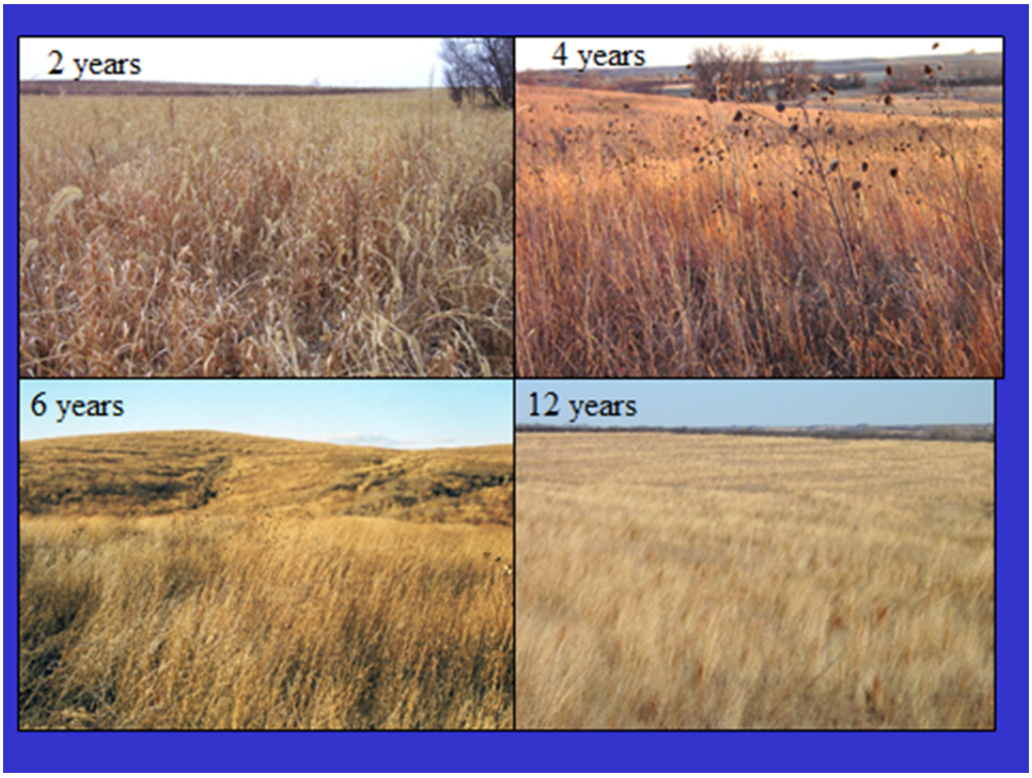
Strip Disking

After several years, pasture or lawn grasses will eventually form mats that are not beneficial to wildlife. Species such as brome, fescue, and orchard grass occasionally require some type of disturbance or they will become a monoculture. The dense stands of the same type of grass have little wildlife benefit due to lack of diversity of plant seed for forage, dense mats that force wildlife to move across the top of them, and increased predation due to having to move over the top of these habitat types. In order to increase biodiversity, strip disking is a useful tool in monoculture grass stands.



Lack of diversity in these stands makes these areas almost like a desert to the native wildlife in the area. In a couple of years, these types of grasses push everything else out. In order to allow other species to sprout, disking is done to expose bare soil and allow for germination of a variety of other plants. Increasing the diversity positively helps the wildlife populations in the area by giving the habitat a different structure and allows annual plants to produce a variety of seeds wildlife need to survive over the winters. You may also plant forb (flowering) species after disking the ground in order to enhance the biodiversity on the ground

In order to accomplish a successful disking and interseeding effort, landowners must 1st burn off all the thatch on the area 1st thing in the spring. Having this thatch on top of the ground would cause a disk or other implement being used to clog up constantly. With the thatch removed, bare soil should be ready for disc blades to make direct contact.

Brome Field Disking/Interseeding

D/I Cool Season Grass (4/26/2011)

D/I Cool Season Grass (6/1/2011)

D/I Cool Season Grass (7/27/2011)

D/I Cool Season Grass (9/1/2011)

D/I Cool Season Grass (12/1/2011)

Strip disking and interseeding a cool season grass stand increases the biodiversity of the stand as well as rejuvenated the grass that was originally in the stand. In the pictures above, it can easily be seen that the disked area has more vigor and a variety of plants growing in it after the treatment. The stand also has more structure to it, so during the winter snows, not all of it is matted on the ground like the solid stand of brome.

Disking and interseeding is a cost effective way to increase the wildlife value of stands of cool season grasses. This treatment will need to be conducted every few years to ensure that the grasses to not form a monoculture again.

Conservation Mowing

Mowing has it place in managing wildlife habitat but is too often used to frequently or incorrectly causing undesirable consequences. It can be used to help control annual weed growth when establishing native warm season grasses, to control the invasion of woody stem plants in grasslands, and reduce the amount of standing vegetation prior to conducting a prescribed burn or herbicide treatment. It is not being used as a management tool when mowing is used 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 eliminating the ability of forbs and legumes to complete and remain within the grassland.

Frequent mowing reduces:

- Diversity of Plant Species (food sources)
- Nesting sites
- Protective Cover
- Wildlife species escape potential from predators

Can be used for:

- Control annual weed growth
- Control of woody stem plants in grassland
- Maintain fire breaks and trails
- Reduce the amount of standing vegetation prior to prescribed burn or herbicide treatment.

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 1 thru August 1. Mowing can be conducted between August 1st and October 1st to allow plants to reach sufficient heights to provide sufficient winter cover benefits 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.)