

# Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE

## State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)



### Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, are partners in implementing a State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) project to establish and manage blocks of native grass and other herbaceous habitat providing nesting and winter cover across much of Montana. The Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE will benefit multiple species of upland game birds and waterfowl of economic importance, and some species of concern, in Montana.

### Background

SAFE is part of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with landowners and agricultural producers to establish and manage vegetative covers that control soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat.

SAFE is a unique type of CRP that offers organizations the opportunity to partner with the USDA to establish habitat for high-priority wildlife species on agricultural land. SAFE sponsors work with the USDA to identify the wildlife species, the vegetative cover that provides habitat for the target species, and the location in the state where the habitat is needed. A partnership is formed between the SAFE sponsor and the USDA, and federal funds are made available to allow for CRP enrollment on eligible land within the SAFE project location.

### Target Wildlife Species

The goal of the Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE project is to provide habitat for the ring-necked pheasant, gray partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, mallard, and Northern pintail. Both ring-necked pheasants and gray partridge need nesting and winter cover in close proximity to water and food sources. Sharp-tailed grouse, reliant on grass and shrubland ecosystems, occupy remnant bunchgrass and shrub communities often found in coulees and wooded draws. Mallards and Northern pintails need native grassland cover for nesting adjacent to wetlands.

### Habitat

Landowners and agricultural producers participating in the Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE are required to develop a conservation plan with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or a technical service provider. The conservation plan will provide details on how to plant, establish, and manage habitat for ring-necked pheasant, gray partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, mallard, and Northern pintail. Each species has slightly different habitat requirements, primarily related to cover composition and structure and subsequent management once the cover is established. Nesting cover consists of grass/legume mixtures. Winter cover includes the establishment of cattail marshes, stiff stemmed grasses, shelterbelts, woody riparian buffers, and tall bunchgrasses. New plantings of crested wheatgrass and smooth brome are not permitted. Existing crested wheatgrass or smooth brome areas can be renovated and upgraded to a more beneficial mix. After the habitat is established, it will need to be maintained and managed by grazing, preferably, or by prescribed burning. Proper habitat establishment, maintenance, and management will provide year-round habitat benefits for ring-necked pheasant, gray partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, mallard, and Northern pintail.



## Project Location

The Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE project is located in portions of Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Carter, Cascade, Choteau, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Glacier, Golden Valley, Hill, Judith Basin, Lewis and Clark, Liberty, McCone, Meagher, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Pondera, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Toole, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Wibaux, and Yellowstone counties.

## Eligible CRP Practices

This SAFE project uses the following CRP practices:

- ◆ CP38A-22, Riparian Buffer
- ◆ CP38A-43, Prairie Strips
- ◆ CP38B-23, Wetland Restoration on Floodplains
- ◆ CP38B-23A, Wetland Restoration on Non-floodplains
- ◆ CP38B-27, Farmable Wetlands
- ◆ CP38B-28, Farmable Wetlands Buffer
- ◆ CP38B-37, Duck Nesting Habitat
- ◆ CP38E-1, Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes
- ◆ CP38E-2, Permanent Native Grasses and Legumes
- ◆ CP38E-4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- ◆ CP38E-12, Wildlife Food Plot
- ◆ CP38E-42, Pollinator Habitat

## Haying and Grazing

Emergency and non-emergency grazing is allowed. New seedlings are to be protected from grazing and left idle for the first 2–3 years. Grazing is the preferred management activity. In lieu of grazing, prescribed burning is also an authorized management activity, required at least once during the contract.

Emergency or non-emergency haying is not authorized. Haying or clipping as a management activity is prohibited.

## Eligibility Requirements

Because SAFE is part of CRP, certain land and participant eligibility rules apply. To begin with, land must be in the project area and meet cropping history. CRP participant eligibility rules also apply to SAFE.

