inches provide maximum benefit to targeted species. Water depths should not exceed 18 inches for an extended period.

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:**

- *Large scale manipulation, such as water leveling and other full-width tillage operations, is not allowed.*
- *This activity has no minimum depth of water requirement. Participant will only be required to keep structures for water control closed during activity period.*
- *This activity is identified in the Payment Schedule as "Close risers by November 1 – February 15" under CPS code 644 and either "wetland mowing" or "wetland disking" under CPS code 647. For the vegetative manipulation payment, use "wetland mowing" for the area bush hogged and/or use "wetland disking" for the area lightly disked. This activity has a maximum of one (1) manipulation payment ("wetland mowing" or "wetland disking") per acre per year.*

**ACTIVITY #5: Manage Grassland, Seasonal Wetland shown as "mottled duck habitat wetland component" under CPS code 644, "mottled duck high intensity grassland component" under CPS code 647, and "mottled duck habitat low intensity grassland component" under CPS code 647 in the MBHI payment schedule.**

- Name: Mottled Duck Habitat System
- Duration: Annually applied system
- Objective: To create and/or enhance wetland habitat that will lead to improved breeding and brooding habitat for mottled ducks and other water birds that share this habitat.
- Eligibility:
  - The system must include both a perennial grassland and a seasonal or permanent wetland component, which may include a mixture of agricultural land and non-agricultural wetlands.
  - Both the grassland component area and the wetland component area must be capable of being managed by the participant and must be under the participant's control. An exception may be a nearby ( $\leq 1$  mile without barriers) "natural" marsh with salinity levels suitable for mottle duck brooding.
  - EQIP – MBHI financial assistance is authorized only on land on which agricultural products are produced. Non-agricultural wetlands may be included in the conservation plan to complete the system requirements; however financial assistance is not authorized on non-agricultural land.
  - The benchmark conditions of the grassland component site must have no more than 20% canopy cover of woody vegetation and be capable of being enhanced to provide improved nesting habitat for mottled ducks.
  - The system shall include enhancing both a grassland component area for nesting habitat and a nearby ( $\leq 1$  mile without barriers) wetland component area for brooding habitat, and to encourage breeding activity. Existing grassland or wetland that exhibits the minimum requirements for nesting or brooding habitat may be maintained to complete the system requirements, but is not eligible for financial assistance.
  - Financial assistance for the "grassland component" or "wetland component" is authorized only when the grassland and/or wetland habitat will be enhanced through long-term management improvements to provide an increase of habitat value above the benchmark conditions. Short term

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habitat improvements may be eligible for financial assistance through facilitating practices; however financial assistance will not be authorized for the grassland component and/or wetland component payment without the adoption of long-term management improvements.

- A Mottled Duck Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (MODU WHEG) will be completed by NRCS for all Activity 5 applications to assess habitat conditions and identify limiting factors. To be considered, the MODU WHEG final score must be 0.5 or higher and must document an increase of habitat value above the benchmark conditions.
- If eligible for financial assistance, the grassland component will be identified as either “Low” or “High” intensity or a combination of the two. “Low” or “High” intensity grassland management will be determined by the following criteria:
  - “High” intensity: A combination of long-term grassland management improvements that will address the sustainability of native warm season grasses for mottled duck nesting habitat when converting a site from introduced grass to native herbaceous grass/forb, or reclaiming a historic native herbaceous grass/forb site that has had complete loss of mottled duck nesting habitat due to invasion of trees and/or shrubs.
  - “Low” intensity: Long-term grassland management improvements that will address the sustainability of mottled duck nesting habitat on land that does not meet the high-intensity criteria.
- Required Management (grassland component):
  - The grassland component (high or low intensity) area will be managed in accordance with the conservation plan to include adoption of long-term management improvements to sustain mottled duck nesting habitat.
  - The grassland component will include management of permanent pasture or other agricultural grasslands (fallow rice field).
  - The grassland component area will be enhanced by planting native grasses and/or improving management to benefit the target habitat. Through implementation of the conservation plan and program contract, the grassland component area will be managed to sustain a diverse mix of grasses, especially native grasses, with a varying canopy height throughout; and a minimal amount of trees and shrubs ( $\leq 5\%$  canopy cover).
  - Grasslands component areas are ideally at least 40 acres, with larger blocks (500 – 1000 acres) being preferred habitat.
- Required Management (wetland component):
  - The wetland component area will be managed in accordance with the conservation plan to include adoption of long-term management improvements to sustain mottled duck brooding habitat.
  - The wetland component will include management of agricultural fields (fallow rice fields or crawfish-type impoundments). Non-agricultural wetlands will be managed in accordance with the conservation plan to complete the system requirements without financial assistance.
  - Agricultural fields will be managed for a shallow flood throughout the brooding season for mottled ducks (February 1 through July 31).
  - If order to meet system requirements, non-agricultural wetlands will be managed to hold water  $\leq 6$  inches in depth with short emergent vegetation not exceeding 50% coverage and minimal coverage of more dense escape cover throughout the brooding season for mottled ducks (February 1 through July 31).
  - Deep water habitat is not considered a suitable component of the habitat and will not be considered as part of the wetland component requirement.
  - A Wetland component area of 500 acres or more is most desirable.

