USDA

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Prescribed Grazing

Iowa Job Sheet

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Des Moines, Iowa

Iowa Conservation Practice 528
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Definition

Prescribed grazing is managing the harvest of vegetation with grazing and/or browsing animals.

Purpose

This practice may be applied as a part of conservation management system to achieve one or more of the following:

- Improve or maintain desired species composition and vigor of plant communities.
- Improve or maintain quantity and quality of forage for grazing and browsing animals' health and productivity.
- Improve or maintain surface and/or subsurface water quality and quantity.
- Improve or maintain riparian and watershed function.
- Reduce accelerated soil erosion, and maintain or improve soil condition.
- Improve or maintain the quantity and quality of food and/or cover available for wildlife.
- Manage fine fuel loads to achieve desired conditions.

Plans and Specifications

A Prescribed Grazing Plan includes:

- Producer's Goals and Objectives clearly stated.
- Resource Inventory that identifies:
  - existing resource conditions and concerns,
  - opportunities to enhance resource conditions,
  - paddocks, acres, and the location of structural improvements such as fences, water developments, etc. using a plan map, and
  - ecological site(s) or forage suitability group(s), when available.

- Forage Inventory of the expected forage quality, quantity and species in each management unit(s).
- Forage-Animal Balance (carrying capacity) developed for the grazing plan, which identifies forage surpluses and/or deficiencies for the kind and class of grazing livestock and/or browsing wildlife of concern. Alternatives will be provided to the producer to assist them in managing forage surpluses and/or deficiencies.
- Contingency plan developed that identifies potential problems (i.e., severe drought, flooding, insects) and serves as a guide for adjusting the grazing prescription to ensure resource management and economic feasibility without resource degradation.
- Monitoring plan developed with appropriate records to assess in determining whether the grazing strategy is resulting in a positive or upward trend and is meeting objectives. Iowa Prescribed Grazing Policy or USDA programs will guide when more intensive monitoring is needed to meet those requirements. See Table 2 of this Job Sheet.

Operation and Maintenance

Operation. Prescribed Grazing will be applied on a continuing basis throughout the occupation period of all planned grazing units. Other practices, such as Forage Harvest Management (511), Forage and Biomass Planting (512), Nutrient Management (590), Pest Management (595), Heavy Use Area Protection (561), Fence (382), Watering Facility (614), Pond (378), Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380), Water Well (642), Prescribed Burning (338) and Brush Management (314) may be used to improve the effectiveness of the grazing plan and the overall management of the system.

Adjustments will be made as needed to ensure that the goals and objectives of the prescribed grazing strategy are met.

Maintenance. Monitoring data and grazing records will be used on a regular basis within the prescribed grazing plan to ensure objectives are met, or to make necessary changes in the prescribed grazing plan to meet objectives. Appropriate records for one grazing season are shown in Table 2. (See USDA-NRCS Guide to Pasture Condition Scoring and the Pasture Condition Score Sheet at www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_007016.pdf.) In addition to Table 2, "Pasture Notes: A Field Guide for Grazing Systems" may be used as a record keeping system.

Table 1
Grazing Management

	Begin Grazing	End Grazing	
	Minimum Vegetative Growth 2/5/6	Minimum Stubble Height	Minimum Re-growth Before Killing Frost 3/4
Forage Species 1/	Inches	Inches	Inches
Cool Season Biennial or Perennial			
Alfalfa	Full bud or later	2	10
Kentucky Bluegrass	4	2	4
Birdsfoot Trefoil	6	4	6
Chicory	6	2	6
White Clover	6	4	6
Red Clover	1/4 bloom	2	8
Smooth Brome	8	4	6
Reed Canary grass	8	4	6
Timothy	6	4	6
Perennial Ryegrass	6	2	4
Orchard grass	8	4	8
Tall Fescue	8	4	8
Meadow Fescue	8	4	8
Festulolium	8	4	8

Table 1 Grazing Management Continues on Page 3

Table 1
Grazing Management Cont...

	Begin Grazing	End Grazing	
	Minimum Vegetative Growth 2/5/6	Minimum Stubble Height	Minimum Re-growth Before Killing Frost 3/4
Forage Species 1/	Inches	Inches	Inches
Warm Season Biennial or Perennial			
Eastern Gamma grass	16	10	10
Big Bluestem	12	6	6
Indian grass	12	6	6
Switchgrass	16	6	6
Little Bluestem	8	4	6
Side oats Grama	8	4	6
Annuals			
Small Grains	6	3	NA
Corn	18	12	NA
Sorghum-Sudangrass	18	12	NA
Brassicas (Turnips, Kale, Radishes, etc.)	10	6	NA
Pearl Millet	18	6	NA
Annual Crabgrass	8	3	6
Annual Lespedenza	8	4	7/

1/Management should focus on the primary species or suite of species and begin grazing at that height and stop grazing at the highest minimum stubble height.

2/Height is based on leaf height when leaves are lifted into a vertical position.

3/Minimum regrowth is needed to ensure plant survival. Plants may be grazed after freeze without damage in most years.

4/The last harvest of alfalfa, either grazed or hayed, should be made 35 to 45 days prior to the time when the freeze normally occurs.

5/Begin Grazing plant heights must be followed during the rotations of the growing season. During first grazing period or two and if stockpiled, the beginning height can be 75% of the beginning height but minimum stubble height should still be observed.

6/If forage is exceeding the begin grazing height, they may be stockpiled for later grazing, hayed, wind rowed, or mowed.

7/Annual lespedeza and most other annual forages should be allowed to set seed during some portion of the growing season to allow the plant to self-propagate over time.

Table 2*

Paddock #	Number & Kind of Livestock	Date of Turn In	Forage Height In	Date of Move Out	Forage Height Out

*Use of Table 2 or "Pasture Notes: A Field Guide for Grazing Systems" is required if receiving financial assistance for prescribed grazing as a method to document meeting the practice standard.

Use of Table 2 is recommended, but optional, if livestock related conservation practices receive financial assistance or if there is no financial assistance involved.

Table 2A Kind/Class of Usual Livestock Animals

Kind	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class
Cattle	Bull	Cow	Yearling	Calf	Heifer	Steer
Sheep	Ram	Ewe	Wether	Lamb		
Goat	Buck (Billy)	Nanny	Wether	Kid		
Horse/Donkey	Stud	Mare	Yearling	Colt	Gelding	
Llama/Alpaca	Males	Dam	Wether	Cria		