

***Van Zandt County
Appraisal District***
**27867 State Hwy. 64 - P.O. Box 926
Canton, TX 75103**



**2015
1-D-1 Open Space
Intensity Standards**

Introduction

One of the legal requirements for qualification of land valuation is its current and primary use “to the degree of intensity that is typical to the area.”

Degree of intensity is measured by local farming and ranching practices (stocking rates, planting rates, crop rotation, fertilization methods, brush and weed control, harvesting and marketing techniques etc.) which are those of a typically prudent farm or ranch manager. The land must be producing a product for human or animal consumption, or for a commercial trade within the agriculture economy of the State of Texas, and being farmed or ranched to the extent typical for agricultural operations. **This test is intended to exclude land on which token agricultural use occurs in an effort to obtain tax relief.**

In determining the intensity use of agricultural properties, appraisers should recognize agricultural uses and then determine a property’s intensity use according to:

- A.) Typical management practices
- B.) Minimum acreage requirements (based upon soil productivity capabilities)
- C.) Minimum stocking ratios

To assist the Chief Appraiser in recognizing typical agricultural activities in the area, the VZCAD Board of Directors has appointed an Ag Advisory Board under the authority of Section 6.12 of the Property Tax Code.

The standards included in this publication have been prepared by the Chief Appraiser and staff and were approved by the VZCAD Agricultural Advisory Board and are considered to be typical practices for agricultural activities in Van Zandt County.

Qualifying Agricultural Activities

Qualifying agricultural activities include, but are not limited to:

- A.) Cultivating the soil
- B.) Producing crops for human food, animal feed, or planting seed for the production of fibers
- C.) Floriculture, viticulture, and horticulture
- D.) Raising or keeping livestock
- E.) Raising or keeping exotic animals or fowl for the production of human food or fiber, leather pelts, or other tangible products having a commercial value
- F.) Beekeeping
- G.) Planting cover crops or leaving land idle for the purpose of participating in a governmental program or normal crop or livestock rotation procedure
- H.) Wildlife management

Minimum Tract Size

A property must be adequate size to support a typically prudent agricultural operation to the agricultural use type. Van Zandt County does not have a fixed minimum acreage requirement for agricultural use. The acreage required will depend on the condition of the land, proposed use, and intensity of use.

Van Zandt County primarily relies on intensity of use standards to determine if a property qualifies for open-space agricultural use. However, the recommended minimum acreages below are generally needed to meet the intensity of use standard established.

Recommended Minimum Acreage

Hay Production	10 acres	Orchards	5 acres
Cattle Production	10 acres	Crop Production	10 acres
Equine Production	10 acres	Horticulture	10 acres
Sheep/Goat Production	5 acres		

Van Zandt County does employ minimum acreage requirements for Timber Production and Wildlife Management. Current requirements are listed below.

Required Minimum Acreage

Timber Production	10 Acres*
Wildlife Management	12.5 Acres**

*Timber tracts less than 20 acres have additional documentation requirements to support a viable harvest plan.

**Exceptions may apply.

Agricultural Use Types

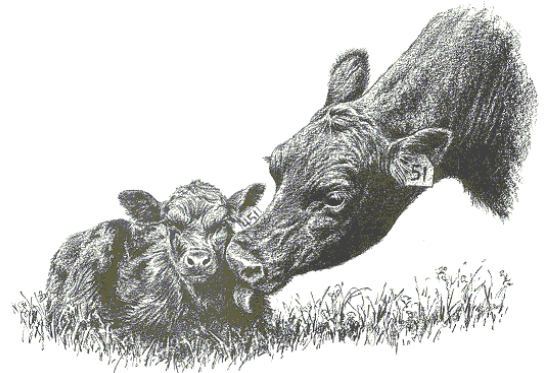
Following are standards for each of the typical agricultural practices commonly occurring in Van Zandt County. Each of the agriculture use type standards will include:

- A.)The type of agricultural production produced
- B.)Minimum standards for stocking or planting
- C.)Minimum acreage requirements for typical operations

Keeping Livestock & Exotic animals

Typical grazing operations include:

