



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Reforestation: Mowing for Site Preparation

Mowing may be used as site preparation on pastures and/or light, semi-open fields prior to planting, by machine or hand. This practice is necessary when grasses or small saplings have reached heights or densities that will impede planter access, however it will do little to improve future growth and survival of seedlings. Mowing on sandy, well-drained sites should not create any future machine planting problems. However, mowing on wetter, tight soils may leave residual grass cuttings to mix with the soil during the machine planting operation. This can cause build-up on the planter's coulter, boot and packing wheels requiring frequent cleaning and is therefore not recommended. If possible, wet sites should be burned prior to planting or planted in their current condition. If the grass is extremely dense or canopied, burning is a better site preparation tool but should not be conducted on steep slopes, deep sands or other soils where erosion may be a problem.

Description:

Planting access problems due to weeds, grasses and small woody vegetation present in abandoned fields and pastures can be temporarily reduced with the use of a tractor and shredder. Mowing of these areas should be performed as necessary during the months prior to planting season to reduce the amount of residual stems and grass cuttings. Emphasis should be placed on proper timing of this treatment to minimize re-sprouting and re-growth between the mowing and planting operation.

Benefits:

Mowing helps to improve planter access to a tract of land potentially improving the quality of the planting job. Where possible, mowing followed by baling of improved pasture grasses is preferred. This serves to remove the

grass cuttings and may provide additional revenue to the landowner or offset the costs of mowing. The quality of the grass and acreage involved will determine if baling is a viable option. Mowing also reduces moisture uptake by the grasses providing additional water to newly planted seedlings.

Concerns:

Mowing does not eliminate the need for herbaceous weed and grass control and herbicide should be applied accordingly, usually following the planting operation. In some instances, mowing grasses can actually increase their spread and growth creating more competition for seedlings. Mowing semi-open fields having scattered saplings and brush will not eliminate the roots but will leave sharp stems that could possibly puncture tractor or vehicle tires. Some landowners may choose to mow between rows of trees after planting for aesthetic purposes. However, this practice incurs additional expense and is recommended with extreme caution due to the high potential for seedling damage or destruction.

