

## Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (PA CREP)

### Reducing Mowing to Benefit Wildlife – Fact Sheet



Early fall cover following rotational mowing



Winter and early spring cover following rotational mowing

### PA CREP

The Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (PA CREP) is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that started in 2000. In addition to the standard objective of reducing soil erosion on cropland, PA CREP has two other primary objectives: improving water quality and improving wildlife habitat. The wildlife habitat objective is targeted specifically to grassland habitats for declining grassland dependent wildlife. This fact sheet addresses mowing to achieve this wildlife habitat objective.

### Mowing & Wildlife Habitat

Targeted wildlife depends on grassland habitat for nesting and rearing their young. The nesting and brood-rearing season for grassland birds ranges from the beginning of April through July across Pennsylvania. Nest destruction from haying and mowing during these months is the primary reason for the 75 - 80% decline of many grassland bird populations in Pennsylvania over the past forty years.

Mowing is **not** required in PA CREP. Mowing is only necessary to either help establish the desired vegetation or to help control the invasion of trees and shrubs. When mowing specifically to help control the invasion of trees and shrubs, delaying mowing and

then mowing only a portion of a field in any given year benefits wildlife.

### Establishment vs. Maintenance

For most land enrolled in PA CREP there are two distinct management periods. The first is when a new seeding or planting is being established, and the second management period begins once the new vegetation is established. These are referred to as the Establishment Period and the Maintenance Period. However, there are some grasslands enrolled where the desired vegetation is already established. These fields require only maintenance management for the entire life of PA CREP contract. Recent contracts include cost-shared Mid-Contract Management activities and will usually not need any mowing in addition to the Mid-Contract Management activities. PA CREP Participants with older contracts can have Mid-Contract Management activities added to their contracts.

The information in this fact sheet will be divided into mowing during the Establishment Period where applicable, and mowing during the Maintenance Period. There are **NO RESTRICTIONS** on the timing and frequency of mowing during the Establishment Period, only some restrictions on mowing **height**. There **ARE RESTRICTIONS** on both the timing and frequency of mowing during the Maintenance Period.