

RIM HAYING AND GRAZING AGREEMENT FORM GUIDANCE

PURPOSE

Haying and grazing can be valuable tools for managing and enhancing the quality of restored and remnant grasslands. Both are economically friendly options for landowners and can be used in areas where prescribed burns are difficult or dangerous to conduct. Haying and grazing can also be an effective tool for woody species control and managing early-successional habitat.

The RIM Haying and Grazing Agreement Form should be used when landowners are requesting approval for the use of haying and/or grazing as a habitat management tool. Approval will depend on current site conditions, soil type, topography, site history, timing, as well as landowner interest and abilities.

Continuous grazing on RIM easements where the terms of the easement do not allow continuous grazing is not allowed and these requests will not be considered. The majority of RIM easements prohibit continuous grazing as a term of the easement, and grazing on those easements will only be allowed on a limited, rotational basis through a RIM Grazing Agreement Form approved by the State. The easement terms and conditions should be reviewed if grazing provisions are unclear. Easements with a working lands component that allows continuous grazing are reviewed via a separate process. RIM easements where continuous grazing is allowed as part of the easement terms require a certified Grazing Plan that meets NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 528 Prescribed Grazing.

It should be made clear to landowners that the allowance to hay or graze RIM easements is for habitat management purposes only. While landowners can benefit financially from these activities, haying or grazing should not be depended on as a continual, guaranteed source of forage or pasture.

This document is meant to be used as general guidance for SWCDs working with landowners and not meant to be interpreted as absolute timelines or strategies. Experience and landowner goals may vary, and plans seeking more dynamic timelines and strategies can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. **SWCD staff are encouraged to reach out to [Easement Program Managers](#) to discuss haying and grazing plans that may deviate from the general guidance in this document.**

EASEMENT OWNERSHIP, CONSERVATION PLAN, AND ON-SITE CONCERNS

Prior to the approval of any Haying or Grazing Agreement, easement ownership must be up to date and any on-site concerns must be addressed. [Ownership Change Forms](#) should be submitted to BWSR with a recorded deed, and an updated [Conservation Plan Workbook](#) with the current landowner's signature must be completed. Any existing compliance concerns must be resolved. Easements that require boundary posting should be posted before making a request to be considered in compliance. Boundary posting is encouraged on all easements before submitting Haying and/or Grazing Agreement Forms.

Landowners should understand that if easement ownership changes during an active Haying or Grazing Agreement, the Agreement does not transfer to the new landowner. A new Haying or Grazing Agreement will need to be developed, reviewed, and approved.

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH HAYING AND GRAZING

Cost-share from BWSR is not available for haying and/or grazing. Any associated costs are at the landowner's expense. Landowners may utilize assistance from other non-state programs, if available. Installation of grazing infrastructure must be approved by BWSR.

The landowner is responsible for all work included in the Agreement, regardless of use of contractor or cooperator. Any damage to the easement shall be corrected at the landowner's expense. This includes costs associated with, but not limited to, re-seeding areas damaged by livestock traffic or rutting due to heavy machinery.

DEVELOPING A HAYING OR GRAZING PLAN

SWCD staff developing haying or grazing plans should first assist landowners in identifying a management goal. The management goal can be used as a starting point to determine appropriate management timing and type. Current site conditions, soil type, topography, site history, and landowner interest and abilities should be considered. The following table can be used to begin identifying the ideal timing and management type based on the landowner's goal(s). The table should only be used as a guidance tool, and plans are not limited to these goals and timelines.

Note that prescribed burning is also an effective management tool, but approval from BWSR is not needed. Appropriate permits must be obtained by the landowner prior to performance of a prescribed burn. Follow appropriate NRCS practice standards for prescribed burning. SWCDs are highly encouraged to note burning activities in the easement file.

Table 1 – Timing of haying or grazing based on management goal.

Management goal:	Suppress cool-season grasses	Suppress warm-season grasses	Enhance forb diversity	Brush management	Reduce litter layer
Haying	Late spring Fall	Summer	Late summer	Active growth stage (determined by species)	Any time
Grazing	Late spring Early fall	Summer	Summer Fall	Mid- to late-summer, multiple instances (depends on woody species and livestock type)	Any time

Once the timing and type of management have been selected, the actual management areas can be identified. Generally, haying or grazing will be done no more frequently than once every third year, with no more than one third of the acreage managed each year. In some cases, it may not be practical to manage smaller sites in stages, especially if they are within or adjacent to a larger habitat complex. Alternatively, the unique nature of vegetation or wildlife within a site may require the site to be managed in more than three stages. Examples of a variety of haying and grazing plans are shown at the end of this guidance and can be used as reference when developing management areas.

Landowners seeking approval for consecutive haying or grazing plans will be given additional consideration when management timing and type is varied.

Haying or grazing can be valuable tools when preparing a site for inter-seeding and are allowed with an approved Haying or Grazing Agreement. This should be noted in the Agreement form.

Partner organizations such as Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, NRCS, and USFWS may have grazing specialists available to also assist in the development of haying and/or grazing plans.

HAYING AND GRAZING RIM EASEMENTS WITH USDA CONTRACTS

Haying and/or grazing of stand-alone RIM easements that have an active CRP or WRP contract **may** be eligible for haying and/or grazing. Landowners must seek approval from FSA and/or NRCS, and written approval must be attached to the Agreement Form. The Work Plan must meet RIM haying and/or grazing standards. Approval from FSA and/or NRCS does not guarantee approval from BWSR.

EMERGENCY HAYING AND GRAZING

Haying and grazing of RIM-only easements during a state- or federal-declared emergency may be allowed. During these times, unless guidance has been otherwise given from BWSR, Agreements should be submitted for approval via the regular submission process.

Land acquired with money appropriated from the Outdoor Heritage Fund may **not** be used for emergency haying and grazing in response to federal or state disaster declarations. If unsure of the funding of an easement, staff should reach out to Easement Section staff.

Emergency haying or grazing may be allowed on RIM-only easements with active CRP or WRP contracts but must seek approval from BWSR before implementation and RIM standards must be met.

Emergency and non-emergency haying or grazing is not allowed on CREP III easements with active CRP contracts.

SUBMITTING A HAYING OR GRAZING AGREEMENT FORM

Completed Haying and Grazing Agreement Forms, associated maps, and all other relevant materials should be submitted to the RIM Inbox (bwsr.rim@state.mn.us). Upon review, Program Managers may request changes to the proposed Agreement. SWCDs can generally expect a response within two weeks of submission. Out-of-date ownership and Conservation Plans as well as compliance and boundary concerns must be addressed before Agreements can be approved and this may delay the review process.

POST-MANAGEMENT SITE REVIEW

In-person site reviews should be completed following each management activity to ensure the Agreement schedule and stubble heights are being followed. Ideally, multiple site visits after management should be done to assess vegetative response. These reviews can better guide future management requests. Photographic documentation is encouraged. Completed Haying and Grazing Agreements that show a documented record of success for specific management goals will be given additional consideration for approval.

HAYING AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT AREA EXAMPLES



Example 1 – This larger easement has been broken up into three separate management areas (in orange, yellow, and blue hashing). The management areas have been clearly labelled with management year, type, and acres.



Example 2 – This is a smaller easement (outlined in red) where terrain, tree plantings, and a watercourse make multiple management areas difficult. The entire easement will be grazed in one instance.



Example 3 – The wetland area (in blue hashing) is being excluded from haying, while the rest of the easement (outlined in red) is being hayed in one instance due to adjacency to existing habitat.