

CRP — Back to the Basics

In the last several months, CRP sign up has continued to be a driving force in creating wildlife habitat throughout my counties and the rest of the state. One of the biggest hurdles for producers to cross comes after they sign the dotted line on their conservation plan; successful establishment of their new CRP. While we do our best in the field office to explain program details during the sign up process, much of the detail can fade by the time comes to put seed in the ground. Beyond that, many landowners are participating in USDA conservation programs for the first time and are unsure of how to prepare the ground for natives, proper planting procedures, and the importance of establishment mowing.



Myself and CDI Private Lands Wildlife Specialist, Matt McClanahan, talk in Onawa about working with seed vendors.



DNR Private Lands Biologist Kathy Koskovich presents concepts about prescribed fire and burn planning.

Twice this quarter I was part of teams that included staff from IDNR, FSA, NRCS, The Nature Conservancy, CDI, and local SWCDs that looked to educate producers about program requirements and best management practices. In Monona County on February 23rd we hosted **38 producers**, farm managers, and landowners at the Onawa community center, and on March 22nd at the Afton community center in Woodbury County another **32** attended such an event. It was an excellent chance to shine a light on the many small steps that lead to successful CRP and to continue to provide excellent customer service to those undertaking conservation on private land.

Practice	Total Acres
CP21—Filter Strip	8.08
CP23—Wetland Restoration	188.79
CP38—SAFE Gaining Ground	168.77
CP38—SAFE Early Successional Quail Habitat	125.55
Total	491.19 ac

166.73 acres in the Loess Hills



Thank you to all our partners!

River City Expo

The annual River City Expo in Council Bluffs was a great opportunity to talk to hundreds of landowners about habitat projects and USDA programs. For my second year I helped put together a USDA booth for this event. We had lots of conversations about managing invasive species, providing habitat for pollinators and wildlife, and planting natives.



Talking with a landowner at the River City Expo

Fire Season in Southwest Iowa

While the flames of fire used for land management and CRP mid-contract management are short lived, the planning process that comes before dropping a match can be quite long. In March a large effort to implement prescribed fire that was in the planning process for over a year, known as Cooperative Burn Week, was carried out in Southwest Iowa. Coordination and burn unit preparation for this annual event was provided by The Nature Conservancy, IDNR, Conservation Corps of Iowa, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Loess Hills Alliance and private landowners.

Cooperative burn week focused on providing training opportunities for local fire practitioners, fostered interagency cooperation, accomplishing goal driven burns, and promoting the use of fire in management for both public and private lands. Several burn units included were CRP mid-contract management burns on private lands that bordered INHF holdings, ultimately providing management of habitat complexes. The event provided ample outreach opportunities to talk with local landowners and promote the use of fire in their own land management activities.



CRP MCM burn on private land in the Loess Hills of Monona County.

Improving Habitat — Brome to Natives

Cool season grasses like Brome provide little benefit to wildlife, so for landowners looking to improve habitat for birds, pollinators, and other animals, converting to natives is a crucial step in meeting their goals. In some cases producers looking to re-enroll CRP may have no choice but to convert from brome to natives to meet the standards of the practices currently available.

Ensuring landowners are successful with conversions like this leads to less headaches for them, and makes adoption of native plantings more likely. A little planning up front can save them 10 years of competing with brome in their native stands.

Many landowners need guidance in this process; a single herbicide spray is rarely completely effective. The best management practice would be to mow in the late summer and treat the regrowth with an herbicide application prior to brome dormancy in the fall. As brome begins to green again in the spring, it is easy to identify areas that were missed in the first application. The second spraying is typically ideal to get full coverage on any brome that remains.



The spring after a fall mow and herbicide application reveals areas where the brome persists



Brome stand successfully killed after a second herbicide application in the spring

By the Numbers

Interaction Type	FY17 Qtr. 3
Phone call or email	93
Meeting (walk-in)	16
Meeting (scheduled)	18
Site visits	31
Habitat Proposals	17
Total	175

Trainings	Outcomes
S-131 Firefighter Type 1 Training	Course focused on taking a leadership role on the fire line, reinforced accountability, promoted documentation, and having contingency plans in place.
S-219 Firing Operations	Course focused on tools used to start fire, understanding weather as it relates to fire, and ignitions sequencing; all very important to writing safe and effective burn plans.