



Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM)

Grassland Management

Haying and Grazing

Spring 2014

The RIM Reserve program is Minnesota's premier private land protection program for riparian buffers, restoration of wetlands and native grasslands. This program partners with state, federal and local government entities, non-profit organizations and the citizens of Minnesota. To ensure that the quality of these easements is maintained, ongoing management is required. Within the grassland component of a RIM easement, management is needed to enhance stand vigor through periodic disturbance of a portion of the site. This benefits native species diversity, stand density, and reduces invasive or woody species and other unwanted vegetation. Other RIM practices including wetlands, tree plantings, and food plots require different management techniques.

A Conservation Plan exists for each easement that identifies the type of desired cover to be maintained on the site. Techniques such as prescribed burning, mechanical haying, or grazing can be used to achieve results and benefit ground nesting birds and pollinators as well as other wildlife species. Typically, these types of activities may occur once every 3-5 years on portions of any given easement. The conservation plan in place for RIM easements is signed by the landowner, and approved by both the local SWCD and the BWSR. Emergency declarations to open lands for haying and grazing do not apply to RIM lands.

Haying of Conservation Lands

As many RIM easements were once crop fields, mechanical harvest can be a very efficient method to enhance the grassland stand. Mechanical harvest through haying can be used to remove invasive species, weeds and duff layer to allow native grass species to increase in density. Haying can also be used to help maintain diversity levels and manipulate growth stages of habitat. When using haying as a management strategy it is important to consider potential influences on bird nesting, soil disturbance, soil nutrients, and long-term diversity levels. Typically less than 1/3 of any given site will undergo management in a single year. Haying is not allowed during the nesting season from May 15 – August 1.



Grazing of Conservation Lands

Temporary and limited use of livestock may also be a way to manage health and vigor of permanent vegetative cover when done in accordance with a management plan. Conservation grazing on easement lands requires regular monitoring to assure the site is not impacted in a negative way.

When managing grasslands through conservation grazing, typical goals include removing grass cover, which promotes forb species diversity, and increasing the structural heterogeneity of plant



communities to improve wildlife habitat for a variety of species. An additional goal may be to create conditions that are favorable for insect populations that are food for grassland birds. Grazing may not be recommended for high-functioning plant communities or plant communities that contain grazing-sensitive species or are connected to sensitive water resources.

The grazing plan will specify animal numbers and timeline to achieve adequate vegetation removal. Grazing plans must be approved by the local SWCD and BWSR. Grazing will generally be conducted outside the nesting season of May 15-August 1st. Only temporary fencing and water sources are allowed and must be removed when the activity is complete. As with haying, grazing may only affect 1/3 of any given site in one year.



To Learn More

The BWSR website has many helpful resources for managing RIM grasslands with haying and grazing. The governing policy and worksheet required can be found at:

<http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/easements/index.html>

Questions about haying and grazing on RIM easements can be directed to the following BWSR staff :

Tabor Hoek, BWSR Private Lands Coordinator

Marshall office

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John Voz, Working Lands Specialist

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Local SWCD offices will also be able to provide information for landowners to get started.