

Early Successional Habitat Management (647)

Conservation Practice Job Sheet

Management of Established Grasses and Legumes



USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
New Jersey

Client Name:

Date:

County:

Assisted by:

Tract #:

NRCS Field Office:

Phone :

Introduction

Cool season grasses, legumes and warm season grasses can all be established to create grasslands for wildlife habitat management. These plants can provide important food, cover and nesting areas for many species of wildlife. Cool season grasses put on most of their growth during April, May and early June. A second growth period occurs in late August and September. Most legumes seeded for wildlife are also cool season plants. Many legumes are high in protein and are sought out by wildlife over other plants. Legumes also fix nitrogen and help maintain soil fertility.

Warm season grasses are very slow to establish and the establishment period usually takes 2-3 years. These plants put most of their growth on during the warm summer months from mid-June through August.

Soil Amendments

All grassland fields should have a soil test periodically to determine lime and fertilizer needs. Apply any lime and fertilizer needed according to soil test results and plant needs. Cool season grasses and legumes are usually more sensitive than warm season seedings to soil pH and N,P,K levels. Warm season grasslands normally do not need any nitrogen fertilizer but phosphorus and potassium can be applied if soil test reveals they are at low levels. Adequate soil fertility is a must for a successful cool season grass or legume grassland stand seeding to thrive.

Weed Control

Cool season grasses and legumes usually have good seedling vigor and are fast to establish if good conditions



exist at seeding time. If weed problems occur control by mowing and/or herbicide use. Remember seedings for wildlife can be successful with some weeds. Many weed seeds are valuable wildlife foods. Weeds should be kept at a level where they will not interfere with the new grass/legume establishment. All weeds need not be eradicated.

Since warm season grasses are slow to establish weed control is more critical. Be sure to clip cool season grasses and weeds that overtop warm season seedings early in the season. Be sure not to clip tops of warm season grasses. This can usually be accomplished by mowing at a height of 8"-12" in mid May and again in mid June.

Once established grasslands should be maintained by mowing or prescribed burning once every 2-3 years. It is important to control woody vegetation from grasslands, especially invasive weedy species such as multiflora rose and autumn olive, often found in farm landscapes.

Mowing

Care should be taken to mow grasslands when wildlife values will be disturbed the least. This is usually in the late winter months, after critical winter cover has been provided by grasslands and before sites are being used for nesting cover. This is usually between March 1st and April 1st.

A second time period for mowing is late summer, after wildlife nesting and brood rearing in grasslands is complete. This is usually between August 15th and September 15th. One drawback of mowing during this period is that tall dense winter cover will usually be lost by a late summer mowing.

A very diverse grassland plant community can be accomplished by rotating mowing throughout all the

grasslands on one farm by mowing some fields, or portions of fields, at different seasons in different years.

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning of grasslands is another way to maintain grasslands and control weedy species from entering grasslands. Warm season grasses respond especially well to prescribed burning but it can be used on cool season grasses and legumes as well.



Prescribed burning in New Jersey is regulated by NJ DEP Forest Fire Service (FFS) who issues permits for prescribed burns, does prescribed burn plans and conducts burns on public and private properties. Landowners should contact the FFS at the appropriate regional office for technical assistance.

Prescribed burning is usually done late winter, after grasslands have provided critical winter cover and before sites are being used for nesting cover.

A very diverse grassland plant community can also be accomplished by rotating prescribed burning throughout all the grasslands on one farm by burning some fields, or portions of fields, in different years.

Maintenance Plan for Grasslands

Landowner:

Assisted By:

Primary Purpose of Planting:

Wildlife Species Targeted:

Tract Number:

Mowing Schedule:

Prescribed Burning Schedule:

Attach aerial photo of planting site showing field locations of all grasslands to be managed.