



Cultural Grassland

- Community Code:** CT2B2A1000
- State Rank:** SNR
- Map:** No Cultural Grasslands are documented in the NHESP database.
- Concept:** Requiring high maintenance, these communities usually result from plowing and sowing non-native grasses. They are normally maintained by frequent mowing and are primarily of conservation interest for the grassland bird community. The concept ideal for this community is pastures and hayfields: fields that are, or were recently, cultivated. Old fields, lands that were cleared and left to succession, usually contain more broad-leaved species than are intended in this concept.
- Environmental Setting:** Cultural Grasslands as a classification unit are intended to be grasslands that are cultivated or the results of cultivation, dominated by non-native agricultural grasses, maintained for pasture or hayfields; some airport grasslands and cemeteries with planted grasses would be included in the type. Cultural Grasslands occur in all areas of the state on a variety of soils, and surroundings reflect the regional variations. Most Cultural Grasslands are mowed at least annually to maintain the grassland stage. Hayfields have fewest native species, but some support grassland birds which are the primary conservation interest in Cultural Grasslands.
- Vegetation Description:** Cultural Grasslands are dominated by planted, non-native grasses such as timothy (*Phleum pratense*), orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), and redtop (*Agrostis gigantea*). Pastures and hayfields provide different habitats and support different species of plants and animals.
- Differentiating Occurrences:** Cultural Grasslands as a classification unit are intended to be grasslands that are cultivated or the results of cultivation dominated by non-native agricultural grasses. Old fields, lands that were cleared and cultivated, then left to succession, usually contain more broad-leaved species than are intended in the cultural grassland concept (pastures and hayfields were the models). Sandplain Grasslands - Inland Variant and Sandplain Grasslands are dominated by native grasses, often the distinctive little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). Sandplain Heathlands and Sandplain Heathlands - Inland Variant are dominated by native shrubs and look shrubbier than grasslands, with a shrub layer comprised of scrub oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*), and/or lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium* and/or *V. pallidum*) which may be dominant.
- Associated Fauna:** Distance to the coast and size of the grassland strongly affect the species that use pastures and hayfields. Many species of birds that use grasslands are more common in the midwestern prairies and agricultural fields. Grassland birds are found in a variety of habitats: for example, Bobolinks (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) in taller grasses found in hayfields and Eastern Meadowlarks (*Sturnella magna*) in shorter grasses found in pastures. Other grassland birds include Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) and



Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*). Meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), meadow jumping mice (*Zapus hudsonius*), and northern short-tailed shrews (*Blarina brevicauda*) would be expected in most grasslands. They would be hunted by garter snakes (*Thamnophis sirtalis*), long-tailed weasels (*Mustela frenata*), American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*), and wintering Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*), Snowy Owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*), and Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*). Some of the lepidopteran fauna of Sandplain Grasslands would make use of Cultural Grasslands. Hayfields may attract grassland birds, but depending on the mowing schedule, may be population sinks when young are not able to fledge before mowing.

Public Access:

Not tracked by NHESP.

Threats:

Mowing too early for birds to fledge.

Management Needs:

USNVC/NatureServe:

Related to: System: Semi-natural/Altered Vegetation and Conifer Plantations (CES203.074): Northeastern Old Field: CEGLO06107 - *Dactylis glomerata* - *Phleum pratense* - *Festuca* spp. - *Solidago* spp. Herbaceous Vegetation.