- A.) **Beef production-** the raising of beef for sale either to other operators for breeding stock or to processors for slaughter.
- B.) **Sheep/goat production-** the raising of sheep and/or goat or mohair, meat, and dairy products.
- C.) **Horses-** the raising of horses, donkeys, and mules are considered valid agricultural use.
- D.) **Exotic animals-** the raising of deer, antelope, emus, ostriches, and other types of animals not native to Texas for:



- 1.) The production of meat, leather, or other plumage and
- 2.) Cosmetic or medicinal purposes

Typical Management Practices

Local operators will include the following as usual activities in the production of livestock:

- A.) Adequate fences maintained
- B.) Stock water provided
- C.) Systematic practices for
 - 1.) Herd management and
 - 2.) Marketing animals
- D.) Proper land management to provide long-term forage
- E.) Adequate animal units matching the carrying capacity of the land and typical agricultural operation.

Animal Unit Definitions

Based upon the standard concept of an animal unit being one 1000 pound animal the following chart can be used to calculate the number of animal units necessary to meet the minimum stocking rates:

Domestic Livestock

Animal Type	Body Weight	Head per AU (rounded)
Beef Cattle (Cow)	1000	1
Horse	1100	1
Domestic Sheep (Ewe)	130	6
Spanish Goat	90	6
Boer x Spanish Goat (Nanny)	125	5
Angora Goat (Nanny)	70	8

Native Wildlife (High Fence Management)

Animal Type	Body Weight	Head per AU (rounded)
White-tailed Deer	100	7
Mule Deer	135	6
Pronghorn Antelope	90	7

Exotic Wildlife (High Fence Management)

Animal Type	Body Weight	Head per AU (rounded)
Axis Deer	150	5
Sika Deer	150	5
Fallow Deer	130	6
Elk	800	1
Red Deer	350	2
Barasigna Deer	350	2
Sambar Deer	400	2
Pere Davis's Deer	400	2
Sable Antelope	500	2
Blackbuck Antelope	75	9
Nilgai Antelope	350	2
Scimitar-horned Oryx	400	2
Gemsbok Oryx	400	2
Arabian Oryx	150	5
Addax	250	3
Ibex x Boer Goat	125	5
Impala	130	6
Common Eland	1000	1
Greater Kudu	450	2
Sitatunga	200	4
Waterbuck	500	2
Thompson's Gazelle	85	8
Mouflon/Barbado Sheep	120	6
Auodad Sheep	200	4
Llama	250	3

Young of the year (calves, lambs, kids, fawns) are considered as part of the mother until weaning. After weaning, they are considered a separate animal and should be added.

For wildlife species, the AU Equivalent is based on a normal population consisting of females, males, and yearling animals.

Soil Considerations

Agricultural production for grazing operations is directly affected by the lands ability to produce adequate forage for the sustenance of the livestock based upon the climate and rainfall along with the lands capability to produce forage. For purposes of determining intensity standards for grazing operations, the district has categorized all property into one of its two major eco-regions, based upon its analysis of soil types, topography influences, and vegetation types. Those regions are The Post Oak Savannah and The Blackland Prairie.

The eastern two-thirds of the county is in the Post Oak Savannah eco-region, with tall grasses and post, black jack oak and pine predominating. The western third is in the Blackland Prairies eco-region, which is characterized by tall grasses, mesquite, and oak, and pecan and elm trees along streams.

Livestock Use Standards

Stocking rates can vary due to a properties ability to support livestock based upon its **pasture type** and its **soil productivity capabilities**.

The minimum use standard is the greater of 5 animal units or animal units per acre denoted below (generally 1 animal unit per 7 acres).

The charts below are intended to be a representation of typical stocking rates on typical tracts in Van Zandt County based upon these two primary characteristics.

Improved Pasture		
Land weed/brush control is practiced as well as areas where fertilizer and/or supplements to the soil are added to enhance the productivity of the land. Land may be used for grazing or hay production (see <i>Haylands</i> below)		
Grasses include grasses that are seeded or sprigged and are baled or grazed by domestic livestock.		
Standards by Eco-Region	Post Oak	Blackland
Recommended Stocking Rate (per animal unit)	*4 to 7 Acres	* 4 to 7 Acres
*Based on the degree of intensity of use (case to case)		

Native Pasture		
Land that is partially cleared of brush and trees with natural grasses growing on the land with no enhancements.		
Grasses include native and introduced varieties of grasses where little to no weed/brush control, fertilizer, or supplements are added to the soil.		
Standards by Eco-Region	Post Oak	Blackland
Recommended Stocking Rate (per animal unit)	*5 to 10 Acres	* 5 to 10 Acres
*Based on the degree of intensity of use (case to case)		

Wooded Pasture

Land that (although) is primarily wooded, still has an agricultural use. This does not include land where timber is being propagated for harvest.

