

## **Guidance for Allowing Hay Harvest on State Land**

From Frank Trcka/Alan Crossley

**Fields Previously Scheduled for Hay Sale:** In the case where we have hay fields previously scheduled for harvest (most likely marsh hay contracts), those contracts should be implemented as planned and should not be made available free-of-charge under the drought emergency.

**All Other DNR Grass Fields:** All other DNR-owned grass fields can be considered for harvest under the following conditions:

- Harvest of cool-season grass fields may begin any time after July 15 and must end by August 30. (This avoids the primary nesting period for grassland nesting birds and allows enough time – provided we get rain, for the fields to recover). Residual growth after August 30 is important for providing nesting cover the following spring and some semblance of huntable cover for the fall hunting season.
- Warm-season grass fields should be harvested between July 15 and August 10. Past experience has suggested that cutting warm-season grass/forb fields after August 10 can damage the seedlings. Individual property managers should have the flexibility to alter these dates based on the soils, species composition, and dormancy of the stand. Cutting height for warm-season fields should be at least 6”.
- Fields slated for fall seed harvest will not be harvested for hay.
- Only one cutting per field is allowed
- Property managers should generally restrict harvest to 20 acres per farmer to spread the opportunity among interested parties. However, property managers can exceed that amount based on availability of forage and demand.
- Property managers should strive to leave at least 25% of the grass-base on the property as fall hunting cover.
- Haybine operators must access Department property using existing access drives and field roads.
- Hay should not be stored on Department properties.
- To minimize the spread of weeds, prior to moving equipment onto and off of a Department property, equipment should be cleaned using the most practical method available (i.e. scraping, brushing, washing, high pressure air, etc.) High pressure air could be used to remove dust and chaff from the working parts of haying equipment. This will help minimize the spread of weeds while helping to reduce the chance of starting a wildfire.
- Grazing may also be allowed where current fences are in place. Farmers willing to install and remove temporary electric fences may also graze cattle.
- Property managers should follow grassland protocol which covers mowing and grazing activities. We are at the point in the season where most of the species would not be impacted. The link to the grassland protocol is: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ERReview/ItGrasslands.html>
- Brian Pillsbury (NRCS Grazing specialist) recommends 60 animal unit days/acre as the maximum stocking rate. An animal unit is equivalent to a 1000 pound animal. If you allow a farmer to graze for 30 days, you can allow 2 animal units (2 beef cows or 2 dry Holsteins) to graze each acre for 30 days (2 animal units x 30 days = 60 animal unit days). Grazing windows should end by August 30 or when the residual is 6 inches in warm-season grass or 3 inches in cool season grass (whichever comes first).
- Hay harvest and grazing should be handled on a first-come, first served basis.
- The Department will not collect a fee for these fields (fees will only be collected for those fields previously scheduled for Hay Sale as agreed upon in the hay contract).

- Participating farmers must sign an agreement specifying that they will use hay from state land for their own livestock and may not sell it. Form 2200-143 and the additional conditions listed shall be used for this purpose.
- A copy of the completed sale agreement should be sent to Alan Crossley, DNR – WM/6, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707.

**Reducing Risk of Grass Fires and Spread of Weeds from Haying:** To minimize the risk of fire and the spread of weeds from hay harvest operations, property managers should provide a copy of Hay Emergency Additional Guidelines – July 2012 to each person that receives a hay harvest permit.

Other resources:

CRP Hay and Grazing Fact Sheet: [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/haygrazefactsheetfinal.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/haygrazefactsheetfinal.pdf)

FSA Emergency Haying and Grazing Website:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=copr&topic=crp-eg>

Grassland Birds: Fostering Habitats Using Rotational Grazing (A3715):

<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/A3715.pdf>

Pastures for Profit: A guide to rotational grazing: <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/A3529.pdf>

You can find average weights for various types of stock on page 29 of this publication if you need some help in estimating an animal unit (1000 pounds)