



Conservation Mowing

Mowing has a place in managing habitat but is often used too frequently or incorrectly causing undesirable outcomes. Mowing can be used to help control annual weed growth when establishing native prairies, to control the invasion of woody stemmed plants in grasslands and can reduce the amount of standing vegetation prior to conducting a prescribed burn or herbicide treatment. Mowing is not being used as a management tool when utilized to reduce the diversity of plant species which in turn reduces the diversity of wildlife foods, nesting sites and protective cover. For example, mowing a grass field several times over the course of growing season will thicken the grass component reducing the ability of forbs and legumes to compete and remain within the grassland.

Frequent Mowing Concerns:

- Reduced Plant Diversity
- Destruction of Nesting Sites
- Loss of Vegetative Protective Cover
- Soil Compaction or Degradation

Conservation Mowing Uses:

- Control of Annual Weeds
- Reducing Undesired Woody Plants
- Maintaining Fire Breaks and Trails
- Pre-Fire/Herbicide Vegetation Reduction

For the Conservation Stewardship Program mowing as a management practice will leave a height of 6 to 15 inches to provide necessary ground cover for the wildlife. If you choose mowing as a management practice indicate how mowing is to be used in your management plan.

Timing of Vegetation Control needs to be considered –

Primary nesting and brood rearing seasons for grassland wildlife extends from April 1st through August 1st. Mowing can be conducted between August 1st and October 1st to allow plants to reach sufficient heights to provide necessary winter cover while removing woody vegetation.

Please note: Mowing and baling a grassland or pasture makes those acres ineligible for the CSP.

IN GENERAL, any type of mowing should be delayed until after August 1st.

Types of Mowing:

Noxious Weed Control - Limit mowing to only those areas that are affected and raise the height of the mow blades so that only the seed heads are removed. This can be done during native prairie establishment as well during the 1st year of the new planting.

Firebreak - Mowing keeps the vegetation short and lush, removes the build-up of thatch, and helps control the height of the flames near the edges of the burn area.

Strip Mowing - Alternate mowed and non-mowed strips across the entire field to control woody plants. There are some negative effects. Therefore utilize strip mowing only to the degree necessary to control the woody invasion.

Trails – Trails may be mowed a 2-3 times a year to facilitate access to the property to conduct other management activities, such as invasive species removal. Only enough trails may be constructed to allow for management activities to take place. Trails should not be any wider than 10 ft with surrounding native vegetation being left undisturbed. No destructive ATV use is allowed on CSP properties (i.e. a dirt bike track, etc.)