



United States
Department of
Agriculture

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Fact Sheet

Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

Montana State
Producer Handbook

Authorization

In 2007 the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) unveiled a new initiative, State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), to improve habitat for high-priority wildlife species.

SAFE allows producers to install practices through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that benefit high priority State wildlife conservation objectives. The cooperative effort is based on locally developed conservation proposals that address the highest priority wildlife objects before the practices may be implemented. The practices must be used to address wildlife habitat that can be enhanced through the restoration of eligible cropland through CRP.

Overview

Development of the Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement SAFE project is a cooperative effort between the following agencies and organizations in Montana: USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Partners for Fish & Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever.

The purpose of the Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement project is to:

- Expand habitats for ground nesting ducks. Other species that will benefit from the expanded habitat are ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian

(gray) partridge, native sharp-tailed grouse, and neotropical birds.

- To enhance or augment existing habitats by providing key nesting cover adjacent to duck brood water

Outcomes

The Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement project intends to combine the biological and ecological knowledge about the primary wildlife species, ground nesting ducks, to expand utilization of the combined existing cover types by contracting the additional cropland acreages to provide missing cover types – nesting cover, broodrearing cover, and food. Properly positioned contracted cropland acreage will increase year long utilization by wildlife generally.

Project Area

This project seeks to enroll approximately 7,700 acres of cropland within the Prairie Pothole or Northern Great Plains Focus Areas of Montana. The proposed project area includes the Prairie Pothole area east of the Centennial divide and north of the Missouri River. This includes the following counties: Blaine, Cascade, Chouteau, Daniels, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Phillips, Pondera, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Teton, Toole and Valley.

Requirements

Habitat requirements of the targeted species, ground nesting ducks, must be met. Acres enrolled must:

- Be with-in a maximum 2-miles distance from streams or impoundments;
- Improve and/or expand ground nesting habitat
- Prevent degradation of wildlife habitat from recurring
- Follow NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Standard 645 – Upland Wildlife Habitat Management to provide missing components of the habitat
- Be included in an approved conservation plan

Cropland Eligibility

Eligible cropland is cropland that has been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity during 4 of the 6 crop years from 1996 through 2001.

Practices

The project will seek to enroll 7,700 acres of cropland in to introduced and native grasses, forbs and shrubs and restored wetlands. The following specifically developed SAFE practices are eligible for enrollment:

- CP38E-CP1 – Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes
- CP38E-CP2 – Permanent Native Grasses
- CP38E-CP10 – Established Vegetation
- CP38B-CP23, Wetland Restoration
- CP38B-CP23A, Wetland Restoration – Non-Floodplain

Conservation Plan and Planting Specification Review

To meet expected goals of SAFE, conservation plans and planting specifications will be designed by, or in consultation with, a wildlife biologist and will require approval by a wildlife biologist.

Conservation plans and planting specifications will meet the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Technical Standards.

Planting or sowing of the approved cover shall be completed within 12 months of the effective date of the contract.

Contract Duration

Contracts will be between 10 and 15 years in duration.

Continuous Signup

SAFE applications will be accepted throughout the year. Eligible SAFE applications can be approved by the local FSA County Committee. The contract effective date is the first day of the month following the month it is approved by the local FSA County Committee. The effective date may be deferred up to 6 months.

Payments

Participants are eligible for the following types of financial assistance:

- **Annual Rental Payments** – The per acre payment rate is based on the 3 predominant soils on the eligible acreage offered.
- **Signing Incentive Payment (SIP)** – Equal to \$10 per acre for each full year (Not to exceed 10 years) of the contract.
- **Cost-share** – Payment will be made up to 50 percent of the eligible cost of establishing a permanent cover.

- **Practice Incentive Payment (PIP)** – Equal to 40 percent of the total eligible cost to establish the practice.

Additional Cost-share Assistance –

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks may provide additional cost-share assistance for grass seed and/or shrub seedling costs.

Definitions of Terms

Nesting Cover – Undisturbed grass-legume mixtures, hay fields (undisturbed during the primary nesting season) winter wheat, vegetated roadsides, ditch banks, and rangeland.

Broodrearing Cover – Shallow wetlands, ponds, reservoirs, streams, rivers and emergent vegetation.

Food – Aquatic vegetation with aquatic invertebrates, grain fields, undisturbed grasses and grass/legume mixtures

For More Information

Additional information may be obtained at local FSA offices or through the Montana FSA Web site at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt>