

Implications/Recommendations for NRCS Program Managers

If development of wildlife habitat is a goal for program managers, the following recommendations should be considered. They are made by the AWCC staff after reviewing the scientific evidence and observations of numerous AWCC projects.

- **Offer higher incentives for landowners willing to make wider buffers.**
While it is important to birds, butterflies, and other grassland-dependent species to have grasslands of any size and shape, research shows larger tracts are most helpful in slowing the decline of grassland species.
- **Offer higher incentives for buffers that connect large habitat blocks.**
Field borders, contour buffers, or riparian buffers that connect larger tracts of grasslands to one another have been shown to be more valuable to wildlife than those with no connection.
- **Offer more incentives for landowners willing to actively manage grasslands for wildlife.**
Research shows wildlife values decline in grasslands as they mature, especially for birds that must travel along the ground through heavy grasses. Also, many birds of concern rely on the insects that are supported by new growth of plants from the seedbank in the soil. Benefits to wildlife from rotational disturbance, including fire and disking, are proven for early successional species, but landowners are not sufficiently rewarded for this management in most existing conservation programs.
- **Offer higher incentives for new habitat that enhances existing surrounding habitat.**
In light of research showing surrounding landscapes may be more important to wildlife than management practices on any particular field, perhaps more emphasis should be placed on selection of land areas that enhance and multiply wildlife benefits on the landscape.
- **Place more emphasis on using existing seedbanks rather than seeding new grasses.**
While this will vary by location, soil, water, and wildlife goals, research is showing that quite often it is not necessary to make new plantings to establish early successional habitat. Techniques that allow the land to go fallow and encourage seedbank plants to emerge can save on establishment costs.
- **Offer more incentives and training to encourage enhanced wetlands to offer fish habitat.**
In the Pacific Northwest, where salmon and other native fish are threatened, winter floodwaters provide protection. This protection disappears when floodwaters recede, however, and fish are left stranded in wetlands that dry up in spring. Enhanced wetlands can keep waters higher longer in spring and techniques are available to make sure these fish can get back to the rivers that were flooded.

