Rare and Declining Habitat (PRAIRIE)

Michigan CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) October 2006

Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

WHAT IS A RARE AND DECLINING HABITAT (PRAIRIE)?

The Rare and Declining Habitat (PRAIRIE) practice is a native grass and wildflower planting that provides soil erosion protection as well as habitat for a variety of wildlife, especially upland game birds and songbirds.

Prairies were found throughout Michigan prior to European settlement. Michigan prairies were diverse areas of native grasses and wildflowers. Grasses and wildflowers common to prairies evolved to be fire tolerant, and relied on periodic fires to maintain this plant diversity. Today, Michigan has lost over 99% of its original prairies.

Native grasses found in prairies were present in Michigan when Europeans arrived. Some of the more common native grasses that grow well in Michigan include warm-season grasses such as Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indian grass, and Switchgrass as well as native cool season grasses like Canada and Virginia Wild Rye. Common wildflowers include Black-Eyed Susan, Purple Coneflower, Coreopsis, and others.

Prairie plantings of warm-season species provide excellent nesting and winter cover for wildlife. These tall, stiff, upright grasses stand up well to snow and ice. These grasses put most of their growth on in the heat of the summer, unlike the cool-season grasses (found in most lawns) which grow best in the spring and fall.

Native grasses will live a long time after establishment. However, like most long-lived plant species, they generally establish slowly. Therefore, it is very important to establish these grasses properly and to have patience when evaluating the results.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for this practice with the Conservation Reserve Program, the land must have a cropping history (4 out of 6 years from 1996-2001). Further, the site must be within 0.5 miles of a Prairie as identified on the Pre-Settlement Vegetation Maps found in Section I of the Field Office Technical Guide.

CRP POLICY

For General CRP, **at least 5 NATIVE grasses plus at least 10 NATIVE wildflowers** will be planted. Any other plantings are not eligible. **Only NATIVE grasses and wildflowers may be planted for this practice** (see MI NRCS Biology Technical Note #13 for a list of native vs. non-native plants in Michigan).

Prairie plantings will be established according to the Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitat (643) standard in the local Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), and they must be planted within 12 months of contract approval to remain in compliance. If circumstances beyond the landowner's control prohibit the planting within the first 12 months, the local FSA County Committee may approve an extension to the next planting season.

PLANTING

It is very important to plant native grasses into a weed-free, firm seedbed. If the field is currently in cropland, weed control efforts should begin prior to planting. Use herbicide or tillage to eliminate competing vegetation. If necessary for erosion control, seed a temporary cover. Eliminate the temporary vegetation at planting time with tillage or herbicides.

If the field is currently in sod, begin weed control efforts using broad-spectrum herbicides in the fall. Apply herbicides again after the spring green-up prior to planting (if possible, a prescribed burn prior to spring green up to remove the dead litter from the fall treatment will provide best results).

Broad-spectrum herbicides will provide good initial weed and sod control for fall and spring applications. Other herbicides labeled for warm season grass establishment may be used alone or mixed with broad-spectrum herbicides to provide residual weed control, which may result in faster establishment of the native grasses. Contact your local Michigan State University Extension Agent for specific herbicide

recommendations. **Apply all herbicides according to the label**.

Plant during the period specified in the attached plan/design sheet. Apply lime and fertilizer according to needs determined by a soil test and MSU recommendations.

Use a specialized no-till drill that is able to handle native grass seeds (possibly available at some local Conservation District offices, DNR offices, Pheasants Forever chapters, etc). Plant the seeds **no deeper than** 1/8 inch.

If a native grass drill is not available, the seed may be broadcast or aerial seeded. In either case, the seedbed must be worked up and firmed with a cultipacker or similar equipment. A carrier such as potash may also be needed in order to spread the seed evenly. **After seeding, the site must be rolled or cultipacked to ensure proper seed to soil contact.** Plant the seeds **no deeper than** 1/8 inch.

