



Open wildlife pathways in CRP. The result of an early-spring controlled burn

INTERSEEDING:

Interseeding of forbs and legumes in your CRP grass stand is a one-time practice that can diversify the planting to make it more valuable for wildlife. To accomplish this, burn off the CRP field, preferably in March. This removes heavy litter that would otherwise hinder seed placement. As soon as possible (before April 15), use a grass drill to seed forbs and legumes into the burned area and the disked fireguard. Other techniques might include the use of strip disking or herbicides

to temporarily decrease competition from the established grasses. Interseeding need not cover the entire CRP field. Interseeding in alternating strips should be adequate to diversify the cover in the CRP. Species for interseeding in Kansas CRP would include grazer alfalfa, white or yellow sweetclover and, preferably a component of native plants including maximillian sunflower, purple prairieclover, and Illinois bundleflower.



Results of successful CRPenhancement: interseeded forbs and legumes growing in openings between grasses.

Interseeding just after burning will improve habitat quality.



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IF YOU'RE INTERESTED in improving your CRP for wildlife, contact your local district conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service for technical assistance and modification of your CRP plan. Also ask about the many benefits of *Conservation Grass Strips* available as part of the new *Continuous Signup of CRP*. For further advice, call the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

For More Information, Contact Your Local NRCS District Conservationist or:

Natural Resources Conservation Service
1010 E. 17th Hays, KS 67601 (785) 625-2588
107 Layton Dodge City, KS 67801 (316) 227-2392

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
1426 Hwy 183 Alt. P.O. Box 338 Hays, KS 67601 (785) 628-8614
1001 W. McArtor Dodge City, KS 67801 (316) 227-8609

Managing Your CRP For Wildlife



Lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as a result of the 1985 Farm Bill have contributed to the habitat available to Kansas wildlife. But looking back over the program's history, biologists realize that the CRP wasn't as much of a boost for wildlife as was once hoped. What went wrong and, how can re-enrolled CRP lands be improved for wildlife?





Almost all of the Conservation Reserve in Kansas was originally seeded to a mixture of native, warm-season grasses such as big and little bluestem, sideoats grama, Indiangrass, and switchgrass. While these grasses are generally beneficial to wildlife, a critical link was left out of the original seedings. Broadleaf plants, because of their excellent seed production and a growth form that's ideal for young birds, are very important components of our most productive wildlife habitats. Without the added diversity provided by broadleaf forbs and legumes, CRP's wildlife benefits fell short of what they might have been.

