

Grassland Evaluation for Wildlife Habitat

Objective: Evaluate a specific grassland for its value to cottontail rabbits and bobwhite quail.

A grassland manager who is interested in both livestock and wildlife production must be able to recognize the habitat requirements of both. Remembering that fences do not confine wild animals is important. Cover such as brush piles and shrubby thickets may be located in areas next to the grassland while additional food and cover can be provided within the grassland unit.

The following factors are considered when evaluating a specific tract of grassland, pasture, or hay field. The objective of this exercise is to identify limiting factors that can be overcome to improve the habitat for rabbits and quail.

Directions: Evaluate the quality of a grassland chosen by your instructor. A field or pasture unit should be rated on the conditions within the fenced area only. An aerial photograph of a specific grassland unit may be helpful in identifying habitat components in adjacent fields. A brief explanation follows each appraisal category.

Appraisal of Existing Conditions

1. _____ Extent of border

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A. No border (<i>see note</i>) | D. Border along three sides |
| B. Border along one side | E. Border around entire field |
| C. Border along two sides | |

(A border cannot exist under grazing (pasture) conditions, since livestock graze from fence row to fence row. The field being appraised is the area that is being grazed between the fences that enclose it. For this category, ignore any vegetation that is outside the fenced area being grazed. Habitat components in adjacent fields will be evaluated separately within that field.)

2. ____ Percent of field covered by winter or escape cover
- A. No cover is present
(The field is lacking any usable thickets, blackberry patches, or dense brushy cover.)
 - B. One to 10% of the field has winter/escape cover
(This amount of cover is considered marginal and is valuable to wildlife only if livestock have not trampled and grazed through it. Look into the thicket to see if a rabbit could escape from its predators or if they could pass through it easily.)
 - C. Field is less than 10 acres in size
(Choose this category only if the fence rows consist of very dense escape cover as described in "B" above. If not, select "A," since this field would be of little value to wildlife for escape cover.)
3. ____ Percent canopy coverage of shrubs and herbaceous vegetation 6 to 18 inches tall
- A. Less than 25% coverage
 - B. 26% to 75% coverage
 - C. More than 76% coverage
4. ____ Grazing pressure
- A. Heavy
(The stocking rate is heavy, leaving forage that is less than 3 inches in height.)
 - B. Moderate
(The forage is 3 to 8 inches in height.)
 - C. Light
(The stocking rate is light, leaving tall forage on the unit.)
 - D. Rotational
(Paddocks or grazing cells have been established to allow the rotation of livestock.)
5. ____ Percent of ground covered or shaded by legumes
- A. 5% or less
 - B. 6% to 50%
 - C. 51% or more
6. ____ Plant composition
- A. Tall fescue *(more than 90%)*
 - B. Mixed cool-season grass *(10% or less legumes)*
 - C. Cool-season grass dominant *(10% to 25% legumes)*
 - D. Cool-season grass and legumes *(26% to 60% legumes)*
 - E. Legumes dominant *(75% or more legumes)*
 - F. Warm-season grasses dominant *(25% or less other species)*

7. ____ Distance from center of field to edge of nearest crop field

- A. More than 500 feet to crop field
- B. 250 to 499 feet to chiseled or disked crop field
- C. Less than 249 feet to chiseled or disked crop field
- D. 250 to 500 feet to crop field with no fall tillage or with winter wheat crop
- E. Less than 249 feet to crop field with no fall tillage or with winter wheat crop

8. ____ Percent of grazing unit that is within 250 feet of dense woody cover or ungrazed woodland

- A. Less than 25%
- B. 26% to 50%
- C. 51% to 75%
- D. 76% to 100%