The land itself does not typically qualify as pasture/grazing land and must be used in connection with land that is devoted primarily to a qualifying agricultural activity and in most cases in connection with improved or native pasture land.

Wasteland

Land that has little agricultural productivity capacity due to severe erosion or flooding; or soil types that cannot support agricultural products in the same manner as the remainder of the associated land.

This land in itself does not qualify as pasture/grazing land and must be used in connection with land that is devoted primarily to a qualifying agricultural activity and in most cases in connection with improved or native pasture land.

Drought Year Exception: Stocking rates may vary due to climate conditions. Reductions in herd size (and total *temporary* liquidation of a herd) may be considered typical during drought periods.

Hay Production

Land that is used to grow perennial improved grasses which are cut and baled for livestock consumption. Grasses will include all native and introduced grasses.

Typical Management Practices

Land used for this agricultural purpose will be classified as improved pastureland.

Standard practices include:

- A.) Cutting
- B.) Baling
- C.) Hauling
- D.) Feeding and/or
- E.) Marketing

Hay Production Use Standards

The minimum intensity standard is the greater of 30 round bales / 300 square bales or the bales per acre denoted below.

The following table represents the typical expectations per acre for hay production with adequate fertilizer and rainfall:

Eco- Region	Bales Per Cutting	Typical Cuttings Per Year
Post Oak Savannah	2-3 Round 20-40 Square	2-3
Blackland Prairie	2-3 Round 20-40 Square	2-3

Timber Management

The Texas Constitution permits timber productivity appraisal only if the property and its owner meet specific requirements defining timber-use.

Land will not qualify simply because it has timber standing on it. In addition, timberland that is used principally for aesthetic or recreational purposes will not qualify.

The Tax Code, [Section 23.72](#), sets the standards for determining whether land qualifies:

“Land qualifies for appraisal . . . if it is currently and actively devoted principally to production of timber or forest products to the degree of intensity generally accepted in the area with intent to produce income and has been devoted principally to production of timber or forest products or to agricultural use that would qualify the land for appraisal . . . for five of the preceding seven years.”

To qualify land for timber productivity appraisal, a property owner must show the chief appraiser that the land meets the Tax Code, Section 23.72, standard. To do so, the property owner must apply for the appraisal and give the chief appraiser the information necessary to determine if the land qualifies. The owner also must notify the chief appraiser of any changes in the land’s status.

To qualify for timber productivity appraisal, landowners must meet each of the following six eligibility requirements.

- A.) The land must be currently and actively devoted to timber production.
- B.) The land must be used principally for timber production.
- C.) The land must be devoted to timber production to the degree of intensity generally accepted for the area.
- D.) The owner must have an intent to produce income.
- E.) The land must have been dedicated principally to agriculture or timber production for any five of the preceding seven years.
- F.) The property owner must file a timely and valid application form by the May 1st deadline.

Tract Size Requirements

A property must be adequate size to support a typically prudent timber operation. Forestry experts with knowledge of timber production in Van Zandt County recommend a minimum of 20 acres to support a prudent timber operation. Van Zandt County has established a minimum requirement of 10 acres that includes an additional reporting requirement for land under 20 acres to support viable production and harvest plans.

Management Practices

Degree of intensity standards will vary from one timber growing area and operation to another. In general, there are three different levels of management intensity:

- A.) **Custodial management** is “hands off” management. The only activities the owner conducts are payment of property taxes and occasional visits to the site. However, it is highly unlikely that a timber property that shows no indication of management activity for two or more decades is being actively devoted to timber production.
- B.) **Minimal management** may fall anywhere between custodial management and intensive management. The owner may undertake some activities, such as periodic thinning, regular site visits, or maintenance of an access road.
- C.) **Intensive management** can involve many activities, including careful soil preparation for replanting, regular thinning and/or prescribed burning to reduce competing vegetation, removal of undesirable trees, following a program to check for and control insects and disease, prompt actions to control insects and disease, and building and maintaining roads to the site.

