



Northern Great Plains 2017 Grant Slate

NFWF CONTACTS

Chris West

Director, Rocky Mountain
Regional Office
303-398-7042
chris.west@nfwf.org

Seth Gallagher

Program Manager,
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
303-222-6483
seth.gallagher@nfwf.org

To learn more, go to:

www.nfwf.org/greatplains



Sharp-tailed grouse

OVERVIEW

The vast grasslands of the Northern Great Plains support a unique assemblage of wildlife adapted to the wide open spaces. Thanks to generations of land stewardship by ranchers, tribes and public agencies, much of the Northern Great Plains remains as native grassland that is productive for people and wildlife.

However, this unparalleled resource is facing threats including conversion to cropland, energy development, invasive species and a lack of capacity to manage the grasslands of this vast region. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) **Northern Great Plains Program** (NGP) works with willing private landowners and local partners to address these challenges by conserving and restoring native prairie and wildlife while also enhancing local ranching and tribal communities.

In 2017, the program awarded 15 grants totaling more than \$2 million. The grants will support conservation efforts on more than 83,000 acres in eastern Montana, western North Dakota and South Dakota, eastern Wyoming and the Nebraska Sandhills.

The grants will draw more than \$4.4 million in matching contributions, generating a total conservation impact of more than \$6.5 million.

NFWF awarded the grants to nonprofit conservation organizations, government agencies and other stakeholders across five states. Awardees will work with private landowners, state and federal wildlife managers, and nonprofit partners to conserve 9,000 acres, restore over 6,000 acres and improve management on over 67,000 acres of grasslands. Grant awards are listed below.

ABOUT NFWF

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores our nation's fish and wildlife and their habitats. Created by Congress in 1984, NFWF directs public conservation dollars to the most pressing environmental needs and matches those investments with private funds.

Learn more at www.nfwf.org

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South Dakota

Funk Ranch

Grantee: The Nature Conservancy
 NFWF Award Amount:\$150,000
 Matching Funds:.....\$850,000
Total Project:..... \$1,000,000

The Nature Conservancy is implementing the acquisition of a conservation easement from Funk Ranch, a 9,500-acre ranch in the northern portion of Valley County, Montana, within the Bitter Creek Conservation Area. Bitter Creek has been identified as high priority for conservation by multiple conservation organizations, as well as state and federal agencies.

ABN Ranch

Grantee: Montana Land Reliance
 NFWF Award Amount:\$162,500
 Matching Funds:..... \$1,140,000
Total Project:..... \$1,302,500

The Montana Land Reliance will implement a conservation easement on a 5,331-acre ranch bordering the western end of the National Wild and Scenic River Corridor of the Missouri River and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. The property overlooks the Missouri River just downstream from the historic “decision point” where the Lewis and Clark expedition met the confluence of the Marias and the Missouri rivers. Of the 5,331 acres, 4,161

acres are classified as “prime and important soils.” Given the property is primarily native grasslands, a conservation easement prohibiting cropland conversion would significantly protect habitat for year-round and migratory species. The property is also home to a healthy pronghorn herd, as well as mule and whitetail deer.

Winnett Conservation Collaborative

Grantee: Petroleum County Conservation District
 NFWF Award Amount: \$32,500
 Matching Funds:..... \$32,500
Total Project:..... \$65,000

The Petroleum County Conservation District (PCCD) will complete an in-depth assessment to determine the feasibility of organizing a locally led group from Winnett, Montana to purchase grazing land. The local group would manage the land for the purpose of grazing and implementing grassland conservation practices to enhance habitat for native wildlife species. The focus will enhance habitat for pronghorn and greater sage-grouse populations, while also providing opportunities for the local ranching community to become more sustainable. The feasibility study, as well as the process used to create the document, can be used as a model across the west for rural communities to develop locally-led conservation collaborative projects.

Identifying Native (Undisturbed) Habitats in the Dakota Grassland Focus Area of Western South Dakota

Grantee: South Dakota State University

NFWF Award Amount:\$100,000

Matching Funds:.....\$100,000

Total Project: \$200,000

South Dakota State University will implement a land-use inventory project focused on identifying native (undisturbed) land tracts within and near the Dakota, Sandhills, and Powder River-Thunder Basin Grassland regions of western South Dakota through Farm Services Agency Common Land Unit data, aerial imagery, and a new and rigorous deductive process developed by the university to determine the extent of known tillage history. This project will result in accurate identification of western South Dakota lands are truly native habitat and has the potential to dramatically impact public and private conservation planning and prioritization.



