



Northern Great Plains Program

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PARTNERS

- Bezos Earth Fund
- Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies
- Altria
- Cargill
- Nestle
- Occidental
- Marathon Oil
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

ABOUT NFWF

Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 6,000 organizations and generated a total conservation impact of \$8.1 billion. NFWF is an equal opportunity provider.



Grasslands in Montana

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, Altria Group, Bezos Earth Fund, Marathon Oil, Nestle, Cargill, and Occidental Petroleum Corporation announced the 2023 round of funding for Northern Great Plains projects. Twenty-six new or continuing grants totaling \$15.6 million were awarded. The 26 awards announced leveraged \$30.1 million in matching contributions from the grantees, generating a total conservation impact of \$45.7 million. The following 26 projects address all eight strategies for the Northern Great Plains program, which include: 1) permanently protect important grasslands with conservation easements and other tools to maintain large blocks of habitat; 2) restore grasslands for the benefit of grassland wildlife and agricultural operations/ranching; 3) facilitate management of grasslands for the benefit of grasslands wildlife and agricultural operations/ranching; 4) implement grassland bird monitoring; 5) implement sylvatic plague treatment; 6) conserve pronghorn; 7) conserve sage-grouse; and 8) build capacity of partners to address the other strategies.

These 26 grants will contribute to the goals of the Northern Great Plains Business Plan by:

- Restoring 175,855 acres
- Improving management on 430,288 acres
- Removing or improving 145 miles of fencing
- Protecting 62,176 acres via conservation easements

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MONTANA**Conserving Grasslands and Protecting Migration Routes for Pronghorn and Greater Sage-Grouse (MT)**

Grantee: The Nature Conservancy
 Grant Amount: \$800,000
 Matching Funds: \$800,000
 Total Project Amount: \$1,600,000
 Place perpetual conservation easements on Montana lands in a vital migration pathway for binational migratory populations of sage-grouse and pronghorn. Project will place 5,000 acres under easement.

Conserving Native Grasslands and Sagebrush Habitat via Conservation Easements (MT)

Grantee: Montana Land Reliance
 Grant Amount: \$750,000
 Matching Funds: \$1,286,000
 Total Project Amount: \$2,036,000
 Conserve imperiled native grasslands and sagebrush habitat through conservation easements in central Montana. Project will permanently protect 6,194 acres with conservation easements to benefit greater sage-grouse and conserve two greater sage-grouse leks.

Conserving Native Habitat Through the Montana Grassland Initiative (MT)

Grantee: Ranchers Stewardship Alliance
 Grant Amount: \$500,000
 Matching Funds: \$1,672,500
 Total Project Amount: \$2,172,500
 Enhance climate resilience, restore native grasslands, improve big game migration corridor connectivity, and expand educational outreach across northern Montana through the "Montana Grassland Initiative." Project will restore 1,500 acres of grassland, improve grazing management on 40,000 acres, and improve 20 miles of fence to wildlife-friendly standards.

Creating a Collaborative Grassbank in the Missouri-Milk River Grasslands (MT)

Grantee: The Nature Conservancy
 Grant Amount: \$1,500,000
 Matching Funds: \$1,000,000
 Total Project Amount: \$2,500,000
 Create a conservation grass bank in Montana's Missouri-Milk River Grasslands, which will be operated by a local rancher-led collaborative to improve management on private lands. Project will permanently protect 4,000-5,000 acres under conservation easement and will catalyze conservation improvements for wildlife and climate resilience on 4 to 6 neighboring ranch properties.

Improving Land Management to Conserve the Musselshell Plains (MT)

Grantee: Winnett ACES
 Grant Amount: \$469,400
 Matching Funds: \$593,800
 Total Project Amount: \$1,063,200
 Conserve and enhance Montana's Musselshell Plains through wet meadow restoration, woody invasive species removal, fence modifications, improved grazing management, and increased capacity to carry out on-the-ground conservation work. Project will improve grassland management on 5,000 acres, modify 15 miles of fence to wildlife-friendly standards, restore 900 acres of cropland back to grassland, and restore 150 acres of riparian habitat to benefit greater sage-grouse.

