



ENHANCING YOUR POST-CRP FOR WILDLIFE

OVERVIEW

CRP lands provide valuable habitat for a number of wildlife species on farmlands and grasslands. But as CRP contracts expire, the potential exists to lose much of what has been gained. As part of your post-CRP land management strategy, consider how you can maintain or enhance wildlife habitat on your land. This information sheet provides some general wildlife considerations and some questions to ask yourself when planning for CRP closeout.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR HEALTHY WILDLIFE HABITAT

All wildlife species require food, cover, water, and space to survive. While each species requires different amounts and types of each, the absence of any one of these components is usually enough to eliminate a species from a particular area. In many cases, it's possible to encourage certain wildlife species by improving one or more of these components. However, habitat diversity is the key to maintaining wildlife populations, particularly in agricultural settings.

Food

The availability of sufficient food is not normally the problem for wildlife; however, you might be missing specific components of a plant community that an animal requires. For example, mule deer require a diverse leafy shrub component in the plant community to help them survive the winter; whereas native pollinators need flowering plants throughout the entire growing season. Planting more shrubs and forbs will improve the habitat quality on retired CRP lands.

Cover

Cover provides protection for wildlife from predators and from extreme weather including heat, cold, wind and rain. You can manage wildlife cover by improving the structure and diversity of your plant community as it relates to the needs and size of the animal. For instance, a bird or small mammal whose main predators are birds of prey might avoid areas with tall perches but use areas with low-growing shrubs. By tailoring your cover with the terrain features, you can greatly enhance the value of cover for wildlife.

Water for Wildlife

In eastern Oregon, 80 percent of all vertebrates (animals with backbones) require riparian areas (areas where a river or stream meets the land) at some point in their life cycle. Those riparian areas tend to cover less than 2 percent of the landscape in arid regions. This makes well-distributed water an important resource for wildlife populations. Consider how you can promote water for wildlife on your lands. Artificial water sources like stock tanks should have no overhead obstructions and include escape ramps for birds and bats that might become trapped.

Space for Wildlife

Space relates to the idea of a home range—an area where the animal lives and roams and has everything it needs to survive and reproduce. The size of an animal's home range typically increases with the body size and the mobility of the species. It can also vary based on the quality of the habitat available.



When high-quality resources are concentrated, animals can meet their needs in a smaller area and their home range size is likely to shrink accordingly.

In addition, the arrangement and distribution of food, cover and water within a home range can be important. For instance, food that is not also near cover is less valuable to an animal than food where they can easily escape to cover when they feel threatened.

Your land alone may not be sufficient to support some wildlife species simply because of space requirements. The condition and use of surrounding lands may also impact wildlife habitat on your property.



Mule Deer

WILDLIFE HABITAT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1. What types of wildlife do I want to maintain or enhance on my CRP lands?

Many agricultural practices favor certain wildlife species and discourage others. Establishing wildlife goals may help you decide on a clear action plan for your expiring CRP acres. This should be the first step in planning for wildlife on post-CRP land.

2. Do I want to convert all of my CRP back to production?

On most farms there are areas with steep slopes, wind blows, shallow soils or otherwise hard-to-farm areas. These areas have the potential to produce the best wildlife habitat. It may be mutually beneficial to leave these areas in permanent cover. Remember, it's easier to leave something that is already established than to create it later.

3. Which type of agricultural production (cropping, grazing, etc.) is best for wildlife on CRP lands?

It depends on which species you would like to enhance. For example, foothill or higher elevation CRP might be best suited for big game habitat; and thus, a carefully planned grazing system might be the best use of your land. In lower elevations, a cropping system that leaves adequate cover and edge (between cover and foraging areas) habitat might be best for pheasants.

The following table provides typical home range sizes for a few species that you might consider:

SPECIES	HOME RANGE SIZE (ACRES)
Mountain Quail and California Quail	5 to 50
Ring-necked Pheasant	640 to 15,000
Sage Grouse	1,000 to 200,00
Mule Deer	640 to 20,000 (and they may move long distances between summer and winter range)
Elk	2,500 to 10,000

4. How much CRP land do I need to “leave in” to provide for wildlife?

It depends on the species you are trying to encourage. For example, you might leave a series of 10-acre patches with inter-connecting corridors and good edge habitat for ring-necked pheasants. At the same time, substantially larger blocks of CRP might be required to support mule deer. Some factors that affect the amount of land necessary are proximity to other food sources, edge habitat surrounding the CRP field, winter and nesting cover in nearby areas, and water availability. Because each CRP field is different, it's important that you assess each one individually and formulate site-specific management actions.

5. Are there assistance programs available to help defray the costs associated with managing for wildlife on post-CRP lands?

There are several funding options available through the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) such as the DEAR, Green Forage, Upland Bird, and Access and Habitat programs. There's also federal programs that can assist you with the costs to maintain wildlife habitat on post CRP lands. In addition, NRCS and ODFW staff can help you design and implement wildlife projects on post-CRP land and provide advice and recommendations.



Elk

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MAINTAINING HIGH-QUALITY WILDLIFE HABITAT

- ❑ Consider periodic burning (3-5 year intervals) or stripmowing of cover patches to maintain plant vigor. The best time to burn is early spring (before nesting season) or late fall. Burn or mow only small blocks in any given year to maintain overall wildlife cover values.
- ❑ If you are reluctant to use prescribed fire, livestock grazing can be a useful tool to increase the vigor of decadent vegetation. Even a system of periodic rest rotation followed with no grazing could mimic the effects of prescribed fire.
- ❑ Consider enhancing pollinator habitat along field borders.
- ❑ Design any cover areas so that the maximum edge can be maintained. Many open-country wildlife species prefer edges, so this can be an excellent way to maximize wildlife benefits from relatively small acreages of permanent cover.
- ❑ To provide cover and food for upland game, big game, and non-game species, plant shrubs and trees in gullies, draws, eyebrows, and as windbreaks. Windbreaks with five or more rows are the most effective; ten rows are ideal.
- ❑ In areas where water may be limited, water cisterns or “guzzlers” may provide a year-round water source for upland birds and small mammals.



Mule Deer



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WILDLIFE CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONVERTING CRP TO GRAZING LAND

- ❑ Develop a rest rotation grazing system so that a portion of each field retains valuable cover for wildlife in any given year. In addition, you may want to permanently fence in certain cover patches. This is especially important for upland game birds.
- ❑ Develop water sources in a way that will benefit both livestock and wildlife. For example, placing water sources no more than a half-mile apart will benefit upland birds.
- ❑ Many of the wildlife practices listed for farming of CRP will also be useful on most livestock operations. Because CRP lands are highly variable, it's important to remember that wildlife enhancement techniques will differ with each site. Consult your local ODFW or NRCS representative for more information on specific habitat needs, other improvement methods, and funding sources to enhance wildlife on post-CRP land.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

The following links provide more information on habitat considerations and requirements for specific species.

Elk: http://bit.ly/elk_habitat

Mule deer: http://bit.ly/muledeer_habitat

Ring-necked pheasant: http://bit.ly/pheasant_habitat

Grassland birds: http://bit.ly/grasslandbirds_habitat

Bats: http://bit.ly/bats_habitat

Pollinators: http://bit.ly/pollinators_habitat

Butterflies: http://bit.ly/butterflies_habitat

Artificial nesting structures: <http://bit.ly/artificialnests>