

CRP Signup 52

While interest wasn't quite as high as in previous signups, there was still plenty of work to do to get all my offices to the CRP finish line. With lots of staffing changes since the last signup, I worked to help get new staff acclimated to working with the program. We covered everything from what kind of notes we should be taking at field visits, how to complete conservation plans, what topics to discuss with landowners regarding mid-contract management, and much more. With so many moving parts between FSA, NRCS, and other partner staff working on CRP, it was imperative that we spent the time to ensure that we were all on the same page.

The effects of flooding were still front and center for many producers in western Iowa during this signup. Unplanted fields and drown outs were a reminder to consider removing unprofitable wet acres from production. Many CP21 Filter Strips, CP23 floodplain wetland restorations, and CP27/28 farmable wetlands were reenrolled, and we received several new applications for those practices as well. Overall that means less problem acres for these producers, and improved water quality for all of us. 



Top: This field experienced significant stress from flooding this spring. Stunted corn helps delineate where the CRP boundary should be contracted for this CP23 application.



Bottom: This field has a former oxbow depression in Monona County experiences drown outs often, a perfect fit for CP23.

CRP Practices Used	Acres Impacted
CP9 (Shallow Water Areas)	4.96
CP21 (Filter Strip)	65.62
CP23 (Wetland Restoration)	562.96
CP27 (Farmable Wetlands)	25.97
CP28 (Wetland Buffer)	71.7
Total	731.21

Contacts & Habitat Projects
121 Landowner Contacts
8 Site Visits with Producers
4 Workshops & Outreach Events
79 Habitat Projects (Habitat proposals, seeding, burn, and conservation plans)



Thank you to all our partners!

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Brush Be Gone

In grasslands, brush can be a constant battle. Moisture and temperature regimes in Iowa are just right, that if left unchecked, volunteer woody plants readily colonize. Controlling woody plants can be intimidating, especially if there has been a multiple year lapse in management. Trees are like most other problems in life: if you ignore them, they only get bigger.

Working through the DNR's State Wildlife Grant, Restoring Royalties, I've been working with several landowners to clear brush from remnant prairies in the Loess Hills to improve habitat for Monarch and Regal Fritillary butterflies. The Loess Hills landform is Iowa's most intact habitat area in the state, and has over 50% of the state's remaining tall grass prairie remnants.



Left: Incredibly tall sumac before brush management. **Right:** The hillside after Sumac and Dogwood removal. Common Milkweed was among the many plants that responded to this management.

One project in Pottawattamie County was overrun with Sumac and Dogwood, some of which was nearly 15 feet tall! Under the canopy of shrubs, wherever sunlight could hit the ground, there was a stronghold of native prairie plants like leadplant, prairie sage, and other remnant indicator species

While the task of removing these shrubs was daunting, there was much to be gained. Utilizing a Fecon forestry mower the farm tenant was able to shred the brush. This machine can mulch a tree up to 8 inches in diameter. Using the Fecon in combination with a trackhoe provided plenty of reach for the mower head, and the tracks minimized the ground disturbance.

On a follow site visit, the results were impressive. While the mechanical removal didn't kill most of the brush, it significantly set it back. Most importantly it opened up more management options for continued maintenance. I found a Prairie Violet in bloom among the plants emerging from the woodchips, a crucial species for the Regal Fritillary. Typically a spring bloom, it appeared this plant was waiting for the magic ingredient – sunlight. 🦋

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