



# MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

## Michigan CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAMS (CRP, CREP, CCRP)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

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Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

### WHAT IS MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT OF CRP?

Mid-Contract Management of CRP are activities that must be performed on certain practices to ensure the original plant diversity, wildlife benefits, and protection of the soil and water resources are present for the life of the contract.

For CRP practices with grasses, legumes, & wildflowers, research has shown that typically 5-6 years after establishment the site becomes dominated by a thick growth of the grasses. To ensure wildlife habitat benefits in these sites, management is required to encourage legumes and wildflowers, and to ensure the grass is not too thick to limit small wildlife species from traveling through the cover to meet their needs.

### ELIGIBILITY

All new CRP General Signup, Continuous CRP, and CREP contracts are required to have Management activities included in the Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO) unless otherwise noted. Cost-share is available to assist with the implementation of these requirements. These activities are a component of CRP contract requirements, and failure to perform them when needed will result in a contract violation.

Prior-approved CRP contracts may voluntarily request management activities be added in their CPO and these activities will also be eligible for cost-share.

### CRP POLICY

Management activities will be implemented according to the following CRP Policy.

In the first or second year of re-enrolled acres and again in year 6 or 7, or five years after the contract begins for ten year contracts and after 7 years for 15 year contracts, the participant will apply the appropriate disturbance activity. Exceptions to this need to be approved by the local FSA office.

Mid-Contract Management will only be allowed on CRP acres outside the designated dates to protect ground-nesting wildlife. Designated dates are from May 1<sup>st</sup> to Aug 1<sup>st</sup>. If management activities are needed within these dates, the FSA County Committee must approve the management activity prior to the activity occurring. The size of the area to be disturbed at one time depends on the size of each field. For fields less than 10 acres in size, the whole field may be treated in one year. For fields 10 to 40 acres in size, one half of the field may be treated one year and the other half the next year. For fields greater than 40 acres, one third of the field will be treated each year for three years.

Following are Management activity options available to Michigan CRP participants:

### PREScribed BURNING

Depending on the needs of the site, Prescribed Burning can be used to remove dead plant material, stimulate grasses, annuals, legumes, and/or wildflowers, and provide bare ground to help small animals find seeds and provide dusting sites.

All Prescribed Burning on CRP must be performed in accordance with an approved Prescribed Burning Plan,

([http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/Landowners\\_Guide/Habitat\\_Mgmt/Grassland/Prescribed\\_Burning.htm](http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/Landowners_Guide/Habitat_Mgmt/Grassland/Prescribed_Burning.htm)) all local and state laws and regulations, and the Prescribed Burning Standard (338) in the FOTG. All necessary permits must be obtained from the local fire authority by the landowner. See the Conservation Information Sheet "Prescribed Burning" for further information.

To facilitate future prescribed burning, consider establishing control lines around the perimeter of the field to wildlife friendly cool-season grasses and legumes such as timothy, orchard grass, and clovers; or Food Plots on non-erosive sites (cost-

share is not authorized for food plots for General CRP, and are not eligible on Continuous CRP or CREP acres).

NOTE: Mowing is not approved nor effective as Mid-Contract Management.

## DISKING

Disking sets back thick grass growth to allow annuals, wildflowers, and legumes to flourish, as well as providing bare ground to help small animals find seeds and provide dusting sites. Disking on CRP will consist of multiple passes approximately 4"-6" deep. All disking must be performed on the contour, and leave at least 30% of the plant residue on the surface of the soil. The goal is to have 50% of the disturbed area bare soil after disking. For fields over 10 acres, alternate strips of disked and undisked areas which are 60 to 100 feet wide.

## GRASS-SPECIFIC HERBICIDES

Grass-Specific Herbicides will suppress grass growth, but not affect legumes and wildflowers. Because of their selective properties, grass-specific herbicides can be used at low rates on grass stands that have become too thick, stressing the grass and allowing legumes and wildflowers to rebound. Contact your local Michigan State University Extension Agent for specific herbicide recommendations. **Apply all herbicides according to the label.**

## INTERSEEDING WILDFLOWERS

CRP fields consisting of Native Grasses may need Native Wildflowers introduced or reseeded to ensure wildlife benefits. Prescribed Burning, Light Disking, or Grass-Specific Herbicide applications must precede Interseeding of Wildflowers to ensure adequate seed to soil contact. Seed ½ pound per acre of Wildflowers species which are Native to Michigan. Seed may be uniformly broadcast into the CRP field and then cultipacked or drilled with a range land no-till drill.

## INTERSEEDING LEGUMES

CRP fields consisting of Non-Native Grasses may need Legumes introduced or reseeded to ensure wildlife benefits. Prescribed Burning, Light Disking, or Grass-Specific Herbicide applications must precede Interseeding Legumes to ensure adequate seed to soil contact. Seed 3 pounds per acre of a combination from the chart below. Seed may be broadcast into a

firm seedbed and cultipacked or drilled into existing Non-Native Grass plantings.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Any damage to the CRP cover as a result of Mid-Contract Management or any other activity will be repaired at the landowner's expense.

## CONSIDERATIONS

Consider using a variety of Management options to provide a wide range of habitat values.

