



## Grouse and the Farm Bill—Needs for Native Species

The prairies and plains of North America once comprised nearly a billion acres of diverse grasslands and shrublands. Today, prairies are considered among North America's most endangered ecosystems. This loss and degradation has put prairie grouse (sharp-tailed grouse and lesser and greater prairie-chickens) and sage grouse populations in serious trouble.

Prairie and sage grouse need vast landscapes of native grasses and shrubs. To reverse the declines in grouse populations, millions of acres of their native habitats must be restored. Restorations should be focused in high-priority areas with a minimum size of at least at least 25,000 acres, an area of about 6 miles wide and long. America's 3.2 million family farmers and ranchers make their homes and living on 922 million acres which includes millions

of acres of grouse habitat. Although agricultural activity occurs in all states, it is particularly concentrated in the Great Plains where most of our prairie grouse live. Farther west, private lands provide vital sage grouse habitat which is found amongst farm and ranch operations.

***The Farm Bill is the largest piece of federal conservation legislation and provides millions of dollars for wildlife conservation. It is vitally important for North American grouse.***

The only hope of restoring and maintaining grouse habitats is to seek support from our farmers and ranchers and the American taxpayers.

The Farm Bill has a suite of conservation programs for

agricultural lands. The most popular of these programs are the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

These programs can be used to restore the natural ecology of prairie and shrubland ecosystems and benefit native grouse. Marginal farm and ranch lands can be restored to strategically establish the habitat conditions needed by grouse. Restoring and incentivizing large blocks (whole field enrollment) of native prairies and shrublands through the designation of native grouse Conservation Priority Areas in collaboration with the States can focus efforts on much needed conservation of key grouse habitats and help ensure successful grouse conservation.





## **Farm Bill Conservation Programs that Benefit Native Prairie Grouse and Sage Grouse**

### **EQIP—Environmental Quality Incentive Program**

EQIP helps farmers and ranchers with technical and financial assistance to improve the environmental impacts of their farming or ranching operations. Cost sharing can help implement agricultural practices that may not otherwise happen. The majority of EQIP projects do not provide direct wildlife benefits but provide indirect benefits through improved stewardship and an increase in water quality. Prescribed grazing, removal of invasive species, and restoration of native habitat are good examples of actions funded through EQIP.

### **CRP—Conservation Reserve Program**

CRP has been one of the most successful and beneficial programs for wildlife under the Farm Bill. CRP pays landowners to place permanent vegetative cover on marginal croplands providing widespread and diverse benefits to soil conservation, water quality, wildlife and rural economies. CRP that uses native vegetation and protects native prairies are highly beneficial to prairie grouse. The CRP State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (CRP-SAFE) address state or regional high-priority wildlife needs.

### **ACEP/ALE—Agricultural Conservation Easement Program/Agricultural Land Easements**

ACEP is an easement program designed to provide financial and technical assistance to landowners who agree to conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits for a certain period of time, usually 10 years or longer. Native prairies and grasslands can be maintained and protected under the ALE component of ACEP.

### **RCPP—Regional Conservation Partnership Program**

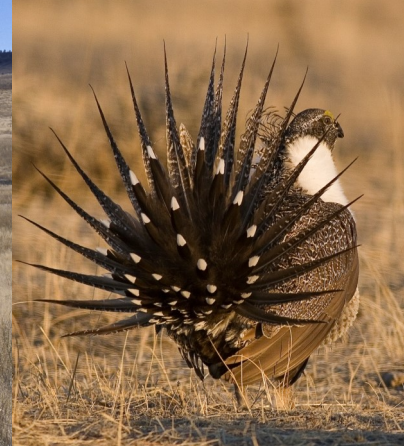
RCPP is a program designed to enable diverse stakeholders to work in partnership with farmer and ranchers to sustain soil, water, and wildlife. Partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in select project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding and help monitor and report on the benefits achieved. RCPP is very useful in mixed-ownership land matrices or where larger efforts are needed for local conservation benefits.