Increasing Capacity for Conservation Easements in Montana's Northern Great Plains (MT)

Grantee: Montana Land Reliance
 Grant Amount: \$361,700
 Matching Funds: \$4,069,300
 Total Project Amount: \$4,431,000
 Increase capacity for the Eastern Manger position and cover transaction costs for five donated conservation easements across eastern and central Montana. Project will permanently protect 31,572 acres of grassland at risk of conversion, 87 percent of which is also core habitat for greater sage-grouse and includes 24 greater sage-grouse lek sites.

Increasing Drought Resiliency through Intentional Collaboration: Continuing Effective Mesic and Wet Meadow Work throughout the Northern Great Plains of Montana

Grantee: Montana Conservation Corps
 Grant Amount: \$500,000
 Matching Funds: \$1,144,000
 Total Project Amount: \$1,644,000
 Montana Conservation Corps, in collaboration with current partners, local watershed groups, landowners and conservation districts, will restore and enhance wet meadows and mesic areas throughout the Northern Great Plains of Montana. Projects will increase climate and drought resiliency and increase partnerships within the target areas. The project will serve to compliment and expand on widely successful initiatives implemented over the last 2+ years with private landowners.



Grazing cattle

NEBRASKA

Improving Grassland Bird Habitat in Nebraska’s Sandhills (NE)

Grantee: Sandhills Task Force
 Grant Amount:..... \$700,000
 Matching Funds:..... \$990,000
 Total Project Amount:.....\$1,690,000

Work with a variety of partners to improve grassland bird and wildlife habitat in Nebraska’s Sandhills by controlling invasive Eastern Red Cedar and improving grazing management systems on private lands. Project will improve management on 15,000 acres through grazing plans and restore 25,000 acres by removing woody invasive species.

Partnering with Ranchers to Conserve the Resources of the Nebraska Sandhills (NE)

Grantee: Nebraska Community Foundation FBO Rainwater Basin Joint Venture
 Grant Amount:..... \$991,000
 Matching Funds:.....\$1,025,000
 Total Project Amount:.....\$2,016,000

Work with a variety of private, state, and federal partners to conserve the Nebraska Sandhills by removing woody invasives, conducting prescribed burns, restoring wet-meadows, and reconfiguring grazing infrastructure to enhance blowouts. Project will improve management on 54,800 acres, restore 650 acres of wet-meadow, and restore 34,160 acres of grassland.

Supporting Landowners in Using Prescribed Fire Regimes to Restore Nebraska’s Sandhills (NE)

Grantee: Pheasants Forever
 Grant Amount:.....\$1,000,000
 Matching Funds:.....\$1,386,200
 Total Project Amount:.....\$2,386,200

Restore grasslands in the Nebraska Sandhills by removing invasive Eastern Red Cedar, reseeded with native vegetation, improving grazing infrastructure, increasing capacity, training landowners in prescribed fire regimes, and providing one-on-one support to landowners. Project will improve management on 27,000 acres through prescribed burns and managed grazing, and restore 90,000 acres through brush management and reseeded.

NORTH DAKOTA

Analyzing Dakota Skipper Habitat to Inform Conservation Efforts in Northwestern North Dakota (ND)

Grantee: North Dakota Natural Resources Trust
 Grant Amount:..... \$205,000
 Matching Funds:..... \$216,500
 Total Project Amount:..... \$421,500

Use spatial surveys and landowner outreach in northwestern North Dakota to analyze the best habitat for Dakota Skipper conservation efforts, and work with landowners to conduct restoration activities and improve management on their lands to benefit this threatened species. Project will improve management on 1,200 acres and restore 200 acres of Dakota Skipper habitat.

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Greater sage-grouse

SOUTH DAKOTA

Assisting Landowners with Conservation Easement Transactions in the Dakota Grasslands (SD)

Grantee: South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust
 Grant Amount:..... \$173,200
 Matching Funds:.....\$2,000,000
 Total Project Amount:.....\$2,173,200
 Provide financial assistance for costs of easement transactions and further incentivize landowner easement and partner donations in South Dakota. Project will place 4,428 acres under easement.

