

MANAGING SEEDED SPECIES ON POST-CRP FOR GRAZING

OVERVIEW

Most of the grasses providing the conservation cover on CRP sites also have high forage value; therefore, if you decide to convert some of your CRP acres to grazing—there are many considerations you should think about when it comes to seeding species. A majority of the planted species are early-maturing and can withstand grazing pressure better than native species in the region. If both native and seeded grass stands occur in the same field, be sure to give additional consideration to ensure both stands are used properly. This information sheet provides grass features and management implications for the most common-seeded species.



Siberian Wheatgrass

Siberian wheatgrass is a long lived, cool-season bunchgrass. In general, it has a late-season maturity which makes it available for extended forage use. Siberian wheatgrass is highly palatable to livestock and wildlife during the spring and following the fall green-up; however palatability decreases during the summer. Retain a minimum of three inches of stubble at the end of the grazing season to promote growth in the spring.



Crested Wheatgrass

Crested wheatgrass is a cool-season bunchgrass. It's highly palatable to livestock and wildlife and can be grazed, on average, two to four weeks earlier than native grasses during early growth stages in the spring. It's also highly palatable during fall re-growth. Seed set should be allowed to occur once every four years to replenish the stand.



Indian Ricegrass

Indian ricegrass is a cool-season bunchgrass. The high protein and fat content in the seed makes it appealing to livestock and wildlife. It may be grazed during the spring and summer but is often used in the late fall and winter because it cures well and retains green growth late into the season. Because of its high palatability, stands can succumb to overgrazing. Springtime grazing should be deferred every two to three years to allow the plant to flower and produce seed.



“Secar” Bluebunch Wheatgrass

Bluebunch wheatgrass is a cool-season bunchgrass. It makes good forage for both livestock and wildlife. While forage quality is at its highest during the spring and decreases as the plant matures, it should be grazed no more than once every three years, as it does not tolerate continuous heavy grazing. Ensure six inches of plant growth in the spring to promote stand health.



“Sherman” Big Bluegrass

“Sherman” big bluegrass is a cool-season bunchgrass which is typically one of the first to green-up in the early spring; up to four weeks earlier than crested wheatgrass. Big bluegrass is highly palatable to livestock and wildlife, it’s highly productive, and it’s a preferred early spring forage for both. Livestock tend to graze big bluegrass while it’s in its vegetative state but avoid it after the grass has gone to seed. Grazing of fall green-up is an option, but a minimum of six inches of stubble should be left after grazing. Big bluegrass should be allowed to set seed at least once every three years to replenish the stand.



Pubescent & Intermediate Wheatgrass

Pubescent/Intermediate wheatgrass is a long-lived, sod-forming grass. It is most palatable to livestock and wildlife during the winter when green. If improperly managed, it may become stemy and accumulate excess dead material. Allow eight inches of new growth before grazing and ensure four inches remains after the grazing season.



“Covar” Sheep Fescue

Dwarf bunchgrass forms dense tufts with numerous wiry, blueish-grey leaves. While it is a poor forage producer, its value lies in its ability to produce a large root system for soil protection and competition against weed invasion. Aggressive plants will increase if other preferred species are weakened through grazing mismanagement.



“Durar” Hard Fescue

‘Durar’ hard fescue is a cool-season perennial bunchgrass. It’s higher-producing than sheep fescue but has low palatability and is not a preferred forage species. Hard fescues produce large root systems for soil protection.



Tall Wheatgrass

Tall wheatgrass is a cool-season bunchgrass with multiple stiff stems originating from the base of the plant. It’s mildly palatable forage for livestock and wildlife in the spring, before seed set. Grazing should be deferred once every two to three years to allow the seed to mature for stand viability. If left unmanaged, excess plant material may choke out other species.



Smooth Brome

Smooth brome is a sod-forming grass. Its early growth is highly palatable to livestock and wildlife, but its palatability and nutritional quality decrease rapidly after flowering. It can be grazed during the spring and early summer before seed set.



Orchardgrass

Orchardgrass is a long-lived, cool-season perennial bunchgrass that produces a dense root system. It's a useful forage species and is palatable to livestock and wildlife. Orchardgrass may lose vigor and decline under heavy grazing conditions, so management should include moderation of grazing pressures. Grazing should be delayed in the spring until a minimum of eight inches of new growth is available, and should be discontinued at a four-inch stubble height at the end of the season. Orchardgrass should be allowed to rest 20-30 days between rotations; however, under-grazed orchardgrass may become tough and unpalatable.



Thickspike Wheatgrass

Thickspike wheatgrass is a cool season, sod-forming grass. It may serve as a good source of forage for livestock and wildlife from mid-spring to early summer when green. Stands may be heavily grazed from spring to fall, although moderate grazing is recommended to promote spreading and stand density. Allow the stand to set seed once every three years and retain four to six inches of stubble after grazing.



Timothy

Timothy is a short-lived, cool-season bunchgrass. It's highly palatable to livestock and wildlife from early spring to mid-summer, with most value in its use in the early spring. Timothy should be grazed before seed production and requires a 28 to 35 day recovery period in between grazing cycles.



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.



Scan code with your smartphone to access this content online.

Requires use of QR reader app.