



# CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM - GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

9/09

## Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - Minnesota

### WHAT IS GRASSLAND



### MANAGEMENT?

Grassland management is used to develop and maintain grassland habitats in prairie, transition and forested regions of Minnesota. This practice improves habitat for certain species such as ring-necked pheasant, greater prairie chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, waterfowl and grassland dependent songbirds. Consider the effects of grassland management on at risk species, including state and Federally listed species.

### REQUIREMENTS

CRP grassland management recommendations apply to practices CP-1, CP-2, CP-4B/D, CP-9, CP-10, CP-15A, CP-18B/18C, CP-23/23A, CP-24, CP-25, CP-28, CP-29, CP-30, CP-33 and CP-37.

Knowing what you have, what you want, and developing a plan to improve your habitat is the essence of a successful project. Refer to your CRP Conservation Plan for practice schedule

### MANAGEMENT

Grasslands may be managed by one or a combination of the following methods:

**Mechanical:** includes mowing, light disking or inter-seeding. For CRP fields >20 acres in size, no more than 1/2 of a field should be disturbed at any given management period. CRP fields < 20 acres in size may be managed in their entirety.

**Timing:** Mechanical disturbance should be done prior to the primary nesting season or between August 1 – September 1 to protect ground nesting wildlife.

### Recommended Frequency of Management:

	Field ≤20 ac.	Field > 20 ac
10 year contract	100% Year 5/6	50% Year 3/4 50% Year 5/6
15 year contract	100% Years 8/9	50% Year 5/6 50% Year 8/9

### Mowing (*Native and Introduced Grasses/Forbs*)

- Use a rotary or flail mower to evenly distribute grass clippings. Do not swath, as the windrows will smother seeding. Clippings may also be baled, removed from the field and destroyed according to FSA requirements.
- Where possible, manage no more than 50% of fields >20 ac. in any given year in 4-5 year increments, or in strips to maintain cover. Rotate mowed strips across the field. Mow cool season grasses no shorter than 6". Native warm season grasses should be mowed no shorter than 10".
- Strip mowing can be applied in the spring prior to the nesting season to encourage vegetative diversity without greatly impacting ground nesting activities.
- Minimum standing strip width shall be 100'.

### Light Disking (*Introduced Grasses*)

- Light disking (2-4" deep) of existing stands, typically greater than 4 years old, may be necessary to increase the amount of open ground and encourage a diverse plant community of annuals and perennials.
- Alternate disked strips of ≤75' in width, with standing buffer strips a minimum 2 times the disked width, across the field on the contour or across slope.
- Rotate the disked strips across the field.

Inter-seeding (Native and Introduced Grasses)

Native forb/legume and non-native legume inter-seeding is used to increase plant diversity in native and introduced grass plantings or in old field habitats. Inter-seeding provides wildlife with a food source during the winter. It can also create excellent brood habitat for upland wildlife during the summer. ***This practice will be used after a disturbance such as prescribed burning, light disking or herbicide spraying.***

Refer to Biology Jobsheet #13 “*Forb and Legume Inter-seeding For Wildlife*” for practice recommendations.

**Prescribed Burning** (Native Grasses/Forbs)

If the area is not mowed or disked, grass stands may need to be managed through periodic burning to remove excess litter which may reduce the quality of wildlife habitat.

Controlled fire can allow germination of seed bearing annuals, increase plant species diversity, control unwanted woody vegetation, and open up the stand for movement of small animals and birds.

**Timing:** Prescribed burning should be done prior to the primary nesting season or between August 1- September 1 to protect ground nesting wildlife.

**Recommended Frequency:** Due to the complexity of completing prescribed burns, individual CRP fields may be burned in their entirety where feasible.

10 year contract	100% Year 5/6
15 year contract	100% Years 8/9

- Fall burns and early spring burns tend to favor wildflowers and are an effective tool to support inter-seeding native forbs/legumes into grass dominated stands of native vegetation. Late spring burns provide maximum stimulus to warm season plants and work well to control cool season grasses and brush.

*It is highly recommended that burning be done according to burn plans prepared by technically qualified and adequately insured individuals. Burning will be done according to the requirements of a vendor/agency developed burn plan, or for a landowner implemented prescribed burn, in accordance with a valid “Minnesota Open Burning Permit” as issued by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or their designee. Landowners completing the prescribed burn must provide a copy of the issued “Minnesota Open Burning Permit” (including any required drawings and sketches) to NRCS prior to initiation of the prescribed burn. Landowners are also encouraged to view the MDNR video “Prescribed Burning in Grassland” which is available at your local DNR Forestry Office.*

*Landowners and/or vendors are responsible for obtaining all necessary permits prior to burning and for complying with all applicable laws in carrying out the burning. Costs associated with obtaining required permits and other necessary approvals, notification of neighbors and governmental units are entirely the landowner's responsibility.*

*By entering into this cost-share agreement, landowners acknowledge that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has informed me that I am responsible for all liability associated with this practice, and hereby release the Government and its agents and employees from any responsibility or legal liability arising from injury or harm to person or property that occurs as a result of this practice. Landowners acknowledge that they knowingly assume all risk of injury while participating in this agreement.*

- See NRCS practice standard PRESCRIBED BURNING (338) for additional recommendations.

