



# MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

## Michigan CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAMS (CRP, CREP, CCRP)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

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Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

### WHAT IS MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT OF CRP?

Mid-Contract Management of CRP are activities that must be performed on certain practices to ensure the original plant diversity, wildlife benefits, and protection of the soil and water resources are present for the life of the contract.

For CRP practices with grasses, legumes, & wildflowers, research has shown that typically 5-6 years after establishment the site becomes dominated by a thick growth of the grasses. To ensure wildlife habitat benefits in these sites, management is required to encourage legumes and wildflowers, and to ensure the grass is not too thick to limit small wildlife species from traveling through the cover to meet their needs.

### ELIGIBILITY

All new CRP General Signup, Continuous CRP, and CREP contracts are required to have Management activities included in the Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO) unless otherwise noted. Cost-share is available to assist with the implementation of these requirements. These activities are a component of CRP contract requirements, and failure to perform them when needed will result in a contract violation.

Prior-approved CRP contracts may voluntarily request management activities be added in their CPO and these activities will also be eligible for cost-share.

### CRP POLICY

Management activities will be implemented according to the following CRP Policy.

**In the first or second year of re-enrolled acres (CP10) and again in year 6 or 7, or five years after the contract begins for ten year contracts and after 7 years for 15 year contracts, the participant will apply the appropriate disturbance activity. Exceptions to this need to be approved by the local FSA office.**

Mid-Contract Management will only be allowed on CRP acres outside the designated dates to protect ground-nesting wildlife. Designated dates are from May 1<sup>st</sup> to Aug 1<sup>st</sup>. If management activities are needed within these dates, the FSA County Committee must approve the management activity prior to the activity occurring. The size of the area to be disturbed at one time depends on the size of each field. For fields less than 10 acres in size, the whole field may be treated in one year. For fields 10 to 40 acres in size, one half of the field may be treated one year and the other half the next year. For fields greater than 40 acres, one third of the field will be treated each year for three years.

Following are Management activity options available to Michigan CRP participants:

### PRESCRIBED BURNING

Depending on the needs of the site, Prescribed Burning can be used to remove dead plant material, stimulate grasses, annuals, legumes, and/or wildflowers, and provide bare ground to help small animals find seeds and provide dusting sites.

All Prescribed Burning on CRP must be performed in accordance with an approved Prescribed Burning Plan, ([http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/hunting\\_wildlifehabitat/Landowners\\_Guide/Habitat\\_Mgmt/Grassland/Prescribed\\_Burning.htm](http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/hunting_wildlifehabitat/Landowners_Guide/Habitat_Mgmt/Grassland/Prescribed_Burning.htm)) all local and state laws and regulations, and the Prescribed Burning Standard (338) in the FOTG. All necessary permits must be obtained by the landowner. See the Conservation Information Sheet "Prescribed Burning" for further information.

To facilitate future prescribed burning, consider establishing the perimeter of the field to wildlife friendly cool-season grasses and legumes such as timothy,

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orchard grass, Canada Wild Rye, and clovers; or Food Plots on non-erosive sites (cost-share is not authorized for food plots for General CRP, and are not eligible on Continuous CRP or CREP acres).

### DISKING

Disking sets back thick grass growth to allow annuals, wildflowers, and legumes to flourish, as well as providing bare ground to help small animals find seeds and provide dusting sites. Disking on CRP will consist of multiple passes approximately 4"-6" deep. All disking must be performed on the contour, and leave at least 30% of the plant residue on the surface of the soil. The goal is to have 50% of the disturbed area bare soil after disking. For fields over 10 acres, alternate strips of disked and undisked areas which are 60 to 100 feet wide.

### GRASS-SPECIFIC HERBICIDES

Grass-Specific Herbicides will suppress grass growth, but not affect legumes and wildflowers. Because of their selective properties, grass-specific herbicides can be used at low rates on grass stands that have become too thick to allow legumes and wildflowers to flourish. Contact your local Michigan State University Extension Agent for specific herbicide recommendations. **Apply all herbicides according to the label.**

### INTERSEEDING WILDFLOWERS

CRP fields consisting of Native Grasses may need Native Wildflowers introduced or reseeded to ensure wildlife benefits. Prescribed Burning, Light Disking, or Grass-Specific Herbicide applications must precede Interseeding of Wildflowers to ensure adequate seed to soil contact. Seed ½ pound per acre of Wildflowers species which are Native to Michigan. Seed may be uniformly broadcast into a firm seedbed and then cultipacked or drilled.

### INTERSEEDING NON-NATIVE LEGUMES

CRP fields consisting of Non-Native Grasses may need Legumes introduced or reseeded to ensure wildlife benefits. Prescribed Burning, Light Disking, or Grass-Specific Herbicide applications must precede Interseeding of Non-Native Legumes to ensure adequate seed to soil contact. Seed 3 pounds per acre of a combination of Alsike Clover, Ladino Clover, Red Clover, and/or Alfalfa. Seed may be broadcast into a firm seedbed and cultipacked or drilled into existing Non-Native Grass plantings.

### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Any damage to the CRP cover as a result of Mid-Contract Management or any other activity will be repaired at the landowner's expense.

### CONSIDERATIONS

Consider using a variety of Management options to provide a wide range of habitat values.

CRP Mid-Contract Management activities are expected to result in an abundance of Early Successional Plants. These are typically annual plants, and although they may appear to compete with the planted vegetation, perennial grasses will eventually increase while the annuals will decrease in abundance in a short time without the need for additional maintenance activities.

If your CRP acres historically had issues with troublesome weeds such as spotted knapweed, thistles, cocklebur, etc. consider using prescribed burning or grass-specific herbicides instead of disking to minimize soil disturbance.

## TIMING (DATES) of Michigan CRP Required Management

Management Activity	Native	Non-Native	Desired Outcome
Prescribed Burning	Sept. – Oct.	October	Suppressed Grass = more forbs + open ground
Prescribed Burning	March - April	March	Increased Grass + open ground
Light Disking	Sept. – Oct.	October	Suppressed Grass = more forbs + open ground
Grass-Specific Herbicide	When grasses are actively growing		Suppressed Grass = increased forbs
Interseed Wildflowers	1/		Increased diversity of wildflowers
Interseed Non-Native Legumes		1/	Increased diversity of forbs/legumes

1/ = see the 327 CONSERVATION COVER and 512 PASTURE & HAYLAND PLANTING standards in the FOTG for seeding dates

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