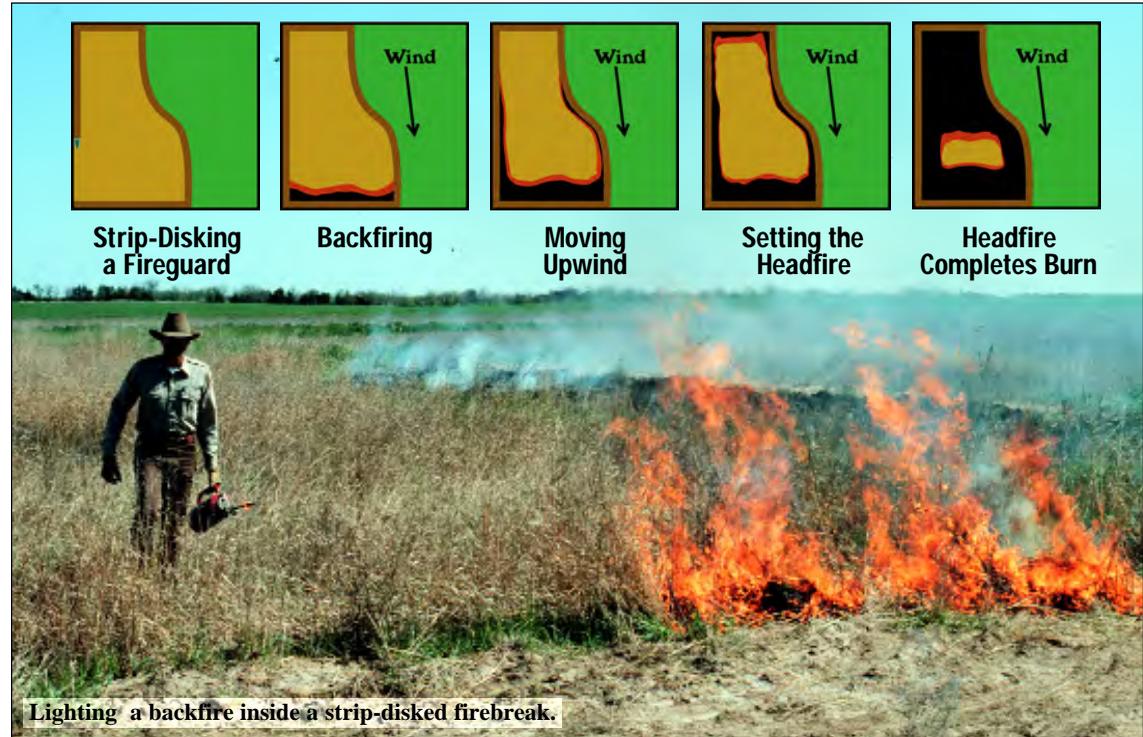
Another factor that played into the less-than-ideal performance of the original CRP plantings was inadequate management. In ungrazed CRP plantings, native grasses have a tendency to build up excessive ground litter over time. When too much litter is present on the ground, cover provided becomes almost unusable for all but our largest species of wildlife. These dense mats of grass litter can become virtually-impassible barriers to young wildlife such as pheasant chicks. The recommended solution to this problem is fire. An occasional burn can open up the grass stand, creating abundant

pathways for wildlife while also improving the vigor of the grasses. But many Kansas landowners are unfamiliar with controlled burning and are concerned about using fire. As a result, many CRP stands have grown too thick for most wildlife to use.

Fortunately, management options available for Conservation Reserve, including strip disking, foodplots, and interseeding, can be used along with controlled burning to make it easy to improve CRP for wildlife.

STRIP DISKING:

Up to 10 percent of a CRP field can be disked under CRP guidelines. Disking a few strips in your CRP temporarily sets back warm-season grasses and creates disturbed areas that foster increased growth of beneficial broadleaf plants like annual sunflower and pigweed. These strips will provide ideal brood habitat where young birds can forage for soft-bodied insects without the dense obstructions that litter build-up can create in grasses. For best results, strip disking should be done in February or March before significant greenup occurs. It need not be done every year because the effect of disking will last two to three years before the warm-season grasses take over again.



BURNING:

To be most productive, warm-season grasses used in CRP should be burned every three to five years. The strip-disking option can be used to create fireguards so that burning a CRP field becomes safer and easier. By first mowing and then strip disking around the periphery of the area you wish to burn in February or March, an excellent firebreak is created. Sorghum food plots can also make good firebreaks. When soil moisture and weather permit, preferably in March, this area can be burned using standard controlled-burning techniques. Winds should be light and steady from one direction so smoke and the headfire will be directed safely. Be sure to notify your rural fire department on the day you plan to

burn. A few Kansas counties require advanced notice and a burning permit.

By setting a backfire inside the disked firebreak on the downwind side of the field, a wide blackened area is created. Once that is done, additional fire can be set inside the firebreak around the periphery of the field, eventually reaching the upwind side where a headfire is set to complete the burn. The headfire, driven by the wind, quickly burns the remainder of the CRP and burns out once it meets the backfire. For greater diversity, disk a fireguard around half the field, burn that half, and burn the other half one to three years later. In this way, some unburned and some recently-burned habitat is always present, meeting both nesting and brood-rearing needs in the same field.