

Options for Establishing Pollinator Habitat in Existing Conservation Reserve Program Stands of Grass

Criteria The following methods are acceptable for inter-seeding herbaceous plants into existing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to establish pollinator habitat. Optimal methods for establishing pollinator habitat will include multiple applications of herbicide during the growing season and allowing a fallow period over one growing season.

Drilling following a prescribed burn The area proposed for inter-seeding will be burned no later than March 31, followed by one or more applications of a non-selective herbicide over one growing season. Drilling of the pollinator mix will be completed the following seeding period (December 1 – May 15). Burning is not approved for soils in Wind Erosion Groups (WEG) greater than 86, unless specifically approved by the state resource conservationist. One additional burning or mowing activity may be needed to remove/reduce any standing residue just prior to seeding.

Mechanical tillage followed by drilling The area proposed for inter-seeding would receive mechanical tillage sufficient to prepare the seedbed to suppress the existing vegetation followed by one or more non-selective herbicide applications over one growing season. The amount of tillage and degree of disturbance will depend on the planned seeding method. Tillage should be used with caution in any known areas of noxious weeds or erodible soils. Drilling of the pollinator mix will be completed the following seeding period (December 1 – May 15). One additional tillage activity may be needed to reduce any standing residue just prior to seeding.

Mowing followed by drilling The existing cover is mowed to reduce existing vegetation. Mowing height should be no more than 6 inches average throughout the area followed by one or more herbicide applications over one growing season. Drilling of the pollinator mix will be completed the following seeding period (December 1 – May 15). One additional mowing activity may be needed to reduce any standing residue just prior to seeding.

No-till seeding into existing cover The area proposed for inter-seeding is seeded by drilling directly into existing cover with no seedbed preparation. Seeding would be completed during the seeding period (December 1 – May 15) after one or more herbicide applications over one growing season. This is the least preferred method. Seeding should be completed with a no-till drill. Management actions that include burning or mowing may be required after the seeding.

The use of herbicides in any of the above criteria will reduce grass competition where pollinator habitat is planned. Read and follow all label recommendations for herbicide application.

NOTE: For all seeding operations, the drill must be properly equipped to allow proper seed placement into existing cover or prepared seedbed.

Trees and Shrubs Trees and shrubs may be added to a pollinator mix for a variety of reasons. Trees and shrubs are considered early flowering and may provide nesting habitat and protection for various pollinators. Follow guidance in Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) and Tree and Shrub Establishment (612) for tree and shrub establishment.

Considerations

- Herbicide application, after removal of residue by fire, disking, or mowing, will establish the most effective pollinator habitat in existing stands of CRP.
- Seed forbs and legumes early in the seeding period, starting in December.
- Establish pollinator habitat in areas that have not had noxious weed concerns. Fields or plots with known/observed presence of noxious weeds (Field bindweed, Serecia lespedeza, Johnson grass, etc.) must be treated with approved methods and noxious weeds controlled prior to forb/legume seeding. Spot spraying may be necessary to control noxious weeds during and after establishment. Chemical weed control will be difficult in these areas.
- For fields with erosive/steep slopes, pollinator plots should be seeded across slope to reduce the potential for erosion.
- Pollinator plots will be no less than 0.5 acres. Multiple plots should be considered and are best if interspersed throughout the field. Square or block plantings are preferred. If strips are used, they will be a minimum of 20 feet wide.
- Forb and legume mixes of 20 or more species will provide the greatest diversity for pollinators.

Operation and Maintenance

Operation and maintenance of established pollinator plots will be critical to ensure success and persistence of pollinator habitat.

Periodic disturbance (disking, mowing, or burning - as allowed) should be completed frequently enough to produce recurrent and abundant flowering. Prior to completion of any maintenance/disturbance activity participant must consult with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Technical Service Provider (TSP).

It is recommended plots not be disturbed in their entirety. This will reduce adverse impacts on pollinators and their habitat (disturbances should be limited to no more than one-third of the plot or plots). Varying disturbance type and timing should be considered within each pollinator plot and from year to year. Prescribed burning of entire contract acreages (including pollinator plots) will likely be more detrimental than the other management options.