Typical management practices will include:

- A.) Pine straw harvest every 4 to 5 years
- B.) Tree thinning every 8 to 10 years
- C.) Final tree harvest every 18 to 20 years

Land owners must provide proof of timber management practices and intent to produce income by filing a *Timber Management Plan*. More information on preparing a timber management plan is available through the Texas Forestry Service at:

www.txforestservation.tamu.edu/main/default.aspx

Forest Types

These are the three primary forest types recognized in the timber industry:

- A.) Pine- Includes all forested areas in which the trees are predominately evergreens (green throughout the year and do not loose their leaves). In distinguishing these forest types, pine and other softwoods make up more than 2/3 of the trees.
- B.) Hardwood- Includes all forested areas with a predominance of deciduous trees (trees which loose their leaves at the end of the frost-free season). In distinguishing these forest types, deciduous trees make up more than 2/3 of the trees.
- C.) Mixed- Includes all forested areas where both evergreen and deciduous trees are growing and neither predominates. In this forest, neither evergreen or deciduous trees make up more than 2/3 of trees.

Orchards/Vineyards/Croplands

Orchards and croplands typically include lands where crops are produced to be sold commercially. Typical orchards are either pecan or peach. Vineyards typically produce grapes. Croplands typically produce several varieties of fruits and vegetables.

Typical Management Practices

Land used for this type of agricultural purpose has a regular schedule for:

- A.) Site preparation
- B.) Erosion control
- C.) Pest control
- D.) Fungus control
- E.) Pruning
- F.) Marketing

Use Standards

While agricultural production may be limited by eco-region, typical planting and spacing practices remain constant throughout the county.

	Spacing	Trees per Acre	Recommended Min. Acreage*	Yield
Peach-Irrigated	18-24 ft.	100	5 acres	30-40 bushels
Peach-Dry-land	24-30 ft.	50-75	5 acres	24-30 bushels
Peach-Dry-land	35-50	16-36	5 acres	15-25 bushels
Grapes-Irrigated	4-6 ft.	3500	5 acres	50-70 bushels
Grapes-Dry-land	6-8 ft.	3000	5 acres	40-50 bushels

*Based on degree of intensity of use

Fish

Intensity standards for the raising of fish or fish products are the same as those applied to exotic game. Commercial fish production differs from keeping game fish for purely sporting or recreational purposes. This difference is not necessarily related to the scale of the operation, nor is it related to any intent to produce income or make a profit. Raising fish is a qualified agricultural land use when all the elements of a bulk harvest are present. Taking fish by individual line is clearly a recreational activity.

Eco-region property location has no effect on this type of agricultural use.

Poultry Production

Commercial agricultural operations that are typically performed under a contract with a poultry production company. Typical operations include:

- A.) Broiler Houses - where poultry is produced for meat products
- B.) Laying Houses – where poultry eggs are collected for food and stocking purposes

Management Practices

Typical practices include:

- A.) Poultry house maintenance
- B.) Providing sufficient food and water to sustain housed poultry
- C.) Control of disease
- D.) Harvesting poultry products as produced
- E.) Marketing poultry products (at market or as provided in contract)

Use Standards

Eco-region property location has no effect on this type of agriculture use.

Typical houses of 20,000 to 25,000 square feet in area require a minimum of ten acres per house.

Beekeeping

Sec.23.51 (2) of the Texas Property Tax Code identifies beekeeping as an agriculture use and states this process shall qualify for agriculture use productivity valuation if used for pollination or the production of human food or other tangible products having a commercial value.

The term “agricultural use” in *sec. 23.51 (2)* also includes the use of land to raise and keep bees for pollination or for the production of human food or other tangible products having commercial value, provided that the land used is not less than 5 acres or more than 20 acres.

To be eligible to qualify for this special use appraisal. The property must have been used 5 of the preceding 7 years for a qualified agriculture activity to the degree of intensity typical within Van Zandt County or have been “**ACTIVELY MANAGED**” 5 of the preceding 7 years to the following degree of intensity standards for beekeeping.

