

## Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) for the Conservation Reserve Program Grassland Initiative in Louisiana September 2015

This Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) is based on the habitat requirements of common grassland species including several birds, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and pollinating insects. It is accepted that managing for these types of species potentially benefits other grassland habitat-dependent wildlife found in LA. This model can be applied to all ecological sites with the potential to support a full range of grassland species even if those species do not currently occupy the habitat.

Grassland wildlife species occupy a wide range of native and introduced pasture, hayland, range and Gulf Coast prairie/marsh interface habitat. The following physical and biotic features characterize most suitable grassland wildlife habitats in LA:

1. Adjacent to an abundance of species rich, diverse herbaceous ground cover; and
2. Generally open canopy with little or no shrub or tree cover.

General Directions to the CRP Grassland WHEG: If multiple tracts/fields exist with different conditions and management, score each tract/field separately and prorate totals by acres. Address each of the 5 variables by choosing the best description of the CRP Grassland site for the Existing Conditions and record that score. Again address each variable and choose the best description of how the CRP Grassland site will score once the Recommended Conservation Practice(s) is implemented and what the Planned Value will now be. Record both the Conservation Practice Code and the Planned Value in the appropriate column. Total all Existing Condition Values and Planned Values and divide each by 50 and record at the bottom of page 3 in the Existing Condition score block and Planned Condition score block. Attach a map(s) showing fields, fences, water features, on and off-site (if possible) and other features if needed (e.g., impediments to movement).

On a wildlife habitat assessment/evaluation scale of 0 – 1.0 with 1.0 being an optimum score, NRCS Policy requires a 0.5 minimum to meet quality criteria for wildlife habitat. If the Existing Condition score is above 0.5 the participant meets the minimum criteria for a wildlife focused conservation plan or the minimum wildlife portion of a RMS plan. If the Existing Condition score is below 0.5, the participant must use options to improve the habitat and reach at least a 0.5 Planned Condition score to meet the minimum criteria for a wildlife focused conservation plan or the minimum wildlife portion of a RMS plan. In conservation planning, the alternative that maximizes habitat quality should be considered.

Owner/Operator:	State & Field Office:
Parish (T/R/Sec.)	Ecological Site(s) (ES) [list mapped ES (using official County/Parish Soil Survey (digital copy) or Web Soil Survey): Note: some states may not have ESDs, if so, list soils for this site(s).]
WHEG completed by:	
Farm Number: Tract Number: Field(s):	Acres (Total):
	Evaluation Date(s):

**User Notes:**  
**Complete all information above to identify the site, participant and planner**

(1) Management Variable	Value Range	Existing Condition Value	Recommended Conservation Practice(s)	Planned Value
a) Mowed/grazed/burned after July 15 and 8-12" winter height	10			
b) Mowed/grazed/burned before July 15 and 8-12" winter height	7			
c) Mowed/grazed/burned before July 15 and/or less than 8-12" winter height	2			

**Field Notes:**

(2) Composition Variable	Value Range	Existing Condition Value	Recommended Conservation Practice(s)	Planned Value
a) Many species of several types (forbs, grasses, legumes)	10			
b) 3-6 species; predominately grasses or legumes	7			
c) 2-3 species of grasses	4			
d) Monotype stands of grasses	1			

**Field Notes:**

(3) Distance To Cover Variable	Value Range	Existing Condition Value	Recommended Conservation Practice(s)	Planned Value
a) >75% of herbaceous area within 600' of cover	10			
b) 25-75% of herbaceous area within 600' of cover	5			
c) <25% of herbaceous area within 600' of cover	2			

**User Notes:**  
**Cover is defined as either forestland or native grass/forbs at least 30 feet wide and 100 feet long within the participant's control. If the pasture is dominated by native grasses and forbs, then the producer will receive a score of 10.**

**Native grasses include but are not limited to; little bluestem, big bluestem, Indiangrass, eastern gamagrass, switchgrass, brownseed, seashore and FL paspalums, marshhay cordgrass, etc. Native forbs include but are not limited to; Illinois bundleflower, black-eyed Susan, clasping coneflower, Texas coneflower, rattlesnake master, beebalm, blazing star, partridge pea, ashy sunflower, compass plant, rosinweed, etc.**

**Bermuda grass, bahia grass and carpet grass are considered non-native grasses**

<b>(4) Disturbance During Nesting Period Variable</b>	<b>Value Range</b>	<b>Existing Condition Value</b>	<b>Recommended Conservation Practice(s)</b>	<b>Planned Value</b>
a) Mowing/pres. burning not conducted April 15-July 15 <u>and</u> August 15-December 31. Only one disturbance event per year.	10			
b) Mowing/pres. burning not conducted April 15-July 15 <u>and</u> August 15-December 31	7			
c) Mowing/pres. burning not conducted April 15-July 15	5			
d) Mowing/burning April 15-July 15	0			
<b>Field Notes:</b>				
<b>(5) Prescribed Grazing Variable</b>	<b>Value Range</b>	<b>Existing Condition Value</b>	<b>Recommended Conservation Practice(s)</b>	<b>Planned Value</b>
a) Grazing period 5 days or less with rest periods of 21-35 days or longer. Rest periods are a minimum of 80% of the year.	10			
b) Grazing periods are 10 days or less and rest periods are 21 – 35 days or longer. Rest periods are a minimum of 50% of the year.	7			
c) Grazing periods of 10 -30 days and rest periods are 30 – 40 days or longer. Rest periods are a minimum of 30% of the year.	5			
d) Uncontrolled and/or season-long livestock access	0			
<b>User Notes:</b> Participants will be required to have a prescribed grazing plan not just a prescribed grazing narrative in the contract.				
<b>Existing Conditions score = Sum of Existing Condition Values divided by 50)</b>				
<b>Planned Conditions score = Sum of Planned Values divided by 50</b>				<b>Planned WHEG Score</b>

