



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

**E511B (With Montana Supplement)**

CONSERVATION  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROGRAM

**Forage harvest management that helps maintain wildlife habitat cover, shelter or continuity**

**Conservation Practice 511: FORAGE HARVEST MANAGEMENT**

**APPLICABLE LAND USE:** Crop (Annual & Mixed); Crop (Perennial); Pasture, Range

**RESOURCE CONCERN ADDRESSED:** Animals

**ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN:** 1 year

**Enhancement Description**

The timely cutting and removal of forages from the field as hay, green chop, or ensilage in such a way, and in time frames, to optimize both forage yield/quality and wildlife cover and shelter and/or continuity between otherwise disconnected habitats.

**Criteria**

- Specify the wildlife species of concern on the state-approved NRCS Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG). The species of concern must be one that is present for at least part of their life cycle in the geographical/physiographic region.
- The state's WHEG will be completed by a NRCS biologist or partner wildlife biologist. Cover and shelter or continuity habitat requirements for the wildlife species of concern must be specified on the WHEG. The total WHEG score after installation of this practice must be 0.60 or greater.
- Provide suitable habitat for desired wildlife species. This may require changes to harvest schedules, cover patterns, and minimal plant heights while managing the desired forage stand, plant community, and stand life.

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- Time harvest to benefit the desired wildlife species by following state guidelines. Whenever possible, avoid harvest during the primary nesting season, harvest during daylight hours, and harvest in patterns (e.g. - beginning on one end of the field and working back and forth across the field or beginning in the center of the field and working outward).
- Cut forage at a height that will promote the vigor while leaving minimal stubble heights required by the desired wildlife species and the Cooperative Extension Service recommendations to avoid winterkill in cold climates.
- Harvest forage without compromising plant vigor and stand longevity and at the stage of maturity that provides the desired quality and quantity to the degree possible while still providing suitable habitat for the desired wildlife species.
- Harvest silage/haylage within the optimum moisture range for the type of storage utilized. Follow Cooperative Extension Service recommendations for moisture content. For optimal dry hay quality, rake at 30% to 40% moisture and ted or invert swaths when moisture is above 40%. Bale field cured hay at 15% to 20% moisture.
- **MT: Refer to Montana Natural Heritage Species of Concern List.**
- **MT: Use Biology Technical Note MT-19 (Rev. 4) *Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guides for Montana* for species of concern.**
- **Refer to MT CPS 511 standard, specification and jobsheet for stubble heights.**

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## Documentation and Implementation Requirements

Participant will:

- Prior to implementation, ensure forage harvesting tool/machinery is capable of cutting the forage at the height required to provide suitable habitat for the desired wildlife species without compromising plant vigor and stand longevity.
- Prior to implementation, review the map delineating the fields selected for improving wildlife cover and shelter and enrolled in the enhancement.
- Prior to implementation, develop a plan to harvest forage in a manner that protects stand longevity and also maintains or improves wildlife habitat. Plan must include specifications detailing the wildlife protection measures, such as selecting time periods to avoid forage harvest to protect wildlife and ensuring that suitable wildlife habitat exists during critical nesting periods. Refer to NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Forage Harvest Management (Code 511).
- Prior to implementation, provide the forage harvest plan to NRCS for review to confirm it meets the criteria of the enhancement.
- During implementation, take photographs of forage cutting heights with fields and date of harvest identified.
- During implementation, notify NRCS of any planned changes to verify they meet the enhancement criteria.
- During implementation, keep the following documentation for each field:

Field	Forage species selected for harvest	Harvest height (inches)	Harvest Date



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- After implementation, make documentation and photographs of forage cutting heights available for review to NRCS to verify implementation of the enhancement.

NRCS will:

- As needed, provide technical assistance to meet the criteria of the enhancement.
- Prior to implementation, provide and explain NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Forage and Biomass Planting (Code 512) as it relates to implementing this enhancement.
- Prior to implementation, an NRCS biologist or partner wildlife biologist will complete the state-approved NRCS WHEG. Specific species targeted will be notated on the WHEG, and total score after implementation must equal 0.60 or greater.

<b>Wildlife Species of Concern</b>	
<b>Cover &amp; Shelter Requirements</b>	
<b>Planned WHEG Score after implementation</b>	

- Prior to implementation, verify a map has been developed delineating the hayfields that will have the enhancement implemented.
- Prior to implementation, NRCS will provide technical assistance, as needed to:
  - Develop a plan to harvest forage in a manner that protects stand longevity, while also maintaining or improving wildlife habitat. Plan must meet requirements of NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Forage Harvest Management (Code 511).



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- Develop specifications detailing the wildlife protection measures, such as selecting time periods to avoid forage harvest to protect wildlife and ensuring that suitable wildlife habitat exists during critical nesting periods.
- During implementation, evaluate any planned changes to verify they meet the enhancement criteria.
- After implementation, verify the planned forage harvest was completed to specifications developed for the fields delineated.
- After implementation, review documentation and photographs of forage cutting heights to verify implementation of the enhancement.
- If changes were made after implementation, complete the state's approved NRCS Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG).

<b>Wildlife Species of Concern</b>	
<b>Cover &amp; Shelter Requirements</b>	
<b>WHEG Score after Implementation</b>	

**NRCS Documentation Review:**

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

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Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contract Number \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Applied \_\_\_\_\_ Fiscal Year Completed \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature

Date



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