



Habitat Management Technical Guidance Sheet

Native Warm Season Grass

NWSG Benefits

Native warm season grasses (NWSG) provide excellent summer forage for livestock. Compared to tall fescue, they can produce double the tonnage, are more palatable, are better adapted to dry summer conditions, and need less fertilizer or lime to perform well. When properly hayed or grazed, NWSG provide quail & other wildlife with winter cover as well as excellent nesting & brood habitat. North Carolina farms that include NWSG in their livestock operations can ensure against forage losses due to summer drought and help restore small game habitat.

Establishment

NWSG can be established through conventional tillage or with a no-till drill. Weed competition is minimized by no-till planting into killed sod, making it the method of choice. To convert tall fescue to NWSG, first hay or closely graze the site in Sept, and spray the re-growth with a 1-2% glyphosate & nonionic surfactant solution in October. Burn the site in Feb-March to remove duff. Re-spray any live fescue in April. No-till into dead sod in late May-June. Set the drill to a depth of no more than ¼ inch. Seed at 4-6 pounds of pure live seed (PLS) for wildlife and 8-12 pounds PLS for hay or pasture.

If conventional tillage must be used, kill fescue as described above, and then prepare a smooth firm seedbed by disking and cultipacking. Use a drop spreader for smooth or debarbed fluffy seed. Use a drill with a NWSG seed box for fluffy seed or mix fluffy seed with pelletized lime and stir frequently if planted with conventional equipment. Do not cover NWSG seed, but cultipack after seeding. Do not apply nitrogen at or before planting time. Control competition using appropriate herbicides.

On a good site with adequate rainfall, NWSG can be fully established by the first fall, and grazed the following summer. With less than optimum conditions, some stands may take up to two years to mature.

Grazing & Haying

Summer grazing of NWSG stands from mid-May through mid-August can provide approximately 2 lbs. of weight gain per day for the period (with four steers per acre). Grazing pressure should be monitored so that a 12" minimum of stubble is retained.

NWSG should be cut for hay in the late boot stage. Leave 8" of stubble to provide leaf surface for rapid regrowth, maintain stand vigor, and reduce weed problems.

Burning

NWSG benefits from being burned around the time it initiates growth in early spring. A controlled burn every three to four years will improve livestock palatability, reduce woody plant and cool season grass encroachment, and improve wildlife habitat.

Additional Information:

A landowners Guide to Native Warm Season Grasses in the Mid-South
<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1746.pdf>



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