

Managing Grassland Habitat at The Trustees

July 12, 2023

- The Trustees uses their extensive network of grasslands to benefit the suite of grassland dependent species that are declining regionally and statewide. Specifically, grassland birds, rare species and native plant and invertebrate diversity.
- The Trustees owns and manages grassland and field habitats to support ecological, scenic, cultural, and agricultural resources. In some cases, an individual field may have just one management goal, while others may achieve multiple objectives. Across our portfolio of grassland/field habitats we manage for grassland bird habitat, rare plants, hay production, pastures for livestock, and crop production.
- As stated in our Ecological Management of Grasslands: Guidelines for Managers, “As a starting point in developing a grassland management plan, The Trustees will first consider the ecological values of the grassland and, based on the guidelines set forth in this report, will develop programs to promote the protection of those ecological values. However, via a consistent decision-making process, one or a combination of the other values (i.e., historical, cultural, economic) may suggest a management program that is less than ecologically ideal.”
- Ecological significance of grasslands may depend on grassland birds, rare species or notable concentrations of native species diversity. While certain grasslands have disproportionate significance for some species, it is the collection and extent of the habitat collectively that allows The Trustees to have impact at the state level.
- Grasslands are open habitats primarily free of trees and woody plants where graminoids and other herbaceous plants dominate including hayfields, pastures and meadows. Lawn is not considered “grassland habitat”.
- Grassland habitats in the northeast are typically a result of human management (e.g. farming) and need to be periodically mowed/cut/harvested in order to be maintained as this habitat. Some grasslands can be mowed or grazed annually, others less frequently. Removal of mowed material is preferred to encourage grass growth. No one type of grassland management will meet the needs of all grassland species.
- The Trustees manages grasslands using staff as well as support from local farmers. Staff and equipment availability, support of local agriculture, and the goals for a field are the factors that determine who and how a field will be cut/grazed. Each field is unique.
- The Trustees monitor field characteristics in light of goals for a field to determine if management activities are meeting the goals or need to be changed. For instance, if a field is becoming dominated by forbs and therefore less productive as a habitat for grassland birds, mowing times may shift temporarily to improve the structure and composition of the field. Volunteer grassland bird monitors help support our monitoring efforts at some fields.

