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 Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE Practices:

- CP38E - CP2 – Establishment of Permanent Grasses and Forbs
- CP38E - CP4D – Permanent Wildlife Habitat, which includes native grasses, forbs and shrubs

Overview

The purpose of the Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE project is to:

- Expand habitat for Sage Grouse and other species that depend on sagebrush such as Sage Sparrow, Sage Thrasher and other sagebrush-associated wildlife like pronghorn antelope;
- Restore Big Sagebrush and associated native forbs, grasses and shrubs;
- Provide critical nesting habitats which would be largely undisturbed through the Sage Grouse breeding and brood rearing seasons.

Project Area

The following counties are in the Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration Project Area: Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Petroleum, Powder River, Rosebud and Treasure.

Partnership

The Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration 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 and Pheasants Forever.
Eligible Land

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

- Be a minimum tract size of 100 acres;
- Include Big Sagebrush in the seeding mixture;
- Be enhanced to provide missing habitat components for grass stands already established on eligible cropland;
- Protect new seeding from domestic grazing and browsing for 2-3 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;
- Not use prescribed fire as a management activity

Significance
Sage Grouse currently occupy about 56 percent of their historical range. A sage brush community may take decades to recover from disturbance and some range management practices; enrolling additional cropland acres into SAFE will help prevent such disturbance from occurring.

Financial Benefits

- 10 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 may be available from the following stakeholders: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.
- CRP SAFE acres may be eligible for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Open Fields which provides an additional payment for walk-in access for game bird hunting.

Management Requirements

Management activities are site specific and are used to enhance the wildlife habitat and benefits for the site. Management activities must be completed before the end of year 6 for 10-year contracts. No cost share payments are available for management. Optimum desired canopy cover for big sagebrush for sage grouse habitat is 5-25 percent. Options for management activities include high intensity, short duration (less than 90 days grazing), ground disturbance, or inter-seeding of forbs.

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/mt.

Sage Grouse - National Audubon Society Photo