



Establishment and Management of CRP for Wildlife

January 2015

Design, Planting and Management Considerations for Wildlife on CRP

Like many wildlife enthusiasts you have probably sat down over a map of your property and dreamed of designing the perfect habitat for your favorite species. Each property will have unique potential based on size, history, management options, and the type of habitat that lies on the surrounding landscape. Understanding that potential, knowing what you want to accomplish, and correctly identifying management challenges are all key parts of a successful wildlife design using land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Choosing Your Objectives

Good habitat designs help control how wildlife species use your property during different times of the year. Design will impact nesting and fledging success, winter survival, and the quality of a hunt. If unsure of a property's potential or specific objectives are either broad or undecided, choose an "umbrella" species such as bobwhite quail. Bobwhite quail can be effectively managed on CRP fields ranging from five acres to several hundred, and their habitat requirements can benefit a

broad array of other wildlife.

There are various types of CRP programs and each program has its own set of objectives and rules. Be sure to understand your CRP contract and work with your local USDA office to determine eligibility of certain management practices before you get started.

Design Tips

Some of the best design components in CRP will serve multiple purposes:

1. Green firebreaks in strategic locations will create more edge habitat and set up distinct management units. They also provide great brood cover and deer browse.
2. Edge feathering trees such as invasive elm, green ash, honey locust, and cottonwood trees will provide instant escape cover and eliminate a future seed source for undesirable trees.
3. Plant an annual food plot or seed heavy winter cover with tall, warm season grass that can be treated with broadleaf herbicide in areas where volunteer trees or noxious weeds may be an issue.



Shred green firebreaks annually to maintain maximum benefit. If eligible, apply to hay them the year before a burn to remove excess residue.



A two year old seeding of nesting cover. Seedings with lower rates of grass will develop more slowly, maintaining nesting and brooding value without management for longer periods of time.

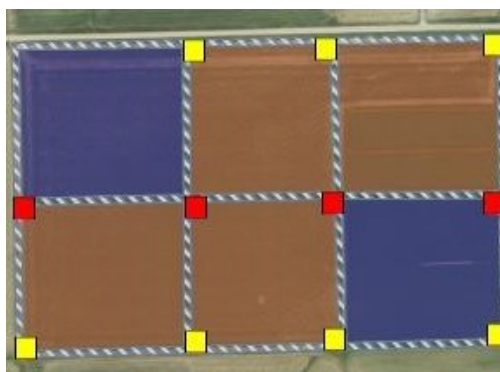
INTERESTING FACT

Quail spend little time flying, most travel is by walking or running.



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Basic design for bobwhite quail: yellow and red are 30' x 50' shrub thickets, blue is brood-rearing habitat, brown is nesting cover, and the grey and white area are green firebreaks.



Annual weeds and wildflowers create excellent structure in high quality habitat.

Summary:

- Work with a local wildlife biologist to discuss your property's potential.
- Define your objectives. Know which wildlife species you want to manage for or choose an umbrella species.
- Identify and pre-plan for management challenges such as volunteer trees and noxious weeds.
- Map out a three to five year management plan with practices rotating through a portion of the acres annually.

4. Generally, no more than 10% of the field will need to be planted to a winter cover grass mix as these areas are important in the winter, but don't produce birds or add to the population.
5. There is no need to have any more than 5% of the total acres in food plots. Small 1/2-1 acre blocks spread out across the CRP will create more edge as well as protect the birds from predators. Narrow strips of food plots (less than 30' wide) should be avoided due to ground predators following those lines.
6. Intersperse different habitat types. For example, place nesting cover next to broodrearing cover and replicate across the entire property.
7. Design appropriate seed mixtures (consider density, diversity, and structure) for the cover type intended. Diverse brood mixtures attract the most insects which are essential for chick survival.
8. Plant shrub thickets near areas that allow for easy management and maximum effectiveness. Close proximity to brooding habitat or winter food sources increase their value as thermal and escape cover. Planting near the edge of green firebreaks, food plots or surrounding croplands works well.

Planting

1. Order shrubs and grass/wildflower seed early. Not only does availability of species decrease, but prices tend to increase.
2. Consider a fall planting. Certain grass and wildflower seed tends to be more available since demand is lower. Equipment rental lines are smaller if you rent a no-till drill. Fall seedings also allow the seed to scarify over the winter as well as receive as much moisture as possible to begin emerging in the spring.
3. Spend time to correctly calibrate your no-till drill. It will save time and money.
4. Plant seed just barely under the surface of the soil (1/4 inch or less). Seeds planted too deep will not germinate.
5. Depending on the current cover conditions, planting a cover crop in the summer may be necessary to establish good soil conditions for planting grass and wildflowers.
6. If planting into non-native grasses such as smooth brome or sod bound native

grasses like Indiangrass or switchgrass, allow for at least one growing season to kill non-native grasses or suppress native grasses.

7. Seed during the appropriate time for the species being planted. Typical warm-season grass and wildflower mixtures must be planted between November 1st and May 15th.
8. Use a pre-emergent herbicide when establishing shrub thickets. Work with your local NRD for planting guidelines and services they offer in your area.

Management

1. Set up a 3-5 year management plan detailing activities and timing. It's likely to change, but you will have a starting point to adjust or modify based on current conditions.
2. Plan for some type of management (burning, disking, herbicide burn down, etc.) every year on a percentage of your acres (10-20%).
3. Plan ahead. Don't wait until the last minute to shred firebreaks, buy seed, line up a disk or drill, or write burn plans.
4. Inspect your land regularly. Stay on top of tree encroachment and invasives.
5. Annual weeds such as ragweed and horseweed are excellent winter food.
6. Creating bare ground and maintaining flowering plants with a broad canopy are critical to fledging success and overall population abundance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



Through a partnership with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, wildlife biologists are available to help provide wildlife habitat guidance, technical assistance on the available conservation programs and design seeding mixtures.

For further information visit NebraskaPF.com or call 844-733-3669.



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