The degree of intensity standard for the required acreages are as follows:

5 acres	6 active hives
7.5 acres	7 active hives
10 acres	8 active hives
12.5 acres	9 active hives
15 acres	10 active hives
17.5 acres	11 active hives
20 acres	12 active hives

*****ALL HIVES MUST BE ACTIVELY MANAGED (maintained and kept alive) AND REMAIN ON THE PROPERTY FOR AT LEAST 7 MONTHS OF THE YEAR (JANUARY 1ST TO DECEMBER 31ST) FOR A 5 OUT OF 7 YEAR PERIOD*****

“Active management” includes but is not limited to:

- A.) Supplemental feeding
- B.) Inspections of the hive
- C.) Collecting honey and other products
- D.) Management of disease

Products Produced

- A.) Honey
- B.) Bee Pollen
- C.) Honey Candies
- D.) Candles
- E.) Beeswax
- F.) Soaps

Typical Management Practices

- A.) Hive structure maintenance
- B.) Monitor bee health
- C.) Provide supplemental food
- D.) Control pests
- E.) Harvest and market products

Bees need an adequate source of nectar and pollen throughout the growing season of April to September. Bees will travel within a 3 mile radius from the hive to find adequate forage for survival. If adequate forage cannot be found the bees will simply move (abscond) or die. It is the responsibility of a prudent and conscientious manager to see that adequate forage is available for his/her bees.

The goal of VZCAD is to assist the ‘legitimate beekeepers’. Legitimate beekeepers will have their bees in locations that provide food for their bees, allow for the pollination of various agriculture and food crops, and manage their bees in a manner to keep them healthy, surviving, and producing for the long term. ***Beekeeping is not a “cheap” endeavor nor is a short term endeavor.***

All properties that qualify for this special use appraisal should be have a production code of D29.

Wildlife Management



To be considered eligible for wildlife management, land must be used to generate a sustaining breeding, migrating, or wintering population of indigenous wild animals. Indigenous animals are native animals that originated in or naturally migrate through and are living naturally in the area as opposed to exotic animals that have been introduced to the area by man. Additionally, indigenous animals are ones that are native to Texas.

Wildlife management must be the primary use of the property. Land that is used exclusively for recreation will not qualify for this special valuation.

Typical Management Practices

Land used for the management of wildlife will be subject to management practices that encourage long-term maintenance of the population.

The district recognizes and adopts the typical practices and intensity standards of the Texas Parks & Wildlife for the Post Oak Savannah and Blackland Prairie Regions as the typical intensity standards for the county. See <https://tpwd.texas.gov>

Use Standards

Wildlife management activities are elements of the degree of intensity determination. By law, property owners must be actively engaged in performing at least three of the following seven activities:

- A.) Maintaining the animal's habitat
- B.) Controlling Erosion
- C.) Controlling Predators
- D.) Providing supplemental water
- E.) Providing supplemental food
- F.) Providing shelter
- G.) Making census counts to determine population

Property owners are required to prove management practices annually by submitting a *Wildlife Management Annual Report* (form provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.) as well as supporting documentation.

Tract Size requirements

Only properties that meet the minimum of 12.5 acres and usage ratio of at least 92% will be eligible for open-spaced land wildlife valuation (some exceptions may apply).

Properties that are a part of a wildlife management co-op or association may have a minimum of 10 acres with a usage ratio of 90% (some exceptions may apply).

For properties that (since the previous tax year) have been reduced in size and have had a change in ownership, the tract size must meet the minimum size as established by the county in order to qualify for wildlife management use.

If a property does not meet the minimum size, but has threatened or endangered species, deed restrictions, property owners' agreements, conservation easements or other legally binding covenants that obligate the landowner to actively perform wildlife management, the minimum acreage for qualification is set to 10 acres with a usage of 90%

Calculation Test

RULE §9.2005 Texas Administrative Code

A tract of land's wildlife use requirement is a number expressed as a percentage and calculated by subtracting one from the total number of acres in the tract of land and dividing the result by the total number of acres in the tract of land. **The following formula expresses the calculation, with "x" representing the tract of land's total acreage:**

$$(x-1) \div x = \text{wildlife use requirement}$$

Properties for which the wildlife use percentage calculates to be less than the required minimum for stand alone or co-op tracts will not qualify for the special valuation.