Sage grouse

Using Plowprint to Monitor Grassland Conversion Across the Northern Great Plains

Grantee: World Wildlife Fund

NFWF Award Amount: \$20,000

Matching Funds:..... \$20,000

Total Project: \$40,000

World Wildlife Fund will update and expand its geospatial data analysis, called The Plowprint Report, to evaluate landscape change metrics for the Northern Great Plains ecoregion. The analysis will use the newest accurate data to track rates of agricultural conversion, monitor previously converted lands and identify risk factors for remaining intact habitats. The project will include developing data to assess soil quality in Canada to complement datasets available for the United States.

Native Prairie Restoration Project - Grand River National Grasslands

Grantee: USDA Forest Service – Dakota Prairie Grasslands

NFWF Award Amount: \$56,770

Matching Funds:..... \$98,700

Total Project: \$155,470

The U.S. Forest Service Dakota – Prairie Grasslands will implement native prairie restoration and management on 460 acres, including a 40-acre restoration on the Grand River National Grasslands and 20 acres on adjacent Bureau of Reclamation land, by eliminating crested wheatgrass and reseeding it to native grasslands species. Conservation outcomes include improvement in herbaceous plant species diversity, including native pollinator plant species, habitat improvements for native birds and pollinators, improved soil infiltration and drought resiliency.

Birds, Herds, and Stewards: Sustainable Working Lands for the Future

Grantee: American Bird Conservancy

NFWF Award Amount:\$230,000

Matching Funds:.....\$230,000

Total Project: \$460,000

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) will promote educational opportunities and land stewardship activities in the core of the Northern Great Plains by offering workshops and providing conservation technical assistance, developing conservation plans, and assisting private and tribal landowners in enrolling in Farm Bill programs. In addition, ABC will coordinate with federal land managers on activities that will enhance habitat for grassland birds while maintaining sustainable land use. Outcomes include enhanced landowner and resource professional knowledge of grassland conservation and soil health, implementation of sustainable wildlife-compatible management across the project area, and restoration and/or improved management practices on 26,000 acres.

Enhancing Rangeland Ecology by Improving Ranch Management Options

Grantee: South Dakota Grassland Coalition

NFWF Award Amount.....\$200,000

Matching Funds:.....\$200,000

Total Project: \$400,000

South Dakota Grasslands Coalition will focus on infrastructural and land improvement tools to improve



Cattle on the Great Plains

management of land within the Dakota, Sandhills and Powder River-Thunder Basin grasslands of western South Dakota. The project will work with a minimum of 20 private landowners to improve habitat on a minimum 18,500 acres through long-term conservation agreements, and will include habitat improvement techniques such as fencing (14 miles) and water development for prescribed/ecological grazing as well as grassland/wetland restoration (500 acres).

Restoration and Enhanced Management of Montana’s Milk River Grasslands through Sustainable Ranching

Grantee: Ranchers Stewardship Alliance
 NFWF Federal Funds:\$300,000
 Matching Funds:\$632,077
Total Project: \$932,077

Ranchers Stewardship Alliance will implement restoration and enhanced management in the critically important landscape of Montana’s Milk River grasslands. Project activities directly support NFWF’s objectives of grassland habitat conservation and improve outcomes on 8,000 acres for grassland passerines, pronghorn and greater sage-grouse. Approximately 4,000 acres of expiring Conservation Reserve Program lands will transition to working rangeland, thereby preventing conversion to cropland. Approximately 3,000 acres of existing marginal cropland will be restored through reseeding perennial cover

of native grasses and forbs. Management applications will enhance ecological function and forage value of 1,000 acres of exotic, tame grass plantings dating back to the Dust Bowl era.

