



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

E511D (with Montana Supplement)

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Forage harvest management to improve terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates during critical over-winter periods

Conservation Practice 511: FORAGE HARVEST MANAGEMENT

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Crop (Perennial) RESOURCE CONCERN

ADDRESSED: Animals

ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 1 year

Enhancement Description

Eliminate or forgo the last fall cutting of hay or haylage to optimize wildlife cover and shelter during critical over-winter periods and lengthen late season bloom period for invertebrates. Allowing late season stand maturity increases stand life and reduces risks of frost and winter damage while providing valuable wildlife habitat and extended bloom periods.

Criteria

- Specify the wildlife species of concern on the state-approved NRCS Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG). The species of concern must be one that is present for at least part of their life cycle in the geographical/physiographic region and benefit from the late season, over-winter standing hay/haylage crop.
- The state's WHEG must specify cover and shelter or continuity habitat requirements for the wildlife species of concern. The total WHEG score after installation of this practice must be 0.5 or greater.
- Eliminate or forgo the last scheduled fall cutting to provide suitable over-winter habitat for desired wildlife species and pollinators.

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- Eliminate or forgo the last fall harvest to benefit the desired wildlife species by following state guidelines.
 - **Forage harvest will occur no later than August 15 of the given year to allow adequate regrowth before winter dormancy.**
- Prior cuttings to the foregone harvest must result in stubble heights that will promote health and vigor of the hayland species (refer to Conservation Practice Standard **and Specification** (CPS) 511). The last cutting of the season must ensure minimum plant heights required by the identified wildlife species. Regrowth and taller stubble heights will reduce winter-kill in cold climates (as applicable) and provide additional wildlife benefits. Refer to Cooperative Extension Service recommendations where available.



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Documentation and Implementation Requirements

Participant will:

- Y Prior to implementation, identify typical date of last fall cutting. Provide the forage harvest plan and cutting dates to NRCS for review to confirm it meets the criteria of the enhancement.
- Y Prior to implementation, design the last cutting heights to meet WHEG criteria.
- Y Bales from the last cutting prior to the foregone cutting must be removed from the field for off-field storage to minimize predator impacts.
- Y Prior to implementation, review the map delineating the fields selected for improving wildlife cover and shelter and enrolled in the enhancement.
- Y During implementation, take photographs of the forage stand to verify final cutting was left standing in the field and plant heights meet state wildlife requirements for the identified species. Overwintering stubble heights and regrowth must be maintained during the dormant period to promote wildlife habitat.
- Y During implementation, notify NRCS of any planned changes to verify they meet the enhancement criteria.
- Y During implementation, keep the following documentation for each field:

Field	Forage species	Overwinter height (inches)	Last Harvest Date



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Y After implementation, make documentation and photographs of forage cutting heights available for review to NRCS to verify implementation of the enhancement.

NRCS will:

Y As needed, provide technical assistance to meet the criteria of the enhancement.

Y Prior to implementation, provide and explain NRCS Conservation Practice Standard and specifications of Pasture and Hay Planting (Code 512) as it relates to implementing this enhancement.

Y Prior to implementation, an NRCS biologist or partner wildlife biologist will complete the state-approved NRCS WHEG. Specific species targeted will be notated on the WHEG, and total score after implementation must equal 0.50 or greater.

Wildlife Species of Concern	
Cover & Shelter Requirements	
Planned WHEG Score after implementation	

Y Prior to implementation, verify a map has been developed delineating the hayfields that will have the enhancement implemented.

Y Prior to implementation, NRCS will provide technical assistance, as needed to:

- o Develop a plan to harvest forage in a manner that protects stand longevity, while also maintaining or improving wildlife habitat. Plan must meet requirements of NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Forage Harvest Management (Code 511).



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- o Develop specifications detailing the wildlife protection measures, such as selecting time periods to avoid forage harvest to protect wildlife and ensuring that suitable wildlife habitat exists during critical nesting periods.

Y During implementation, evaluate any planned changes to verify they meet the enhancement criteria.

Y After implementation, verify the planned forage harvest was completed to specifications developed for the fields delineated.

Y After implementation, review documentation and photographs of forage cutting heights to verify implementation of the enhancement.

Y If changes were made after implementation, complete the state's approved NRCS Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG).

Wildlife Species of Concern	
Cover & Shelter Requirements	
WHEG Score after Implementation	

NRCS Documentation Review:

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

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Participant Name _____ Contract Number _____

Total Amount Applied _____ Fiscal Year Completed _____

NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature

Date

