



United States Department of Agriculture

CRP Management Activity

Indiana Natural Resources Conservation Service – July 2020 (ver. 1.0)

Prescribed Burning Job Sheet



Management Activities in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) ensure plant diversity and wildlife benefits are enhanced throughout the contract period while maintaining soil and water resources. CRP participants are required to perform a management practice during the life of the contract. This job sheet describes Prescribed Burning Management Activity option.

Normally, Management Activities are conducted between the 4th and 6th year of the contract. However, on land with existing cover, disturbance activities can begin as soon as technically feasible. All required management practices must be completed by the end

of year 6 of a 10-year contract and by the end of year 9 of a 15-year contract. No required Management Activities can occur during the last 3 years of a CRP contract, but there are options for additional voluntary management activities in this period.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

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

The purpose of disturbance activities is to enhance the wildlife habitat value of the managed acres by increasing the amount of open ground networks under the grass canopy, and by encouraging a diverse forb/legume community. Forbs (any broadleaf plant) and legumes in grasslands are beneficial to birds, insects such as butterflies, and other wildlife. Prescribed Burning is an effective management tool that can be utilized where vegetation has become too thick to benefit the target species.

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

- Creating open ground for wildlife movement by reducing excess plant litter,
- Allowing sunlight to reach the soil surface, encouraging the germination and growth of forbs and legumes,
- Suppressing woody plants, and
- Retarding the growth of nonnative plants.

In addition, Prescribed Burning removes naturally occurring wildfire hazards, enhances the aesthetic appearance of natural landscapes, and keeps maintenance costs low.

Prescribed burning is especially helpful for maintaining brood-rearing habitat for northern bobwhite, wild turkey, ring-necked pheasant, and other early successional grassland wildlife species. The insects associated with annual weed communities provide critical nutrients, including protein, and essential amino acids for growing nestlings and chicks. Reduced plant residue, along with open ground networks, are also critical for young chick mobility in grassland areas. The structural diversity that results from Prescribed Burning also improves habitat for a variety of grassland songbirds including Dickcissels, Bobolinks and Savannah sparrows. Many of these species have experienced population declines over the last several decades. Prescribed Burning enhances habitat quality because it inhibits woody growth, promotes favored seed producing plants, reduces plant residue, increases open ground networks, and increases insect abundance.

SPECIFICATIONS

The following are specifications for Prescribed Burning on CRP acreage. Note that this practice can be used in conjunction with the Management Activity technique *Inter-seeding*.

- **The landowner is responsible for securing a written burn plan developed by a qualified individual.**
- **A written prescribed burn plan must be completed before any fires are started.** 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.
- **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.
- Only NRCS employees with appropriate training may discuss prescribed fire or write a conservation plan containing prescribed fire as a management alternative. NRCS employees are not authorized to write burn plans or to assist with igniting or spreading of fire for private landowners.
- The following table shows the maximum amount of area that can be disturbed by Management Activities in a given number of years. However, to maximize wildlife benefits, participants may opt to perform Management Activities on one-third (1/3) of the area each of three (3) years if desired.

	MAXIMUM AREA TO BE DISTURBED	
	CP33	All other practices ¹
5 acres or more	½ of the area each of 2 years	½ of the area each of 2 years
Less than 5 acres		total area in 1 year

¹CP Practices requiring management activities are identified by the State Technical Committee. See list for year of CRP enrollment, or CRP contract for information on those practices requiring management.

- Environmentally sensitive areas will be marked on the plan map to ensure Management Activities are avoided on these areas.
- Erosion will not exceed tolerable limits.