## Payments and Incentives

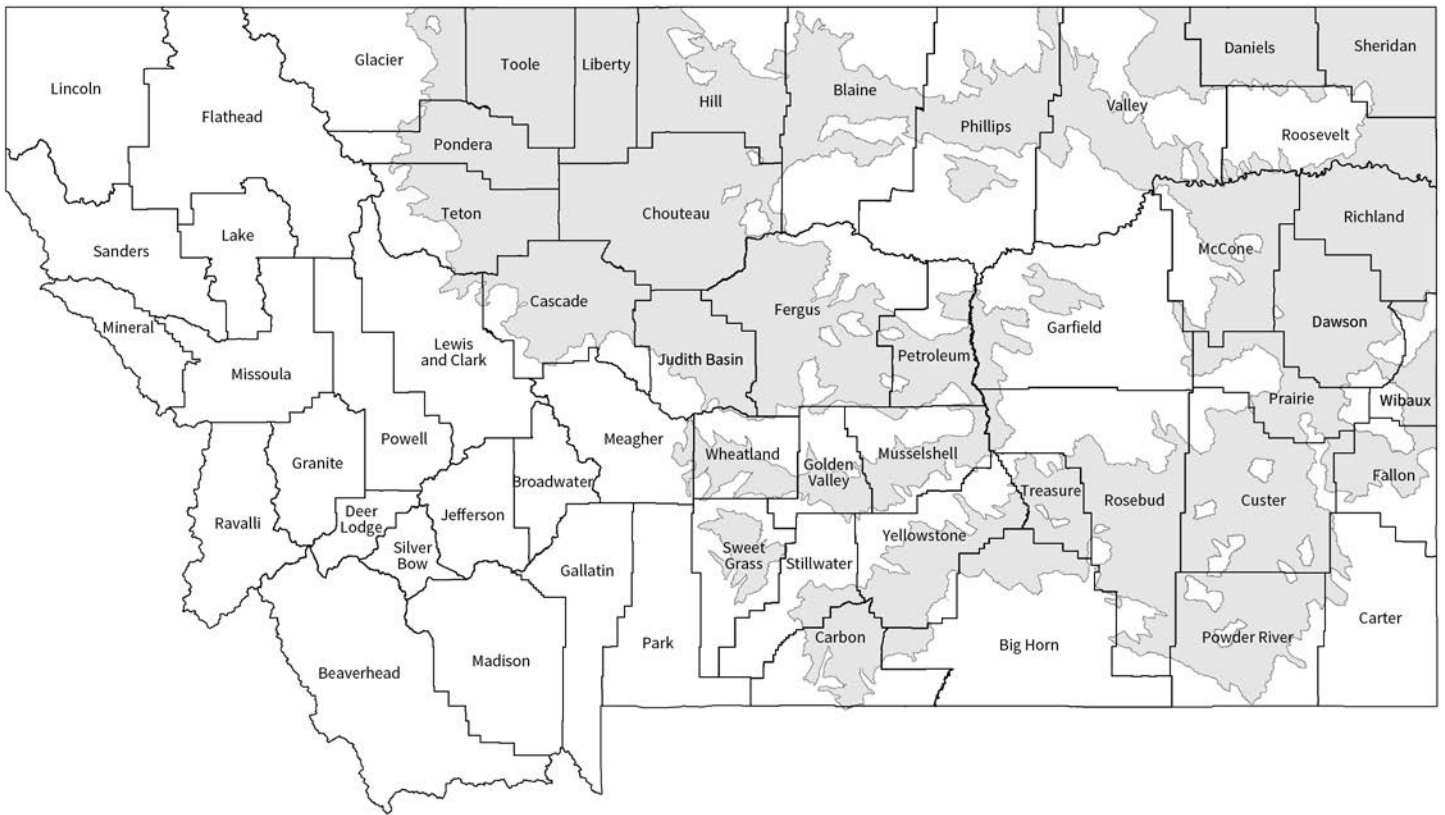
In exchange for participation in CRP SAFE, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with annual per acre rental payments, cost-share to assist with habitat establishment expenses, and in some cases additional monetary incentives.

## For More Information

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions or requirements may apply. Consult your local FSA office for details. For more information, contact your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office: [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).



# Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE Project Map



## Legend

 FSA County Boundary

 Montana Pheasant Winter Cover and Prairie Pothole Enhancement SAFE Project Area