Consider establishing wildflowers or non-native legumes that provide honey bee forage. Table 1 is a list of approved honey bee favored wildflowers for establishment and Table 2 is a list of native and non-native legumes suitable for honey bee forage.

To be eligible for the honey bee initiative the cover must be currently established to CP1, CP2, CP4D, CP10, CP25 and CP38E conservation cover practices. It is preferred that honey bee habitat be established in a single contiguous block with one block per CRP field established to an eligible conservation cover practice. The minimum size for a block must be one acre in size.

- Additional specifications for the honey bee initiative:
- A minimum of 3 and up to 8 species of honey bee preferred flowering plants
- At least 1 species of the mix should begin bloom during bloom periods, April 15-June 15, June 16-July 31 and August 1-October 31

CRP Mid-Contract Management activities are expected to result in an abundance of Early Successional Plants. These are typically annual plants, and although they may appear to compete with the planted vegetation, perennial grasses will eventually increase while the annuals will decrease in abundance in a short time without the need for additional maintenance activities.

If your CRP acres historically had issues with troublesome weeds such as spotted knapweed, thistles, cocklebur, etc. consider using prescribed burning or grass-specific herbicides instead of disking to minimize soil disturbance.

Table 1. Approved Species List for Plantings Under CRP Honey Bee Initiative

Common Name	Species Name	Native Status	Wetland Status
Smooth Penstemon	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	native	FAC/UPL
Large Flowered Penstemon	<i>Penstemon grandiflorus</i>	native	UPL
American Vetch	<i>Vicia Americana 1/</i>	native	FACU
Purple Giant Hyssop	<i>Agastache scrophulariaefolia</i>	native	FAC
Common Milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca 2/</i>	native	UPL
Swamp Milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnate 2/</i>	native	OBL
Butterfly Milkweed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa 2/</i>	native	UPL
Canada Milkvetch	<i>Astragalus canadensis</i>	native	FAC/UPL
Beebalm	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Native	FACU
Spotted Bee Balm	<i>Monarda punctata</i>	native	UPL
Slender Mountain Mint	<i>Pycnanthemum tenuifolium</i>	native	FAC
Virginia Mountain Mint	<i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i>	native	FAC
Sneezeweed	<i>Helenium autumnale</i>	native	OBL
Sawtooth Sunflower	<i>Helianthus grosseserratus</i>	native	FAC
Showy Sunflower	<i>Helianthus pauciflorus</i>	native	UPL
Late Goldenrod	<i>Solidago gigantea</i>	native	FAC/OBL
Stiff Goldenrod	<i>Solidago rigida</i>	native	FAC/UPL
Wingstem	<i>Verbesina alternifolia</i>	native	OBL

1/ Bloom time of the *Trifoliums* and the *Vicia* may extend into the early part of mid-season.

2/ *Asclepias* species (milkweeds) have the added benefits of supporting habitat for Monarch butterflies and using milkweeds should be encouraged in appropriate plantings. However, many species of milkweed are toxic to livestock (sheep, cattle, and occasionally horses). Avoid planting *Asclepias* species on range and pasture sites that will be grazed or hayed. See <http://www.ars.usda.gov/services/docs.htm?docid=9955>.

Note: NRCS recognizes that sweetclover (*Melilotus officinalis*) and birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) are important species for honey bee forage. However, because of concerns about invasiveness for both species and potential poisoning of livestock and wildlife (coumarin poisoning) with improper management of sweetclover, NRCS limits the recommendation of these species in its conservation programs. State specialists have the option of adding these species to planting recommendations, if desired.

Table 2 Approved List of Native and Non-native Legumes

Common Name	Species Name	Native Status
Alsike Clover	<i>Trifolium hybridum</i>	introduced
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pretense</i>	introduced
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i> 1/	introduced
Alfalfa	<i>Medicago sativa</i>	introduced
Yellow Alfalfa	<i>Medicago sativa ssp. falcata</i>	introduced
Canola	<i>Brassica napus</i> , <i>Brassica campestris</i> , or <i>Brassica rapa</i>	introduced
Partridge Pea	<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>	native
Buckwheat	<i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i>	introduced
Annual Sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	native
Lacy Phacelia	<i>Phacelia tanacetifolia</i>	nonnative to Northern Great Plains
Mustard, Tame	<i>Sinapis alba</i> or <i>Brassica juncea</i>	introduced
Berseem Clover	<i>Trifolium alexandrinum</i>	introduced

**TIMING (DATES) of Michigan CRP Required Management**

Management Activity	Native	Non-Native	Desired Outcome
<b>Prescribed Burning</b>	Sept. – Oct.	October	Suppressed Grass = more forbs + open ground
<b>Prescribed Burning</b>	March - April	March	Increased Grass + open ground
<b>Light Disking</b>	Sept. – Oct.	October	Suppressed Grass = more forbs + open ground
<b>Grass-Specific Herbicide</b>	When grasses are actively growing		Suppressed Grass = increased forbs
<b>Interseed Wildflowers</b>	1/		Increased diversity of wildflowers
<b>Interseed Legumes</b>		1/	Increased diversity of forbs/legumes

1/ = see the 327 CONSERVATION COVER and 512 PASTURE & HAYLAND PLANTING standards in the FOTG for seeding dates

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