Increasing Landscape Connectivity for Pronghorn in the Cheyenne River Reservation (SD)

Grantee: Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
 Grant Amount:..... \$213,800
 Matching Funds:..... \$237,100
 Total Project Amount:..... \$450,900
 Increase landscape permeability for pronghorn within the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota by gathering data on pronghorn movement, connecting with local communities to spread awareness, and modifying existing fence to mitigate barriers to migration. Project will modify 50 miles of fence to wildlife-friendly standards.

Restoring the Grasslands of the Wolakota Buffalo Range (SD)

Grantee: Rosebud Economic Development Corporation
 Grant Amount:..... \$266,200
 Matching Funds:..... \$0
 Total Project Amount:..... \$266,200
 Enhance the management of the Wolakota Buffalo Range by increasing staffing capacity and improving rotational grazing by GPS tagging buffalo, resulting in healthier grasslands and increased food sovereignty for the Lakota people of the Rosebud Reservation. Project will improve management on 28,000 acres and improve 15 miles of fencing.

Restoring the Grand River National Grasslands with Adaptive Management Practices (SD)

Grantee: Grand River Ranger District
 Grant Amount:..... \$431,800
 Matching Funds:..... \$568,600
 Total Project Amount:.....\$1,000,400
 Restore native habitat in the Grand River National Grasslands in South Dakota to benefit pollinators, Grand River riparian areas, migratory big game species, and grasslands threatened by invasive species. Project will improve management on 68,587 acres and restore 180 acres of grassland.

WYOMING

Conserving the X Heart Ranch (WY)

Grantee: Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust
 Grant Amount:..... \$144,300
 Matching Funds:..... \$998,300
 Total Project Amount:.....\$1,142,600
 Place a perpetual conservation easement on a working family-owned ranch comprised of native wetlands, oak, and grasslands in northeast Wyoming. Project will place 1,998 acres under easement.

CANADA

Managing Native Prairies for Biodiversity in Southwest Saskatchewan (SK)

Grantee: South of the Divide Conservation Action Program (SODCAP)
 Grant Amount:..... \$500,000
 Matching Funds:..... \$910,000
 Total Project Amount:.....\$1,410,000
 Foster engagement and collaborative conservation actions with landowners, including implementing new grassland conservation agreements, investigating reintroducing bison to the Nekaneet First Nation Reserve, and incorporating traditional knowledge and indigenous stewardship practices into management plans. Project will improve management on 40,000 acres, restore 640 grassland acres, and improve 10 miles of fence to wildlife-friendly standards.

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MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Evaluating NFWF’s Impact on Grassland Birds (AB; MT; ND; NE; SD; SK; WY)

Grantee: Bird Observatory of the Rockies
 Grant Amount:..... \$150,000
 Matching Funds:..... \$150,000
 Total Project Amount:..... \$300,000
 Continue the multi-year effort to evaluate and quantify the impact of NFWF-funded grazing management and habitat restoration projects on focal grassland bird species across the Northern Great Plains. Project will conduct three studies used to inform future grassland management to benefit bird species.

Expanding Regenerative Grazing in the Northern Great Plains (AB; MT; NE; SD; SK; WY)

Grantee: World Wildlife Fund
 Grant Amount:.....\$1,000,000
 Matching Funds:.....\$1,221,800
 Total Project Amount:.....\$2,221,800
 Partner with ranchers to develop and implement sustainable grazing plans and practices that are supported by ecological monitoring, infrastructure improvements, and habitat restoration activities across the Northern Great Plains. Project will restore 300 riparian acres to benefit greater sage-grouse, improve management on 150,000 acres, and restore 10,000 acres of marginal cropland back to native grassland.

