Impact Grazing 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 the Impact Grazing Management Activity option. Impact grazing as a Management Activity is limited to the following CRP practices: CP1, CP2, and CP10.

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 Activity can occur during the last 3 years of a CRP contract, but there are options for additional voluntary management activities in this period.

IMPACT GRAZING

Once established, grassland fields need to be managed so that 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 bare ground declines, litter accumulates, and vegetation density increases. These changes lead to a decline in wildlife benefits.

The purpose of Management Activities is to enhance the wildlife habitat value of the enrolled acres by increasing the amount of open soil 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. Impact grazing is an effective management tool that can be utilized where vegetation has become too thick to benefit the target species.

Animal impact is a powerful tool. Through hoof action, pawing, defecating, urinating, grazing/browsing, and salivating, grazing animals trample plants, break up soil surfaces, incorporate seed into the soil, and create and improve wildlife habitat and control and improve vegetation. Animal impact can also improve mineral cycling, water infiltration, and soil health.
In human-controlled grazing systems, the detrimental or beneficial impacts of grazing are largely determined by the management used. The negative impacts of livestock grazing are often the result of misuse. The benefits of domestic livestock grazing rarely come by accident, and are likely the result of careful program design, regular monitoring, and flexibility in modifying treatments. The ecological impacts of grazing depend on the type of ecosystem, plant community, and conditions of a particular site.

Grazing is especially helpful for maintaining brood-rearing habitat for bobwhite quail, 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 bare ground, are also critical for young chick mobility in grassland areas. The structural diversity that results from grazing 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. Grazing enhances habitat quality because it inhibits woody growth, promotes favored seed producing plants, reduces plant residue, increases open ground, and increases insect abundance.

Grazing can also be used to promote seed to soil contact and improved stands in newly seeded legumes and forbs.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

The following are specifications for Impact Grazing on CRP acreage:

- Impact Grazing will follow the Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647) Standard in the Indiana (IN) NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). Also refer to the Indiana Standard (528) Prescribed Grazing to implement this practice.

- Livestock will be managed with preferably daily allocations or a maximum period of two days on any area before being moved and according to a Prescribed Grazing Plan. Stock density will be high enough for the allotted area, vegetation present, and time period to achieve sufficient disturbance (generally 50,000 lbs. of stock density per acre or higher). Example: thirty 1,200 pound cows on a half-acre allocation is 72,000 pounds live weight per acre. Thirty 1,200 pound cows will consume about 1,080 pounds of dry matter per day (~3% of body weight) so at least 2 times that amount should be available. Adjust allocation, stocking rate or time frame to meet the planned results. Use an estimate of 250 pounds of dry matter per acre inch of live vegetation.

- Grassland fields must be established for a minimum of three (3) years before initiating impact grazing, and impacts will not be grazed more than once in a two-year period.

- Impact grazing will result in at least 40% open soil conditions (i.e. lacking duff and other debris) at the soil surface, with equal distribution throughout the area of disturbance.

- Impact grazing 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 to occur.

- Environmentally sensitive areas will be marked on the plan map to ensure Management Activities are avoided on these areas.
• Table 1 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 (⅓) of the area each of three (3) years if they so choose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>MAXIMUM AREA TO BE DISTURBED</th>
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<tr>
<td>CP practices CP1, CP2, and CP10</td>
<td>% of the area each of 2 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 acres or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 5 acres</td>
<td>total area in 1 year</td>
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• Grazing is not allowed on any CRP practices except CP1, CP2, and CP10.

• Grazing operations 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 grazing until after August 15 to reduce the chance of harming fledgling birds and other young wildlife.

• Impact grazing operations will be performed along field contours, or across the slope, when practical.

• Erosion from impact grazing will not exceed tolerable limits.

• Impacts will parallel brushy or woody escape cover when feasible.

CONSIDERATIONS

• Impact grazing should not be planned in places where gully formation is a problem. CAUTION: Grazing in the late fall on highly erosive sites may cause erosion to occur over the winter months. Consider broadcasting one-half (½) bushel of cereal rye per acre to reduce erosion potential if needed.

• Consider seeding a mixture of forbs and legumes into areas that have been impact grazed. See NRCS CRP Program Job Sheet CRP Management Activity: Inter-seeding for additional guidance.

• Consider spot-spraying 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 by grazing. Consider any grazing restrictions after pesticide applications.

• Consider the habitat needs of the target wildlife species. Areas grazed hard in late summer or early fall will tend to stimulate the production of hard-seeded plants such as common ragweed. These species provide excellent brood-rearing cover and winter food for quail and pheasants.

• Grazing in low, wet areas currently dominated by sedges should be avoided because these areas naturally often add additional plant diversity to the site.

• Where the existing vegetation is extremely thick, tall, or rank, consider first using prescribed burns, herbicides, or mowing on those areas where grazing will be performed.

• Landowners should be wary of tile blowholes, groundhog holes, fallen tree limbs, and other hazards that may have developed since they were last in the field.

• Livestock water needs will be provided through temporary tanks – access to creeks, ponds, springs/seeps, and other natural water sources is not authorized.

• Temporary fencing systems which include reels, poly-wire, and step-in posts are ideal for managing impact grazing.
IMPACT GRAZING - SPECIFICATIONS SHEET

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<th>Landowner:</th>
<th>County:</th>
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<td>Farm:</td>
<td>Tract:</td>
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CONCURRENCE OF IDNR DISTRICT BIOLOGIST (recommended):

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Wildlife species benefited:

Date range (i.e. grazing window):

Planned live animal weight per impact acre (show calculations):

Additional considerations (including weight estimate of standing vegetation):

SITE/SKETCH MAP

(Include environmentally sensitive areas to be avoided)

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