

CRP MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT: GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

BACKGROUND

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is responsible for administering the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP policy requires that starting with Signup 26, participants must perform management activities that maintain or enhance the quality of conservation cover. These management practices are designed to ensure plant diversity and enhance wildlife benefits, while ensuring protection of soil and water resources. Typically, mid-contract management (MCM) activities are conducted between the 4th and 7th year of the contract. However on land that was accepted into CRP with existing cover, management activities can begin as soon as technically feasible. Participants with CRP contracts accepted prior to Signup 26 may apply to voluntarily perform mid-contract management.

PURPOSE

This job sheet gives an overview of all MCM practices that are available to enhance the conservation cover. These practices are focused on herbaceous cover established to grasses, forbs and/or legumes. There is an individualized job sheet available for each of the MCM practices. These job sheets should be reviewed and followed once the appropriate management practice has been selected.

HOW PRACTICES ARE SELECTED

Once CRP enrolled land is determined to be eligible for mid-contract management, the FSA will request the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or other partners to conduct an on-site assessment of the conservation cover. NRCS will evaluate the condition and density of the approved cover; the grass/forb species present; and determine whether or not the cover is providing good habitat for local wildlife species. Based on results of this evaluation, the assessment person will then recommend the appropriate MCM practice(s) to FSA and the participant. A Farm Service Agency and NRCS representative will meet with the participant and discuss the MCM options available and the appropriate cost-share payments if applicable.

PAYMENT RATES FOR MCM PRACTICES ARE:

Practice	Cost-share Per acre
Prescribed Mowing	\$7.50
Soil Disturbance	\$25.00
Prescribed Burning	\$50.00
Herbicide Application	\$25.00
Interseeding Cool Season Grasses / Legumes	\$25.00
Interseeding Warm Season Grass/ Forbs	\$37.50
Continued Monitoring and Management	N/A

ALL MCM PRACTICES

The following items apply to all of the mid-contract management (MCM) practices:

- Each MCM practice has an individualized, detailed job sheet. Make sure you read and follow specific job sheet recommendations.
- MCM operations will be performed between July 16 and February 28, (outside primary nesting period for grassland bird species) unless it is specifically otherwise stated in the “Specifications” section of the job sheet.**
- MCM operations may require more than one type of activity or practice.
- These activities will not be conducted on grass waterways, CRP food plots, riparian forest buffers, or areas planted to trees and/or shrubs.
- Not all options are available for every CRP practice.
- Environmentally sensitive areas will be avoided:
 - Concentrated flow areas
 - Critical areas
 - The first 30' that borders a water resource
 - Scour areas on floodplains
 - Other areas where gully erosion is likely to occur

MCM PRACTICES

Prescribed Mowing

Typically mowing does not provide the type of benefits the other disturbance activities do. However, in some cases it may be the best method to use to control brush or provide increased stand diversity. If **Prescribed Mowing** is indicated as a needed management practice, the following are some specific considerations:

- Mowing may only be used in conjunction with other activities
- Annual mowing is not allowed
- Typically, no more than 1/3 of the area may be mowed in one year.
- Mow blocks, strips or whole fields as indicated in plan. Intersperse mowed areas with unmowed areas.
- Mowing residue should be shredded or well distributed to prevent deep litter accumulation.

Soil Disturbance

Disking or otherwise tilling the soil breaks up thick grass stands to allow annuals, wildflowers and legumes to become established, as well as providing some bare ground to help small animals move about, find seeds and provide dusting sites. If **Soil Disturbance** is indicated as a needed management practice, the following are some specific considerations:

- Make multiple passes with a disk about 4" deep or other tillage equipment.
- Leave at least 40-70 % of the soil bare.
- Tillage should be done across the slope or on the contour.
- The best time to disk is in late summer or fall.
- Areas to be disked may require one of the other activities to reduce excessive litter prior to tillage.

