

# Benefits of Grazing CRP for Recreational Landowners

As a recreational landowner, you most likely desire the highest quality wildlife habitat your property can offer. Interseeding will make your CRP ground more attractive to wildlife by adding legumes and native forbs to a stand previously dominated by grass. Pairing with a local cattle producer to graze your CRP ground can help maximize the wildlife benefits provided by interseeding.

Interseeding is one of the acceptable Mid-Contract Management activities required by most Conservation Reserve Program contracts. Without MCM activities, like interseeding, the quality of grassland habitat steadily decreases about five years after the initial seeding. The MCM activities like interseeding, reset the plant community conditions so habitat quality will improve for early successional wildlife species like pheasants and quail.

The interseeded species produce better feeding areas, especially for broods of young birds; by attracting insects that supply the protein they need in their diet to grow body mass and feathers. These same legumes and forbs are also preferred forage for deer and other mammals, especially during the summer and early fall.

## How Grazing Fits with MCM

MCM activities on CRP are cost shared by FSA at a 50 percent rate. However grazing entails a 25 percent reduction in the CRP rental payment for the year that the site is grazed. The 25 percent rental reduction can be offset by charging rent to the livestock producer who utilizes the CRP. But even without a rental payment from the livestock owner, this one time loss in income is off set by the creation of more diverse habitat.

While grazing is not a MCM activity, it can be used to enhance the application of the other MCM options. For example with less duff, disking or interseeding is easier and less costly. Grazing would meet the requirement that the grass stand is weakened prior to interseeding.



*Managed Grazing*

Grazing also provides benefits independent of interseeding or other MCM options. **While overgrazing can be detrimental to wildlife habitat, responsible managed grazing by livestock can actually improve wildlife habitat.**

The cattle will remove some of the cover, opening the stand to light which encourage more vigorous growth of the grass and forbs. Only allowing the cattle to graze for a short time period, or limiting the number of animals grazing the stand, will help ensure greater success. Either method will ensure that only some of the grass is eaten. But the grazed areas will produce a mosaic of shorter and taller plant heights and thicker and thinner areas of grass. This disturbance will produce some of the same results as the MCM options listed above, but can actually produce better habitat conditions since the stand will not be uniform. This produces more diverse "niches" which can provide greater habitat value to the wildlife species on the area.



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You can also contact your local NRCS or ISU Extension office for more information.