Since warm-season grasses are slow starters, it is important to control unwanted vegetation, especially the first year after planting. Use mowing or herbicides as needed until a Final Status Review is issued to control unwanted vegetation. Mow when competing weeds are taller than the planted grasses and wildflowers, and at a height above the planted grasses and wildflowers. Some herbicides labeled for warm season grass establishment will provide residual weed control without damaging the planted grasses. For additional information on herbicide controls, see Conservation Management Sheet "Establishing Prairie Grass Buffer Strips" and contact your local Michigan State University Extension Agent for specific herbicide recommendations. **Always apply herbicides according to labeled directions.**

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Noxious weeds and other undesirable plants, insects, and pests shall be controlled, including such maintenance as necessary to avoid detrimental effects to the surrounding land.

After the Final Status Review, maintain the planting according to your CRP conservation plan. Maintenance activities are allowed only on a spot basis and only if necessary to maintain stand health, maintain stand diversity, or control pests that will damage the CRP cover or adjacent lands. **MOWING** is only authorized between Aug 1st and Aug 20th to protect ground-nesting wildlife and to allow re-growth for winter cover. Other maintenance activities or Mid-Contract Management will only be allowed outside the designated dates to protect ground-nesting wildlife. Designated dates are from May 1st to August 1st. If management or maintenance activities are needed within these dates, the FSA County Committee **must** approve the management activity **prior to** the activity occurring.

Mowing for generic weed control or for cosmetic purposes is prohibited.

REQUIRED MANAGEMENT

All new CRP contracts must have mid-term contract management activities scheduled that are site specific and will ensure plant diversity, wildlife habitat, and protection of soil and water resources. Management activities that will ensure these benefits in prairie plantings include prescribed burning (according to an approved burn plan), disking, interseeding of wildflowers, etc. All management activities must be performed according to NRCS Standards and Specifications as found in the FOTG, and CRP policy. See the attached design sheet for suggested management activities on your property.

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

For optimum wildlife habitat, plant a diversity of grasses and wildflowers. This mixture will provide winter and nesting cover, flowers for pollinating insects, as well as a good seed and insect source for food.

To facilitate future prescribed burning, consider establishing the perimeter of the field to a CP1 (Introduced Grasses and Legumes) mixture such as timothy, orchard grass, and clovers, CP12 (Food Plots) on non-erosive sites (cost-share is not authorized for food plots), or Native cool season grass.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status, or protected genetic information. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternate means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC, 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Rare and Declining Habitat (PRAIRIE) DESIGN WORKSHEET CRP CP25

Landowner: **County:**

Farm: Tract: Field(s): Acres: Date:

RECOMMENDED SPECIES and SEEDING RATE (PLS #/acre = Pure Live Seed Pounds per Acre)

SPECIES	RATE		TOTAL needed = (RATE X Acres)	
		PLS #/acre	0.0	PLS #
		PLS #/acre	0.0	PLS #
		PLS #/acre	0.0	PLS #
		PLS #/acre	0.0	PLS #
		PLS #/acre	0.0	PLS #
Wildflowers:	1.0	PLS #/acre	0.0	PLS #

Recommended Wildflowers include:

BEFORE PLANTING in Year:

☐ Herbicide$_1$ **(per label)**: Dates =

☐ Herbicide$_2$ **(per label)**: Dates =

☐ Tillage: Dates =

☐ Temporary Seeding:

☐ **Apply fertilizer and lime according to an approved soil test and MSU recommendations for "establishing native grasses".**

☐ Other:

PLANTING METHOD in Year:

☐ **Planting Method:**

Dates =

(If unforeseen circumstances prohibit the planting of the grass by this date, please contact our office as soon as possible)

GRASS AND WILDFLOWER POST-PLANTING MAINTENANCE for Pest Control

☐ **Mowing: <u>BEFORE</u> FINAL STATUS REVIEW = mow 12" high when the weeds are 12" taller than the planted grasses**

<u>AFTER</u> FINAL STATUS REVIEW* = 12" MINIMUM Mowing Height*

☐ Herbicide* **(per label)**: ☐ Prescribed Burning*: According to an approved plan

☐ Other:*

****NOTE: after the Final Status Review has been issued, other maintenance activities will be conducted outside the primary nesting season (May 1st – August 1st), and weeds will be treated on a "spot" basis only, unless prior approval is granted by the County Committee.**

LOCATION AND LAYOUT SKETCH & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: