

East Polk SWCD
240 Cleveland Ave
PO Box 57
McIntosh, MN 56556

Phone: 218-563-2777
www.eastpolkswcd.org



Contacts

Local County Feedlot Contacts

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PO BOX 57
McIntosh MN 56556
218-563-2777



MPCA Area Offices

Detroit Lakes: 218-847-1519
Metro: 651-296-6300

Brainerd: 218-828-2492
Toll-Free Number: 800-657-3864

Duluth: 218-723-4660



Polk County Feedlot News

Volume 22 • Issue 1

Local Feedlot Updates

Recent registration cycle was completed in December 2021. Eligible registered feedlots in Polk County numbered at 47. Significantly lower than previous registration cycles which was above 70. This number indicates feedlots that meet the minimum requirements set by the MPCA. The requirements for eligibility is to have 10 or more AU (animal units) if within Shorelands or 50 or more AU in all other cases. The significant drop in eligible feedlots is attributed to recent year stressors, such as drought and flooding. That resulted in high hay prices and a delayed start to the growing season of grains and other feed sources. These recent year stressor have impacted many farm and cause many small operations to reduce livestock numbers. The drop in livestock kept in each feedlot dropped the overall number of qualifying feedlots, many no longer met the 50 animal unit minimum to be still considered a qualifying feedlot. However, over a hundred feedlots were recorded within Polk county, many below the qualifying standards in 2021 but show the potential to grow and qualify in upcoming registration years.



Upcoming Deadlines

NRCS—Natural Resources Conservation Service

Local Contact: Laura Schnapp | District Conservationist—218-563-2475 | laura.schnapp@usda.gov

- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) General Signup: **February 10th 2023**
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): Continuous Signup is Ongoing
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program: Accepting Applications Year-round

USFWS—US Fish & Wildlife Services

Local Contact: Gregg Knutsen | Refuge Manager — 218-686-4329 | gregg_knutsen@fws.gov

- 3yr Grazing Contract on Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge: **Bidding Scheduled to Open January/February**
- 1yr Haying Contract on Rydell National Wildlife Refuge: **Bidding Scheduled to Open July/August**

East Polk SWCD

Local Contact: Jenna Simonson | District Technician—218-563-2777 | wiersma.eastpolk@gmail.com

- Tree Orders due: **February 17th 2023**
- Next Feedlot Registration Cycle ends: December 31st 2025

Air Quality Improvements Due to CRP

CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) is a federal land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The program is aimed at re-establishing valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce the loss of wildlife habitat. A voluntary program in which landowners can opt in to placing an area of land into fallow and receive yearly payments in exchange.

A new study published in the journal *GeoHealth*, is the first to quantify air quality in terms of life-saving benefits. The study found that areas with more acres of land set aside through CRP had lower levels of fine particulate matter. Using data from 2,300 counties, the researchers cross-referenced national public health data from 2001–2016 with each county’s percentage of arable land enrolled in CRP.

Fine particulate matter, or PM2.5, refers to particles no more than 2.5 micrometers in diameter. The particles are small enough to cause inflammation that leads to asthma, heart and respiratory diseases, and several cancers. This mixture often consists of dust, fossil fuel emissions, and the volatile organic compounds applied to farmlands. Ammonia from fertilizers, for example, breaks down to form fine particulate compounds. And when tractors and other heavy machinery till the soil it reduces plant cover, increasing wind-blown dust. Droughts also has a high impact on PM2.5 levels and often increases PM2.5 levels within the air. But the researchers found that areas with more CRP acreage also saw fewer deaths “and many billions of dollars saved via those prevented deaths,” the study reads.

In 2008, when CRP acreage was 35 million acres, the authors estimate there were 1,300 fewer deaths than would have occurred if all the land had been farmed. Placing the value of a statistical life at \$7 million (a bit less than the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) recommendation), CRP saved roughly \$9.5 billion.

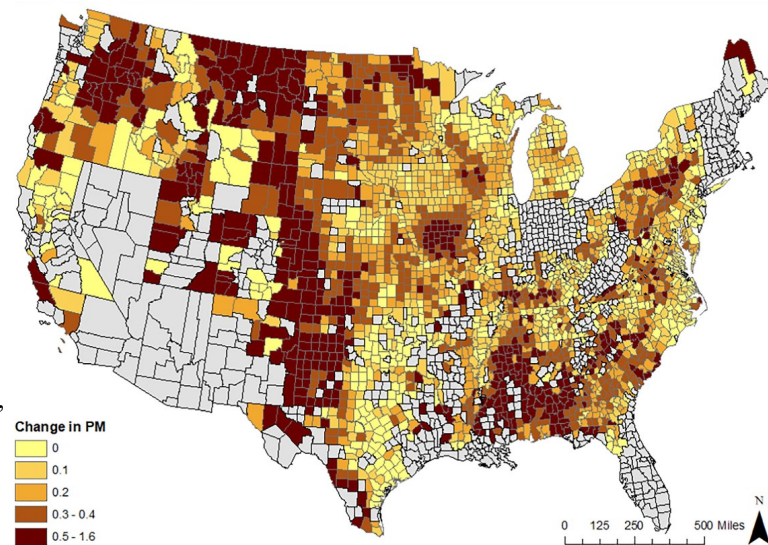
“Our findings represent the real possibility that [the program] could pay for itself many times over just based on one small component—reduced fine particulate matter concentration,” says study co-author Douglas Becker, a postdoctoral economist at the University of Idaho in Moscow. In fiscal year 2021, about 20.5 million acres were registered as part of CRP, costing the USDA roughly \$1.8 billion per year. Given his preliminary estimated public health savings, “CRP could be a mind-bogglingly efficient program,” he adds.

