

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Habitat Preference: Large tracts of undisturbed, open grasslands with thatch used for nesting cover.



Threats:

- Northern harriers are a late successional grassland species.
 - Haying an area during nesting season destroys nests.
 - Northern harriers will not use grasslands that are grazed heavily; even light grazing during the nesting season can destroy nests.
- Loss of grassland habitat
 - Conversion of prairie to cultivated ground
 - Encroachment of woody vegetation. Northern harriers will not nest in areas that have trees scattered throughout the grassland.
 - Invasion of non-native plants
- Fragmentation of grassland habitat
 - Because northern harriers need large (+100 acres) undisturbed grassland tracts, they require plenty of refuge from disturbance such as fire and grazing. These birds will cease to use tracts when large sections are managed in a variety of ways not conducive to this sparrow's nesting.

Practices Guidelines:

- Prescribed burns should be done no more than once every 4 years. Burns should not be done during the nesting season (April-July). Harriers will not nest in an area that has been burned during that nesting season.
- Limit water manipulation. In areas known to be used for nesting water depths should be kept below 15 cm.
- Repeated haying will deter nesting use by northern harrier. Haying should not be done until after July 15.
- Mowing on established areas should be done after the nesting season (April-July).
- Areas that are lightly grazed may still be used by northern harriers. Limit grazing to after the nesting season (April-July).
- Establish new tracts of grassland. Buffer existing grassland to create larger tracts that will sustain a large population of rodents. When rodent populations are high northern harriers are more apt to use a particular area.