

Grassland Conservation Practices

for a Sustainable System



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help the Land

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As a landowner or farm operator you face many decisions when managing the resources on your land. When you evaluate options for your grassland or grazing operation, consider implementing some of the conservation practices listed below into your

grassland/grazing management. NRCS staff and your local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) can assist you in making the right choices to protect your resources and improve your operation.

Conservation Practice	Description	Maintenance	Recommended
Access Control			
	Limiting the amount of time or the time of year that vehicles and/or livestock have access to water bodies, environmentally sensitive areas or hazardous areas.	• Barriers should be periodically inspected and repairs should be performed as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Brush Management			
	Reducing or eliminating undesirable vegetation to increase the vigor, amount and quality of the desired vegetation present, and increase wildlife habitat.	• Spot treatment of individual plants or areas needing re-treatment should be done as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Fence			
	A constructed barrier to control animal traffic patterns to reduce erosion and control access by grazing animals to permit recovery or stockpiling of vegetation.	• Routine inspection should be part of an on-going management program. • Inspection of fences in the spring after snowmelt and after storm events is needed to determine if weakness, breaks, or malfunctions have affected the intended use of the fence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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Forage Harvest Management			
	<p>Timely cutting and removal of forages for optimized yield, quality, stand life, controlling insects and other pests, and to maintain wildlife habitat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before forage harvest, clear fields of debris that could damage machinery. Do not cut forages until dew or rain on leaves has evaporated. Mow most recent seedings ahead of older stands. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Grade Stabilization Structure			
	<p>A structure used to control the channel grade in natural or constructed water courses. They may be used as a source of livestock water, wildlife habitat and control of gully erosion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An operation and maintenance plan is prepared for the person responsible for operating and maintaining the system. The plan provides for periodic inspections and prompt repair or replacement of damaged components. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Heavy Use Protection Area			
	<p>Stabilizing areas frequented by vehicles or livestock to reduce erosion in or near critical water bodies, improve water quality, and improve herd health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An operation and maintenance plan will be prepared for and reviewed with the landowner or operator. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Nutrient Management			
	<p>Proper placement of the correct amount of nutrients at the correct stage of plant growth to increase forage production, reduce loss of nutrients to surface or groundwater sources and to increase production and profits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment needs calibrated to ensure uniform distribution of material at planned rates. Document actual rate nutrients were applied. Changes in animal numbers or feed management will necessitate additional analysis. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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Pasture and Hay Planting	 <p>Establishing desired native and/or introduced forages to supply forages during normally low production periods, reduce erosion, reduce runoff, improve water quality and increase carbon sequestration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspect and calibrate equipment to insure proper rate, distribution and depth of planting. Growth should be monitored for water stress. Cutting, herbicides or grazing management may be needed to control undesirable plants. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Pest Management	 <p>Pest management helps reduce impacts of invasive species, weeds, and pest invasions while minimizing the impacts to soil and water resources and non-target plants and animals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The operator is responsible for the proper implementation of the practice, including operation and maintenance of all equipment. Plans should be reviewed and updated periodically. Develop a safety plan. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Prescribed Burning	 <p>Prescribed burning is used to increase the quantity, quality and vigor of certain desired plant species. Burning also reduces the competition from undesired species.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burn according to your prescribed burn plan. Smoke, liability, and safety and health precautions should all be monitored. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Prescribed Grazing	 <p>Managing the harvest of vegetation with grazing animals to maintain or improve the desired plant community and ground water quality, reduce erosion, and improve cover for wildlife.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor data and grazing records on a regular basis to insure objectives are met, or to make necessary changes in the prescribed grazing plan to meet objectives. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Riparian Forest Buffer	 <p>An area established to trees and/or shrubs adjacent to a stream, lake or other water body to improve water quality, reduce sediment delivery, create shade for aquatic habitat, mitigate flood damage, and more.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trees in the buffer area need to be periodically maintained and harvested. As the buffer matures, tree harvesting is important for plant health and buffer function. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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Water Well			
	A well constructed to an aquifer to provide needed water for domestic livestock and other general water needs of a farming operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep a copy of the well log and permit documents. Any maintenance, modification or repairs to the well should be done by a Certified Well Driller or Certified Pump Installer. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Watering Facility			
	Permanent or portable tanks or troughs to increase the even distribution of grazing animals, to promote even grazing, and provide a water source for wildlife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An operation and maintenance plan will be provided to the operator. The tank/trough should be clear of debris, algae and sludge. Check for leaks. Check for erosion in adjacent areas. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Wildlife Habitat Management (Uplands or Wetlands)			
	The rehabilitation of a degraded uplands and wetlands, or creating or enhancing areas to provide food and cover for wildlife.	A plan will be provided, which will address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> wildlife needs establishing food sources vegetation management acceptable uses timing and operation of water control structures 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment			
	Linear plantings of multiple rows of trees or shrubs established that provide shelter for structures, wildlife, livestock and people, improve air quality, provide noise or visual screens, manage snow deposition, and enhance wildlife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control competing vegetation. Protect planting from live-stock and wildlife, as needed. Replace dead trees as necessary. Supplemental water may be needed for establishment. Protect plantings from fire with firebreaks. Inspect at least every six months. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Pasture Condition Score (PCS)			
	Pasture condition scoring is a systematic way to check how well a pasture is managed, and evaluates overall pasture health. This tool may show pasture deficiencies, and where management changes could help improve pasture productivity.	Could your PCS be improved with conservation practices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No