Guiding Restoration Across the Great Plains Using Habitat Management Plans (MT; ND; NE; SD; WY)

Grantee: National Audubon Society
 Grant Amount:.....\$1,757,700
 Matching Funds:.....\$2,283,000
 Total Project Amount:.....\$4,040,700
 Improve habitat quality on private working lands across the Northern Great Plains through management agreements, technical assistance for land restoration activities, and landowner education. Project will improve visibility of 2 miles of fence, remove invasive trees from 100 acres, restore lands including two greater sage-grouse leks, restore 20 acres of riparian habitat, improve management on 78,000 acres, and restore 8,880 acres by removing invasive vegetation and conducting prescribed burns.

Increasing Capacity to Enhance Private Grasslands Conservation Efforts (MT; NE; SD; WY)

Grantee: Bird Observatory of the Rockies
 Grant Amount:..... \$545,800
 Matching Funds:..... \$573,000
 Total Project Amount:.....\$1,118,800
 Increase capacity for Private Lands Wildlife Biologists based in NRCS offices across the Northern Great Plains states to continue building and maintaining partnerships, fostering community impact and engagement, and providing financial and technical support to private landowners. Project will survey two active greater sage-grouse leks, improve

management on 50,000 acres, restore 2,000 acres, and improve 10 miles of fencing to wildlife-friendly standards.

Increasing Indigenous Natural Resource Management Capacity in the Northern Great Plains (Multiple Locations)

Grantee: Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance
 Grant Amount:..... \$220,000
 Matching Funds:..... \$211,900
 Total Project Amount:..... \$431,900
 Increase Tribal natural resource management capacity and contribute to workforce development across the 16 Tribal Nations of the Northern Great Plains. The Project Coordinator position will foster Tribal game and fish agency stewardship efforts and support community-led conservation partnerships.



Grasshopper sparrow

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Milk River, Montana

Supporting Resilient Rangelands and Storing Carbon in the Northern Great Plains, Phase II (MT, ND, SD, WY)

Grantee: Ducks Unlimited
Grant Amount:..... \$500,000
Matching Funds:..... \$503,300
Total Project Amount:.....\$1,003,300
Expand and enhance the impact of existing programs, partnerships, and community engagement by administering funds through the Northern Grasslands Restoration Incentive Program, providing technical assistance to underserved areas, enhancing private lands biologists networks, and supporting grasslands conservation workshops. Project will improve management on 10,000 acres and restore 25 acres of wet-meadows and grasslands.

Restoring Buffalo Habitat for Ecosystem Health and Tribal Culture (MT; ND; NE; SD; WY)

Grantee: Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
Grant Amount:..... \$700,000
Matching Funds:.....\$3,813,200
Total Project Amount:.....\$4,513,200
Develop, facilitate, and manage the Buffalo Habitat Restoration and Improvement Programs to increase buffalo habitat, outreach, education, and access for Tribes. Project will conduct three buffalo restoration studies used to inform management, improve management on 10,000 acres, and restore 11,000 acres of buffalo habitat.

Restoring Native Canadian Grasslands to Benefit Greater Sage-Grouse and Pronghorn (AB)

Grantee: Nature Conservancy of Canada
Grant Amount:.....\$1,091,100
Matching Funds:.....\$2,236,200
Total Project Amount:.....\$3,327,300
Restore high-priority grassland in Alberta’s Missouri-Milk River Grasslands by partnering with landowners, provincial and federal governments, and local conservation organizations. Project will place 2,484 acres under easement, improve visibility of 5 miles of fence for greater sage-grouse (GSG), restore 150 acres for GSG, conserve land including or in the vicinity of Alberta’s only three known GSG leks, improve management on 14,817 acres, and improve 12 miles of fencing to benefit pronghorn.

Updating the Plowprint Report to Inform Future Grasslands Conservation Efforts (Multiple Locations)

Grantee: World Wildlife Fund
Grant Amount:..... \$163,100
Matching Funds:..... \$163,100
Total Project Amount:..... \$326,200
Generate annual updates of the Plowprint Report and Central Grasslands Assessment Map to track grassland conversion and woody plant encroachment across the Great Plains, and assess the composition of existing grasslands to inform carbon, water, and biodiversity benefits of intact grasslands. Project will conduct one study used to inform future grasslands management.