



Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative

NFWF CONTACTS

Chris West

Director,
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
chris.west@nfwf.org
303-871-0240

Greg Pilchak

Program Director,
Central Region Working Lands
greg.pilchak@nfwf.org
202-938-0640

Nora Ong

Manager,
Central Region Working Lands
nora.ong@nfwf.org
202-595-2608

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- McDonald's USA
- Cargill
- The Coca-Cola Company
- Golden State Foods
- Lopez Foods
- OSI Group
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

ABOUT NFWF

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) works with partners to foster sustainable and impactful conservation solutions so that people and nature thrive together. Chartered by Congress in 1984, NFWF has grown to become the nation's largest conservation foundation. Since its founding, NFWF has funded more than 23,900 projects that have generated a total conservation impact of more than \$12 billion.

Learn more at www.nfwf.org



A rainbow over marginal cropland that has been converted into native grassland near Winnett, Montana

Conservation Easements: A tool for protecting working lands

Conservation easements are among the most effective tools available for permanently conserving grasslands while keeping working ranches in production. A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization that permanently limits a property's use for all present and future owners of the land. In general, conservation easements limit development to protect certain resources in perpetuity, such as open space, wildlife habitat, agricultural use, scenic vistas, historic landmarks and more.

Each conservation easement is tailored to a specific piece of land and the conservation goals of its owner, including activities such as grazing, hunting, fishing and recreation on the land. Agricultural easements are particularly important in grassland ecosystems because they help keep ranches intact, prevent conversion of native grassland and ensure that working lands remain productive for future generations. By maintaining large, connected landscapes, easements can also protect wildlife migration corridors, improve watershed health and support the long-term resilience of rural communities.

(continued)



Cattle grazing on ranchland in Montana

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS THROUGH THE GRASSLAND RESILIENCE AND CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Launched in 2025, the *Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative* aims to enhance wildlife habitat, conserve water resources and improve soil function while providing benefits to participating ranchers. The initiative seeks to strengthen the health and resilience of 4 million acres of grasslands over seven years, with significant investments expected in the Great Plains, Rocky Mountain West, Midwest, West Coast and Southeast. As part of this effort, NFWF will manage and invest conservation funding to advance ranchers in their voluntary conservation efforts.

The initiative is a partnership between McDonald's USA, some of its key beef and beverage suppliers, and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. This initiative supports large-scale, voluntary conservation and grazing management practices on grasslands across the United States.

Recognizing that conserving grasslands requires both healthy ecosystems and economically viable ranching operations, the initiative supports voluntary, permanent conservation efforts that maintain working ranches and restrict subdivision and sod-busting activities. These efforts may include tools such as conservation easements, which help keep grasslands intact while supporting long-term ranch operations.

ADVANCING VOLUNTARY LAND CONSERVATION THROUGH EASEMENT COMPLETION

Although conservation easements provide lasting benefits for landowners, wildlife and natural resources, they require careful planning and consideration and can take years to complete. Beyond the purchase price of the conservation easement itself, typical costs include staff time, a land survey, a property appraisal, an environmental assessment, legal

fees, a baseline documentation report, and title review and insurance.

Additionally, the organization that takes on the responsibility of holding the conservation easement has a perpetual obligation to monitor the land on a regular basis to ensure that the easement is being upheld and to enforce the easement restrictions. These transaction costs required for a conservation easement can total more than \$100,000 and often must be paid upfront by the landowner.

For many landowners and conservation organizations, these expenses can be a barrier to closing conservation easements, as there are limited funds available to landowners to help cover these costs.

The *Grassland Resilience and Conservation Initiative* has the flexibility to support conservation easements in multiple ways, depending on the specific conservation opportunity and landowner needs.

- **Helping fund conservation easements:** Funding may help support a portion of the conservation easement itself, providing financial resources that help conserve working ranches, protect native grasslands and maintain important wildlife habitat.
- **Helping fund transaction costs:** Funding may also help cover transaction and due diligence costs associated with completing a conservation easement. By helping offset these costs, funding can remove barriers that might otherwise delay or prevent conservation projects from moving forward.

By providing flexible funding solutions, the Initiative helps ranchers, land trusts and conservation organizations advance voluntary conservation efforts that conserve native grasslands and protect wildlife habitat for future generations while still keeping land productive.