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:**

- *Due to the complexity of the mottled duck habitat requirements, prior to ranking applications for the mottled duck habitat activity, the NRCS State Biologist must be contacted to coordinate a site visit and*

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*review of the application information. The NRCS State Biologist may refer the review to an NRCS Area Biologist or a biologist of a conservation partner. Upon verification that mottled duck habitat enhancement is feasible, the biologist will provide planning assistance during the process of developing the conservation plan and contract.*

- *A MODU WHEG will be completed for all Activity 5 applications to assess habitat conditions and identify limiting factors. To be considered, the MODU WHEG final score must be 0.5 or higher and must document an increase of habitat value above the benchmark conditions.*
- *QA will be conducted on 100% of applications for financial assistance for the mottled duck habitat activity. By the close of the ranking period, the District Conservationist will forward a narrative description of the benchmark management system and conditions, preliminary conservation plan, plan map, MODU WHEG, and NRCS-CPA-1155 to the State Resource Conservationist and Assistant State Conservationist / Programs for a technical and programmatic review prior to funding selection.*
- *Financial assistance will be provided only on acres where the habitat is capable of being manipulated and managed by the participant. Permanent marsh with no capacity for habitat management is not eligible for financial assistance, but may be considered as part of the wetland component of the system. Both grassland and wetland habitat must be addressed in the conservation plan and managed by the participant, with the exception of a nearby “natural” marsh.*
- *Non-agricultural wetlands may be included in the conservation plan to complete the system requirements; however financial assistance is not authorized on non-agricultural land.*
- *Facilitating practices such as forage and biomass planting, brush management, dike, structure for water control, range planting, prescribed burning, etc. may be included in the program contract **only** when these practices are needed in order to establish and/or enhance the desired habitat component as identified by the Migratory Birds Habitat Initiative. If the conservation plan only includes implementation of a facilitating practice (i.e. prescribed burning or brush management) without long-term improvement of the overall habitat management, the land may be eligible for MBHI enrollment and financial assistance of the facilitating practice. However, financial assistance would not be authorized for the grassland component and/or wetland component payment. Financial assistance for the “wetland component” or “grassland component” is authorized only when the grassland and/or wetland habitat will be enhanced through adoption of long-term managements to provide an increase of sustainable mottled duck habitat value above the benchmark conditions.*
- *The grassland component of this activity is identified in the payment schedule as “mottled duck high intensity grassland component” and “mottled duck habitat low intensity grassland component” under CPS code 647. The wetland component of this activity is identified in the payment schedule as “mottled duck habitat wetland component” under CPS code 644.*
- *If eligible for financial assistance, the grassland component will be identified as either “Low” or “High” intensity or a combination of the two. “Low” or “High” intensity grassland management will be determined by the following criteria:*
  - *“High” intensity: A combination of long-term grassland management improvements that will address the sustainability of native warm season grasses for mottled duck nesting habitat when converting a site from introduced grass to native herbaceous grass/forb, or reclaiming a historic native herbaceous grass/forb site that has had complete loss of mottled duck nesting habitat due to invasion of trees and/or shrubs.*
  - *“Low” intensity: Long-term grassland management improvements that will address the sustainability of mottled duck nesting habitat on land that does not meet the high-intensity criteria.*