

PENNSYLVANIA

WILDLIFE HABITAT EVALUATION WORKSHEETS

For Cropland or Pasture & Permanent Hayland

INTRODUCTION

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) policy for assistance on private lands requires that conservation practice planning and implementation be accomplished with consideration for fish and wildlife resources, regardless of land use (National Biology Manual, Sec. 511.04, July 2003). Persons who provide technical assistance to land users need to evaluate the potential impacts of implementation and explain to their clients what effect a planned system of conservation practices may have on various natural resources, including fish and wildlife. When provided with this information, clients are able to make informed decisions about the management of their land.

To meet quality criteria for the Fish and Wildlife – Inadequate Cover/Shelter resource concern for an individual field or other conservation planning unit, the wildlife habitat rating for each land use (Cropland or Pasture & Permanent Hayland) must be at least 50% of optimum conditions (0.5 on a scale of 0 to 1). In order to measure the degree to which existing conditions and any alternative actions presented or selected meet this resource quality criteria, a method of evaluation is required.

The Wildlife Habitat Evaluation worksheets for Cropland or Pasture & Permanent Hayland are intended to be used during the inventory and evaluation step of the conservation planning process as an efficient method to document existing conditions for this resource concern. These worksheets can also be used to document the potential effects of alternative actions selected.

When the evaluation documents the existing condition is less than 0.5 and a Resource Management System (RMS) or a conservation system where wildlife habitat is an objective is being developed, actions will be incorporated into the selected alternative (conservation plan) to improve the existing condition to at least the 0.5 level. When the evaluation documents the existing condition is already 0.5 or higher and a RMS or a conservation system where wildlife habitat is an objective is being developed, actions to maintain or improve the existing condition will be incorporated into the selected alternative. When wildlife habitat is a **primary objective**, alternatives will be incorporated to improve the existing condition beyond the 0.5 level.

Except for the Grassland Birds worksheet (Pasture & Permanent Hayland), this evaluation procedure is based primarily on habitat diversity and provides a general rating applicable to many different wildlife species. The worksheets are simplified to limit data input and the time required to complete them. The worksheets alone cannot be used to make detailed management recommendations required for intensive wildlife management or for managing habitat for individual wildlife species. Additional Biology assistance should be requested in these situations.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select the appropriate worksheet for the land use (Cropland or Pasture & Perm. Hayland).

- Use one worksheet per management system or conservation planning unit, which may include one or more fields.
- Only land under control of the decision-maker can be included in the evaluation.
- Crop fields with the same crop rotation and management practices (tillage & residue management, cover crops, etc.) should be grouped together for habitat evaluation. Hayland in rotation is Cropland. (It is not necessary to use these worksheets for CRP/CREP fields.)
- Fields managed primarily as permanent hayland should be evaluated on a separate Pasture and Permanent Hayland worksheet from fields managed primarily for pasture. Fields managed primarily for pasture but occasionally hayed can be evaluated on the same worksheet with other pasture fields. (It is not necessary to use these worksheets for CRP/CREP fields.)
- Select the appropriate Pasture and Permanent Hayland worksheet (General Wildlife or Grassland Birds) based on Local Working Group priorities and landuser objectives.

2. Evaluate the existing condition and the planned condition (if applicable).

- For the existing condition 'E', check the option that most closely fits for criteria and record the appropriate score. For the **planned condition** (if applicable), **circle and record** the appropriate score for the option that most closely fits each criteria. Do not select options with higher scores unless all the elements are met for that option. If the field(s)/area(s) being evaluated do not meet all the elements for a given scoring option, then a lower scoring option must be selected.*
- Sum the points for the existing condition and the planned condition (if applicable).
- Divide by the maximum possible score to get the overall score for the existing index and planned index (if applicable).

Additional requirements for Criteria (2) Crop Residues/Cover Crops (Cropland worksheet):

- Winter cover crops must attain six inches of height by the end of the Fall growing season.
- No more than fifty percent of the Cropland acreage may have liquid manure surface applied before March 15th, unless liquid manure is applied early (late Summer/early Fall) and followed by a winter cover crop which meets the above criteria.

Additional requirements for Field Border and other habitats such as dense shrubby cover, hedgerow, and un-grazed woodland: (This is Not Applicable to Grassland Birds worksheet.)

- Must be less than or equal to ten percent noxious, invasive, or problem introduced species.

Examples of Desirable Forb/Legume:

- Asters and daisies, buttercups, common ragweed, daisy fleabane, goldenrod, ironweeds, milkweeds, Queen Anne's lace (wild carrot), birdsfoot trefoil, various clovers, alfalfa, black medic, and partridge pea.

*Interpolation is possible, but should only be done after consulting the State Biologist (not all relationships are strictly linear.)