While the air-quality benefits were not an intended goal of CRP, the findings shed further light on the impacts of intensive agricultural practices. “The key takeaway is that the air quality improvements are due to the absence of [agricultural] production,” says Michael Happ, who was not involved in the study and works on climate and rural communities at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP).

Last year, the World Health Organization updated their air quality guidelines for PM2.5—it is not to exceed 5 mg/m3 for annual mean concentrations—citing air pollution as one of the biggest environmental threats to human health. The EPA’s National Ambient Air Quality annual average standard for PM2.5 is 12 mg/m3—a limit that the agency is currently reconsidering after an independent panel called for the national standard to be lowered to 8–10.

Becker, D. A., Maas, A., Bayham, J., & Crooks, J. (2022). The unintended benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program for Air Quality. *GeoHealth*, 6(10). <https://doi.org/10.1029/2022gh000648>

Gewin, V. (2022, November 3). *Leaving some farmland fallow benefits the air we breathe*. Civil Eats. Retrieved November 29, 2022, from <https://civileats.com/2022/11/02/conserving-farmland-also-benefits-the-air-we-breathe/>



Conservation Grazing Dept. of Agriculture

What is Conservation Grazing?

Conservation grazing uses managed livestock grazing to improve and maintain wildlife and plant habitat. Grazing – along with burning and haying – provide the ecological disturbances that are necessary to keep prairies and other ecosystems healthy. In addition, opening public land to grazing benefits local livestock producers.

Working with the Wildlife Manager

Public wildlife land is managed differently than private pastureland. You will need to work closely with the agency that manages the land to develop a grazing plan that works both you and the wildlife manager.

Things to consider when grazing public land:

- **Timing:** Stock rate, density, timing, and duration need to support habitat goals. The land manager will work with you to get the right kind and number of animals to the right place at the right time and for the right reasons.
- **Fencing:** Most public land is not fenced for grazing and doesn’t have electricity. You may need to install temporary fencing (or repair existing fences) and, in most cases, provide solar fence chargers.
- **Fees:** Grazing fees are determined by the office managing the land and are usually based on Farm Service Agency reported average pasture rental rates. You may be able to offset these fees depending on the amount of work required to install fences, provide water, move livestock, etc.
- **Insurance:** Most agencies who manage public land require you to carry one million dollars of liability insurance coverage to protect both you and the agency against claims of injury and/or death.



Harvesting Hay on Public Land

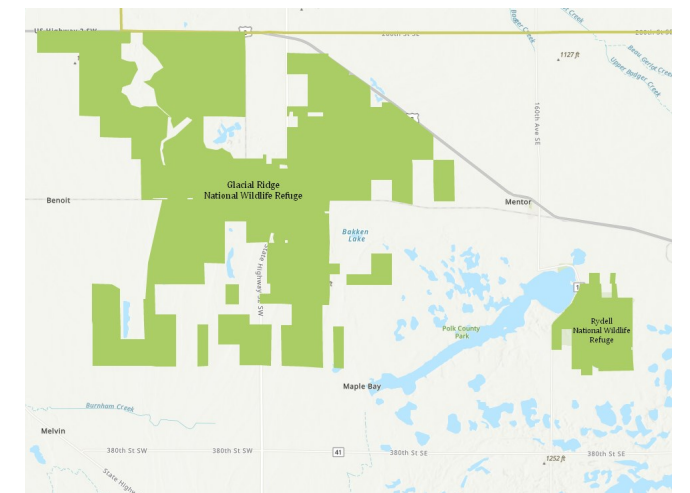
In addition to grazing, hay cutting and baling may be an appropriate disturbance on some public land. As with grazing, timing of hay cutting must support the habitat goals established for the area. To learn more, contact the wildlife manager in your area.

Things to consider when haying on public land:

- Most of the time you must harvest hay in August (after nesting season and before fall hunting begins.)
- You must remove bales within 72 hours, unless it rains so much, that driving on the land would create ruts.
- You will be charged market value for the bales, or less upon a deduction for the work you've done.
- You must inspect your equipment to be sure that all vegetation that could contain invasive species seeds has been removed.

Local Opportunities

- Grazing opportunities are available on Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge.
- Haying opportunities are available on Rydell National Wildlife Refuge



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