IN- CRP Management Activity- Prescribed Fire

- Rotate fields through a three-year burning cycle.
- Prescribed burning will be avoided on environmentally sensitive areas including:
 1. Concentrated flow areas
 2. Critical areas
 3. Acreage within the first 20 feet of a practice that borders a water resource to avoid water quality resource concerns
 4. Other areas where gully erosion is likely
- The Indiana NRCS Indiana (IN) Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Standard (647) *Early Successional Habitat Development/Management* will be used for this practice.
- Prescribed Burning will not be performed from March 1 through July 15 for contracts prior to 2007, and from April 1 through August 1 for contracts starting in 2008, to protect the primary nesting period for grassland bird species. It is also recommended, but is not required, to delay burning until after August 15 to reduce the chance of harming fledgling birds and other young wildlife.

NOTE: Prescribed burns will not be conducted from April 15 to September 15 in burn areas containing potential bat roost trees/snags >3-inch dbh. Contact your local FSA Office for more guidance.

- Grassland fields must be established for a minimum of three (3) years before initiating burning, and strips will not be burned more than once in a two-year period.
- Firebreaks will be constructed according to the specifications stated in the burn plan. See NRCS IN FOTG Standard 394 *Firebreak* for additional guidance.
- When Prescribed Burning is used as site preparation for inter-seeding forbs, the burn will result in a seedbed that consists of 40-70% open soil.
- Designated filter/buffer strips will be left adjacent to all water bodies to maintain water quality. See NRCS IN FOTG Standards 393 - *Filter Strip*, 327 - *Conservation Cover*, or other appropriate standards for additional guidance.
- Areas planted to trees will not be burned.
- Areas planted to shrubs should normally not be burned. However, under some circumstances, shrubs can be stunted by fire to produce a beneficial low-growing structure. Consult a qualified professional for guidance.
- Chemically treat areas in advance of disturbance where noxious weeds, such as Canada thistle and Johnsongrass, or other invasive species, such as Reed Canarygrass, exist. This will reduce the potential for unintentional establishment of these species.
- The presence of annual weeds (such as foxtail, common ragweed, and perennial forbs) is an objective since these plants are important sources of food for wildlife, especially bobwhite quail.

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. Consult a qualified professional for further guidance
 3. Select trained and qualified persons to write the burn plan and conduct the prescribed burn

IN- CRP Management Activity- Prescribed Fire

- Fall and late winter burns decrease Big Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Switchgrass but favor forbs and legumes.
- Use discretion if soil conditions are dry or drought conditions are predicted as burning under these conditions may damage or destroy prairie plant crowns and plants.
- Prescribed Burning should be planned for the least erosive parts of fields and not in places where gully formation is a problem.

CAUTION: If soil erosion is a concern, landowners should rule out a fall or early spring burn since the burn will remove plant vegetation and make the site more susceptible to erosion from rainfall. Consider broadcasting one-half (½) bushel of winter wheat per acre to reduce erosion potential; or consider planting wheat at a rate of one (1) bushel per acre to add food and habitat structure, plus wheat may suppress grass growth and increase forbs resulting in longer-term wildlife benefits.

- After completion of the prescribed burning, consider planting wheat at a rate of one (1) bushel per acre. In addition to adding food and habitat structure, wheat may suppress grass growth and increase forbs resulting in longer-term wildlife benefits
- Whenever practical, warm season grass fields should be divided into three (3) to five (5) sections, or units, so that each unit can be managed individually. Under these conditions, it would be ideal to burn 33% to 20% of your total grasslands in any given year. By having your warm season grass fields in various stages of development, you will increase plant diversity, which is beneficial to many wildlife species.

Table 1: Burn Objective and Relationship to Burning Time Frame

Burn Objective	Time of Burn	Comments
To prepare tall fescue or other cool season grasses for fall herbicide termination	August/September	Time burn to allow fescue to re-grow six (6) inches prior to herbicide application
To prepare tall fescue or other cool season grasses for spring termination	September/October February/March	Time burn to reduce the amount of residual re-growth prior to tillage
To increase the forb component in established native grasses	Late winter through early spring	Burn prior to green-up
To revitalize a wildflower planting	August through October	Burn prior to green-up