



# FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

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

July 2015

### **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 objectives 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**

Montana recently received an additional 7,500 acres for enrollment in the SAFE Prairie Pothole Area. The following counties are in the SAFE Prairie Pothole Area: Blaine, Cascade, Chouteau, Daniels, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Phillips, Pondera, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Teton, Toole and Valley. Over 14,000 acres have been enrolled in the SAFE Prairie Pothole Area since 2009.

### **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 2008 through 2013.

### **Practices**

The 7,500 acres now available for enrollment in this area must be offered as the following practices:

- CP38E-CP1 – Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes
- CP38E-CP2 – Permanent Native Grasses
- 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***

Producers within the Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement area can submit offers to voluntarily enroll cropland in CRP contracts. 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.

### ***Management Activities***

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 contracts with a 10 year contract length or before the end of year 9 for contracts with a 15 year contract length. Contract participants can receive cost-share for completing management activities.

### ***Project Acreage Limitation***

Producers within the Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement area can submit offers to voluntarily enroll cropland in CRP contracts. The Prairie Pothole-Upland Game Bird Enhancement SAFE area now has 7,500 acres available.

### ***Payments***

Participants are eligible for the following types of financial assistance:

- **Annual Rental Payments** – The per acre payment rate is calculated by using the average of the rental rates for the three predominate soils of the eligible acres offered.
- **Signing Incentive Payment (SIP)** – Equal to \$10 per acre for each full year (Not to exceed 10 years) of the contract. Re-enrolled acres are not eligible for SIP.
- **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. PIP is authorized for re-enrolled continuous signup practices only if new cost share is approved.

### **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>.

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