Herbicide Application

The use of a selective herbicide can control unwanted vegetation, whether that is grass, broadleaf weeds or brush. This allows more desirable plant species to become established. If **Herbicide Application** is indicated as a needed management activity, the following are some specific considerations:

- All herbicide applications must be done in accordance with the product label
- Spot spraying is preferred in order to reduce impacts to other species
- Strip spraying may be a good method to achieve stand diversity

- Rotate sprayed areas across the field
- Leave an unsprayed strip approximately 30 feet wide along water bodies.

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning reduces litter and provides bare soil for the germination of desirable plants. It also can help control unwanted weeds and brush. If **Prescribed Burning** is indicated as a needed management practice, the following are some specific considerations:

- Prescribed burning must be done according to an approved plan by qualified personnel
- Burning can be done every 3-5 years
- All necessary permits must be obtained in order to carry out a prescribed burn.
- Establish a firebreak around the area to be burned.

Interseeding Forbs, Legumes, Grasses

It may be necessary to seed species that are missing from the stand and are not likely to establish naturally. These species will improve the diversity of the stand and improve its value for wildlife. If **Interseeding Forbs, Legumes, Grasses** is indicated as a needed management practice, the following are some specific considerations:

- Areas to be seeded will likely require one of the other disturbance activities prior to seeding
- Seeding may be done in blocks over the entire acreage
- Follow the rates, timing and seeding methods on the *Interseeding Forbs, Legumes, Grasses* Job sheet.

Continued Monitoring and Management

Mid-Management Practices are designed to enhance the cover value. Under certain very specific conditions, if the cover is ideal then it may be detrimental to disturb the cover. If, based on a field evaluation this is found to be the case then **Continued Monitoring and Management** practice may be used to monitor the existing cover.

Practice Applicability

Not all Mid-Contract Management activities are applicable to all CRP practices. The attached table shows which MCM activities are applicable to each CRP practice.

Ohio CRP Required Management Options for Grassland Practices

PRACTICE	Prescribed Burning	Soil Disturbance	Chemical Application	Interseed Forbs, Legumes, Grasses	Prescribed Mowing
CP1: Introduced Grasses / Legumes	X	X	X	X	X
CP2: Native Grasses & Legumes	X	X	X	X	X
CP3: Tree Planting					
CP3A: Hardwood Tree Planting					
CP4B: Permanent Wildlife Habitat (Corridors)	X	X	X	X	X
CP4D: Permanent Wildlife Habitat	X	X	X	X	X
CP5A: Field Windbreak					
CP8A: Grass Waterway	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt
CP9: Shallow Water Areas - Wildlife	X	X	X	X	X
CP10: Grass Already Established	X	X	X	X	X
CP11: Trees Already Established					
CP12*: Wildlife Food Plot	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt
CP15A: Contour Grass Strip	X	X	X	X	X
CP16A: Shelterbelt					
CP17A: Living Snow Fences					
CP21: Filter Strips	X	X	X	X	X
CP22: Riparian Buffer					
CP23: Wetland Restoration	X	X	X	X	X
CP23A: Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain	X	X	X	X	X
CP25: Rare & Declining Habitat, Tall Grass Prairie	X	X	X	X	X
CP25: Rare & Declining Habitat, Bur Oak Savanna	X	X	X	X	X
CP25: Rare & Declining Habitat, Wetland Complexes	X	X	X	X	X
CP27: Farmable Wetlands	X	X	X	X	X
CP28: Farmable Wetland Buffer	X	X	X	X	X
CP29: Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer	X	X	X	X	X
CP30: Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer	X	X	X	X	X
CP31: Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands					
CP32: Expired CRP Hardwood Tree Planting on Marginal Pasture					
CP33: Habitat Buffers - Upland Birds	X	X	X	X	X

X = Indicates the Mid-Contract Management activity may be applicable to the listed CRP practice

= Indicates a tree practice to which these Mid-Contract Management activities are not applicable

* = CP12 Wildlife Food Plot must be established annually, therefore, is exempt from Mid-Contract Management