Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative – 2026 Project Information

Program Overview

The Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative is a public-private conservation partnership that aims to help promote and accelerate regenerative grazing practices, habitat restoration, and conservation of wildlife and water. This initiative seeks to positively impact 4 million acres of grasslands over seven years, with significant investments expected in the Great Plains, Rocky Mountain West, Midwest, West Coast and Southeast United States.

Project Overview

The six groups below are the first grant recipients under the Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative. Each organization will provide technical assistance to ranchers, including writing grazing management plans and assisting with applications to Farm Bill programs. Alongside this technical assistance, financial assistance is available to fund improved grazing infrastructure and grassland restoration. Each group will fund numerous conservation practices, and some of their primary focuses are listed below.

American Bird Conservancy

Project States: Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Wyoming

Primary Project Activities:

- Reseeding grass species and brush clearing
- Wildlife-friendly fence improvements
- Assistance with applying to Farm Bill programs and providing private funding to fill gaps

Project Description: American Bird Conservancy will scale their proven conservation delivery systems to achieve measurable, landscape-level outcomes for grassland biodiversity, rangeland health and resilient ranching communities. Staff will help implement adaptive grazing and grassland management practices, enroll in Farm Bill and state programs, and work with ranchers to meet data collection needs. American Bird Conservancy will also conduct bird and vegetation surveys aligned with NRCS and BLM protocols.

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American Farmland Trust

Project States: Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, Oregon

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Primary Project Activities:

- Development and deployment of mentor-led grazing networks
- Emphasis on regionally focused technical resources and training and one-on-one support
- Financial assistance for grazing infrastructure and improvements

Project Description: American Farmland Trust will combine peer-to-peer mentorship, technical assistance, community building and financial support to help land stewards adopt regenerative grazing practices that enhance soil health, water retention, wildlife habitat and profitability. The project will establish a scalable network of grazing specialists, mentors and peer learning opportunities tailored to the regional context. Financial assistance includes incentive payments, business training and access to a grant program to reduce barriers to practice adoption.

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Ducks Unlimited

Project States: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota

Primary Project Activities:

- Restoration from marginally productive cropland or invaded pastureland to diverse grassland habitat
- Rotational grazing – installation of fence and water system infrastructure, virtual fence technology, or other portable fencing solutions
- Engage mentor networks to provide support for ranching families to attend educational events

Project Description: Ducks Unlimited will partner with grazing managers to facilitate grassland restorations and long-term grazing management projects. The conservation delivery team will work hand-in-hand with ranchers to incentivize diverse grassland restoration on marginally productive cropland or invaded grasslands, target grazing infrastructure and technology to restored and existing grazing lands, actively engage conservation partners, and lead engagement with public land managers.

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Mule Deer Foundation

Project States: Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Wyoming (within core mule deer range in the states of KS, NE, ND, OK, SD, TX)

Primary Project Activities:

- Virtual fencing and wildlife-friendly physical fence improvements
- Riparian and wet meadow management; water infrastructure to buffer drought and distribute water for improved grazing management and wildlife benefits
- Prescribed fire and mechanical and chemical treatments to control woody and herbaceous invasive species

Project Description: Mule Deer Foundation will help producers develop voluntary grazing plans and implement practices such as rotational grazing with virtual fencing, precision water developments, invasive

species control, native grassland reseeding, and wildlife-friendly fencing improvements to enhance forage, soil health, and wildlife habitat, big-game passage and landscape connectivity while sustaining or improving operational profitability. Mule Deer Foundation will connect producers to NRCS Farm Bill programs and provide private financial assistance to fill gaps and accelerate project implementation timelines where necessary.

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National Audubon Society
Project States: Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Wyoming

Primary Project Activities:

- Access to financial assistance through the Audubon Conservation Ranching program
- Audubon Bird-Friendly Land Certification
- Technical assistance for writing grazing plans and connecting to Farm Bill programs

Project Description: National Audubon Society will assist producers in developing ranch-specific Habitat Management Plans, provide technical assistance, scope and design projects, and facilitate practice implementation. Ranches must have high potential conservation value for grasslands, as indicated by total grassland acres, contiguous native grassland habitat, and potential for priority grassland bird species conservation. They will also connect ranchers to NRCS conservation programs to seek cost-share funding for implementing planned practices. Bird monitoring will be conducted on every ranch to track bird abundance and calculate the Bird-Friendliness Index (BFI), providing a direct measure of breeding bird community health, which is an indicator of overall ecosystem health and biodiversity.

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Sand County Foundation
Project States: California, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, Wyoming

- Grazing infrastructure improvement, including virtual fencing
- Invasive species and woody encroachment management (prescribed fire, mechanical removal and targeted herbicide treatment)
- Technical support to implement an enhanced grazing management plan

Project Description: Sand County Foundation will leverage the impact of their Leopold Conservation Award recipient network to provide technical assistance to these stewards and additional ranchers. They will provide cost-share to support both shovel-ready plans and build out new conservation projects, streamlining paperwork through coordinated “batched” applications. Program enrollment will be on a first-come, first-served monthly evaluation schedule and provide significant financial assistance (up to 40 percent, on top of public cost-share), in addition to technical support with applying to Farm Bill and state-based programs. Practices considered include virtual fencing, low-tech stream restoration, rotational grazing, prescribed burning, brush management, grassland reseeding, herbaceous weed control and applying soil amendments.

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University of Missouri
Project States: Missouri, Nebraska

Primary Project Activities:

- Virtual fencing and removal of physical fence
- Reseeding grassland species
- Support producer-to-producer networks and information sharing

Project Description: The University of Missouri's Center for Regenerative Agriculture and partner organizations will use innovative grassland conservation approaches centered around regenerative grazing and virtual fencing. They will support active producer-to-producer networks and create long-term information sharing systems that will help to ensure the successful adoption of improved grassland management. Specific approaches to achieve these outcomes include virtual fencing, regenerative grazing management, increased use of native forages and grassland restoration.

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