

**Landowner:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tract:** \_\_\_\_\_

### CRP CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is responsible for administering the rules of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). All questions related to CRP contract requirements, payment, or modifications should be directed to the FSA office where your contract originated.

CRP policy requires participants to do some type of “disturbance” to certain CRP practices during specific years of the contract. Required Management Practices are designed to enhance the cover value. This job sheet describes how to implement Prescribed Burning as a required management activity.

Once established, grassland fields need to be managed so that the grasses do not crowd out the forbs and/or legumes over time. In the absence of disturbance, the composition of grassland communities will change over several years through normal plant succession. The vegetative structure changes as annual forbs and legumes are replaced by perennial forbs, grasses, and eventually, woody plants. Changes also occur structurally as litter accumulates and vegetation density increases. These changes lead to a decline in diversity and reduced wildlife benefits.

The purpose of required contract management activities is to enhance the wildlife habitat value of the enrolled acres by encouraging a diverse forb/legume community. Forbs and legumes in grasslands are beneficial to birds, insects such as butterflies, along with other wildlife. Prescribed burning is an effective management tool to balance the forbs and grasses in a native planting.

### PRIMARY NESTING SEASON

CRP rules do not allow disturbance of cover during the primary nesting season recorded in the CRP contract. This rule prevents injury to nesting and fledgling birds. The dates have varied over time, but the current primary nesting season for new as well as existing CRP contracts is May 15 through August 1. CRP participants are also required to control invasive and weed plant species before they produce viable seed. Spot clipping or spot spraying may be done during the primary nesting season with prior approval from the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committee.



### PRESCRIBED BURNING

Fire, when properly applied, can improve grassland habitats by:

- Creating open ground for wildlife movement by reducing excess plant litter and dense sod formation.
- Allowing sunlight to reach the soil surface, encouraging the germination and growth of forbs and legumes.
- Suppressing woody plants and other non-native plant species.

Prescribed burning may reduce naturally occurring wildfire hazards while enhancing the aesthetic appearance of natural landscapes.

The structural diversity that results from this type of management is especially helpful for maintaining brood-rearing habitat for bobwhite quail, wild turkey, ring-necked pheasant, and other early successional grassland wildlife species. Prescribed burning also improves habitat for a variety of grassland songbirds, including bobolinks and savannah sparrows. Many of these grassland songbird species have experienced population declines over the last several decades. The habitat quality is enhanced because fire inhibits woody growth, promotes favored seed producing plants, reduces plant residue, increases bare ground, and increases insect abundance. The insects associated with forb communities provide critical nutrients, including protein, and essential amino acids for growing nestlings and chicks.



## SPECIFICATIONS

The following are specifications for prescribed burning on CRP acreage.

- The landowner is responsible for adhering to the burn plan, as well as all applicable local, state and federal laws. Landowners are responsible for confining prescribed burns to their lands and are liable for damages and costs to others should the fire escape from the designated area. Landowners are also responsible for any damages caused by smoke blowing into neighboring properties, across roads or airport runways.
- A written prescribed burn plan must be completed and submitted to NRCS for review before any fires are ignited. The burn plan will identify suitable weather conditions, needed personnel and equipment, adjacent and in-field hazards, and the safest firing method, in addition to the time of year to conduct the burn for the best management results. Prescribed Burning plans will follow the NRCS Prescribed Burning Practice Standard (338) found in the Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide.
- Prescribed burning will not be performed during the primary nesting period for grassland bird species identified in the CRP contract.
- Prescribed burns shall not be planned in the following areas:
  1. Areas where the soil surface contains high levels of organic matter (muck/peat).
  2. Areas where burning will cause erosion to exceed tolerable limits.
  3. Areas planted to trees.
  4. Areas planted to trees and shrubs.
  5. Sites that include smooth brome grass in the mix are not eligible for Prescribed Burning Required Management.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Consider the following primary components when planning for a prescribed burn:

1. Evaluate the proposed site to determine what the intended objective of the burn is, and what conditions are needed to meet the intended objective. See Table 1.
2. Prepare a comprehensive burn plan describing all the necessary elements to have a safe and effective burn.
3. Select trained and qualified persons to write the burn plan and conduct the prescribed burn.
  - Fall and late winter burns may decrease Big Bluestem, Indian Grass, and Switch Grass and favor forbs and legumes.
  - Prescribed burning should not be planned for in places where gully formation is a potential problem.
  - Use discretion if soil conditions are extremely dry or drought conditions are predicted because burning under these conditions may damage or destroy perennial prairie plant crowns. Follow all State and Local laws and obtain necessary permits.
  - Always control noxious weeds by spot spraying or mowing. This will reduce the potential for unintentional establishment of these species.
  - It is highly recommended, but is not required, that prescribed burning be delayed until after August 15, reducing the chance of harming fledgling birds and other young wildlife.

**Table 1  
Burn Objective and Relationship to  
Burning Time Frame**

Burn Objective	Timing of Burn
Promote grasses in cool season stands	August 2-August 10 or October 1-November 15 or March 1-April 14
Promote forbs and legumes in cool season stands	April 15-May 14 or August 20-September 30
Promote early forbs in warm season stands	August 2-August 10 or November 1-November 30 or March 1-April 15
Promote grasses and late forbs in warm season stands	April 15-May 14 or August 20-September 30

### Guidelines for Prescribed Burns on CRP:

1. Identify the need for prescribed burning.
2. Determine the timing of the burn based on burn objective.
3. Follow the specifications outlined in this job sheet.