Stewardship of Private Lands in the Northern Great Plains and Integrated Population Models for Grassland Bird

Grantee: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
 NFWF Award Amount:\$229,999
 Matching Funds:\$578,000
Total Project: \$807,999

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies will address the documented need for building local capacity to implement on-the-ground conservation by supporting three Stewardship Biologist positions in three focal areas of the NGP (Missouri/Milk River Grasslands, Dakota Grasslands and Powder River/Thunder Basin Grasslands) to establish public-private conservation partnerships, provide targeted outreach to landowners, and implement grassland habitat enhancement and restoration projects. The Stewardship Biologists will conduct at least 100 one-on-one landowner visits, coordinate with partners on four workshops, and conduct other outreach reaching over 4,000 people. By using conservation plans for guidance, and in combination with additional information developed by Bird Conservancy, they will strategically engage at least



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15 landowners to participate in conservation programs enhancing 27,500 acres. Lastly, they will facilitate partnerships between landowners and land trusts to conserve through easements.

Sandhills Native Ecosystem Partnership Project

Grantee: Sandhills Task Force

NFWF Award Amount:\$200,070

Matching Funds:\$220,000

Total Project: \$420,070

The Sandhills Task Force, in collaboration with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program will improve grassland wildlife habitat in Nebraska's Sandhills on privately owned land by controlling eastern red cedar infestations on 4,875 acres and improving grazing systems on an additional 3,000 acres. Cedar infestations will be controlled by use of prescribed fire and mechanical treatment. Grazing systems will be improved by installing necessary watering locations and fencing, and by establishing a management plan with the landowner.

The Journey to Thirty Breeding Adult Black-footed Ferrets at Fort Belknap

Grantee: Fort Belknap Indian Community

NFWF Award Amount:\$212,514

Matching Funds:\$214,037

Total Project: \$426,551

The Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department seeks financial assistance to manage and increase its reintroduced black-footed ferret population and associated black-tailed prairie dog colony habitat. Future actions include annual sylvatic plague mitigation, ferret population and habitat surveys, reintroductions (if needed), vaccination and identification tagging on the Fort Belknap Reservation in Montana. The long-term goal of this project is to increase the ferret population on the Reservation to at least 30 breeding adults, which will contribute to the removal of the species from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.

Woven Wire Fence Modification

Grantee: Bureau of Land Management

NFWF Award Amount: \$46,042

Matching Funds: \$50,000

Total Project: \$96,042

The Bureau of Land Management – Miles City Office will work to modify existing fences that do not meet specifications for wildlife – primarily pronghorn and mule deer. Cattle and sheep farming were historically the primary lifestyle in these communities. As a result,

countless miles of fences crisscross the region, which create hazards and barriers for wildlife, often resulting in injury or death. The objective is to replace at least 11 miles of woven wire fence in crucial pronghorn winter range and high use areas to wildlife-friendly specifications to facilitate pronghorn and young wild ungulates movement across the landscape.

Putting Science into Action to Facilitate Pronghorn Movements in the Northern Great Plains

Grantee: Miistakis Institute

NFWF Award Amount:\$71,200

Matching Funds: \$71,200

Total Project: \$142,400

The Miistakis Institute project builds the case for ensuring safe movement of pronghorn across highways in the Canadian portion of the Great Northern Plains through development of a participatory science program. Pinch points have been identified along the Canadian highway network where seasonal pronghorn movements are impaired. Public support needs work, and the business case needs to be outlined for provincial agencies responsible for implementing strategies to enable effective pronghorn movement. Through a citizen science approach, stakeholders and the public will be engaged in science and conservation action to the benefit of pronghorn and other wildlife species impaired by road fragmentation. Ultimately, the program will create support for the installation of one or more overpasses across Highway 1 and the identification of crossing sites along secondary highways.

Feasibility Study Regarding an Agricultural-based Land Trust in South Dakota

Grantee: South Dakota Cattlemen's Association

NFWF Award Amount:\$100,000

Matching Funds: \$6,000

Total Project: \$106,000

The South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, in partnership with agricultural land trusts from Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas, seek to address a major impediment to grassland conservation in the state. The parties will undertake a feasibility study to identify the best way to proceed with initial implementation of a nonprofit land trust to address this gap for South Dakota's agricultural landowners. South Dakota is experiencing some of the highest grassland conversion rates in history, and the funding for the feasibility study and initial implementation of an agricultural land trust will provide landowners, federal agencies and nonprofits with an additional tool to address this threat in a manner that works for farmers and ranchers.