### **CSP—Conservation Security Program**

CSP promotes land stewardship through offering annual incentive payments to landowners who undertake actions that provide best land practices without compromising their agricultural operations. It also is a vehicle for technical assistance from USDA. Financial assistance is based on what practices a landowner agrees to and is scaled to provide more benefits the more they improve their operations.







## Prairie Grouse and Sage-Grouse Priority Needs for the Farm Bill

### Native Habitats and Vegetation

Native grouse do best when their habitat is native vegetation. Programs need to emphasize the use of native vegetation, where possible, and protect remaining large blocks of intact native habitats through their identification, prioritization, and providing dedicated funding.

### Large Spaces with Intact Habitats

Grouse, particularly prairie grouse, are a landscape bird that need large areas to thrive. Larger areas are hard to come by in mixed ownership or highly developed areas. Priority areas for native grouse conservation need to be identified and targeted towards 25,000 acres or greater. These areas should have less than 30% cropland agriculture and have the ability to host local populations of grouse for all their seasonal and life needs.

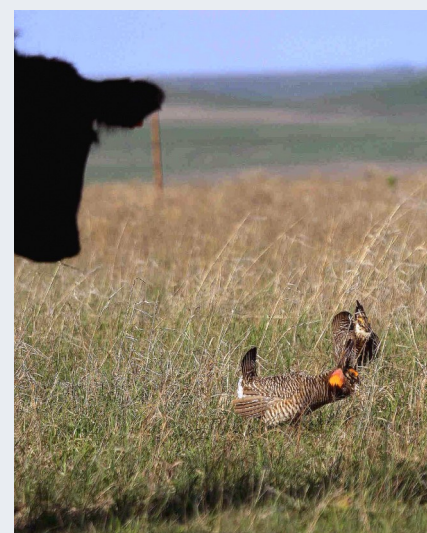
### Long-term Agreements

Native grouse conservation requires a long term outlook and commitment to be successful. Agreement terms need to provide enough assurance that grouse can thrive in certain areas where landowner business practices can incorporate native grouse conservation efforts.

Ten to fifteen years may not be long enough of a commitment for long-term grouse conservation and may not give enough time to recover from drought conditions and fluctuations in populations. Rehabilitation of native grouse habitat takes a long time and to incentivize landowners to undertake needed actions, longer agreements are necessary.

### Grouse-Friendly Practices

Certain agricultural practices can be modified to lessen the negative impact on grouse and their habitats. Grazing regime changes, water placements, fence modifications, timing of harvest, and others can all greatly benefit grouse with minimal impact to a landowner's operation.





## Recommendations to Protect and Restore Native Prairie Grouse and Sage Grouse Habitat via the Farm Bill

1. Identify native grouse **Priority Conservation Areas** (habitats in large blocks of >25,000 acres) for prairie grouse and sage grouse conservation
2. Prioritize native vegetation where possible and reduce the frequency of use for introduced or non-native vegetation in key grouse habitats
3. Increase and prioritize incentive payments for landowners who enter into conservation plans which focus on the conservation of native grouse habitats
4. Increase landowner and stakeholder partnerships through streamlining RCPP and making it more “user-friendly”
5. Dedicate funding for native prairie grassland and prairie-grouse conservation (\$50 million each/year for the Northern and Southern Great Plains)
6. Increase CRP-SAFE to 2 million acres in the Great Plains
7. Extend potential agreements terms for RCPP, EQIP and CRP-SAFE **up to 30 years** in large blocks of native grouse habitats
8. Expand the use of ACEP/ALE to protect native prairies and shrublands in the Great Plains and shrub dominated semi-arid regions of the US.
9. Reinstate **Sodbuster** provisions to preserve remaining prairie and shrubland habitats
10. Eliminate CRP eligibility for parcels created by conversion of native grasslands after the new Farm Bill becomes law

**The North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP)**  
is a “Key Voice” for grouse whose mission is “to promote the conservation of grouse and their habitats for their survival and reproduction.”  
NAGP is the only organization dedicated to the conservation of all 12 species of native North American grouse and their habitats.



*North American Grouse can benefit greatly from a carefully crafted Farm Bill that recognizes and prioritizes the need for native species, large habitat blocks, and practices that enhance survival and reproduction of grouse.*



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