



FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

May 2015

Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

Authorization

In 2007 the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) unveiled a new initiative 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

The Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration 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, landowners and the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture.

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

- Expand habitats for sage grouse and other sagebrush obligates such as sage sparrow, sage thrasher and other sagebrush associated wildlife;
- Restore big sage 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 Area: Beaverhead, Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Madison, Musselshell, Petroleum, Powder River, Rosebud and Treasure. Over 800 acres have been enrolled in the SAFE Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration Area since 2009.

Requirements

Year round habitat requirements of the targeted species, sage grouse, 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 two to three years;
- Not be hayed for the life of the contract;
- Not use fire as a management activity
- Follow NRCS seedbed preparation and planting procedures and be seeded within the first year of the contract;

- 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 four of the six crop years from 2008 to 2013.

Practices

The 1,500 acres available for enrollment in this area must be offered as one of the following practices:

- CP38E-CP2 – Permanent Native Grasses which includes Big Sagebrush

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 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 no less than 10 years or more than 15 years in duration.

Continuous Signup

Producers within the Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE 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 is effective 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 six 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 of the contract. Contract participants can receive cost-share for completing management activities.

Payments

Participants are eligible for the following types of financial assistance:

- **Annual Rental Payments –**
The per acre payment rate is calculated by using:
 1. The average of the rental rates for the three predominate soils of the eligible acres offered.
- **Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) –**
Equal to \$100 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.

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>