Why Choose CRP State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement?

SAFE allows producers to establish native grasses, forbs and shrubs through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that benefit high priority State wildlife conservation objectives. The practices must be used to address wildlife habitat that can be enhanced through the restoration of eligible cropland through CRP.

Montana Declining Grassland Birds SAFE Practices:
- CP38E - CP2 – Establishment of Permanent Grasses and Forbs
- CP38E - CP4D – Permanent Wildlife Habitat - includes native grasses, forbs and a limited amount of shrubs
- CP38E - CP25 – Rare and Declining Habitat - includes native grasses, forbs and a limited amount of shrubs

Overview
The purpose of the Montana Declining Grassland Birds SAFE project is to:
- Restore and enhance breeding habitat for declining grassland songbirds including Sprague's Pipit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird's Sparrow, Lark Bunting and other grassland-associated wildlife;
- Restore native grass, forbs and shrubs appropriate for the site;
- Enhance native grasslands for grasslands birds through grazing management or prescribed fire

Project Area

Portions of the following counties are in the Montana Declining Grassland Birds Project Area: Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Daniels, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, McCone, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, Valley, Wheatland, Yellowstone. The project area covers 16 million acres, approximately 25% of eastern Montana.

Partnership
The Montana Declining Grassland Birds SAFE project is a cooperative effort between the following agencies and organizations in Montana: USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, landowners, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife, World Wildlife Fund, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and the Nature Conservancy.

Chestnut-collared Longspur - Nature Conservancy Photo
Eligible Land

Agricultural land that was cropped or considered cropped four out of six years from 2012 to 2017. Breeding season habitat requirements of the targeted species must be met. Acres enrolled must:

- Be planted with native grass, forb and shrubs that would have been common in the historic climax plant community or historic reference state;
- Protect new seeding from domestic grazing and browsing for two to three years;
- Not be hayed for the life of the contract;
- Follow NRCS seedbed preparation and planting procedures and be seeded within the first year of the contract;
- Alfalfa and yellow sweet clover will not be allowed in any seed mixes.

Management Requirements

One of the following management options are required during the contract: Management Activity Grazing will be high intensity, short duration (less than 90 days) at a frequency of one time every 2-3 years for the duration of the contract, and will be permitted without a rental rate penalty; or Prescribed Burning one time per contract can be selected as an alternative management activity. No cost share payments are available for management.

Global Significance

Along with the equivalent core areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the project area provides habitat for approximately 25% of the global populations of the endemic grassland birds included in this project. It is unequivocally the most important, intact breeding season habitat in the United States for conserving populations of these species.

Financial Benefits

- 10-15 years or annual rental payments
- Payments of up to 50% cost share for practice establishment
- Additional cost share assistance for native grass, forb and shrub seedings and/or for infrastructure required to facilitate grazing may be available from the following stakeholders: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, and partner organizations. Contact Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, https://ranchstewards.org/, in the northern part of the project area and the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, https://ngpjv.org/, in the southern part of the project area for more information on cost-share opportunities.

More Information

For more information, contact your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office through the Montana FSA website at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/montana.