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*ABC's Bird Saver*  
*Thoughts on a Bird-Friendly Farm Bill*

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# NOTES

- 25 minutes total; leave plenty of time for discussion and questions
- Provide examples germane to the upper Midwest ecoregion.
- Make sure to touch on parts of the Farm Bill that tend to drive prairie/grassland *problems*, like crop insurance and subsidies
- Mention support for tree planting in priority open habitats
- Bell curve of adoption; need to get to the average joe farmer and rancher, not just the early adopters.
- 3000 TA

# Why's ABC Working the Farm Bill?

## Grassland Birds

**720**  
MILLION  
GRASSLAND BIRDS  
LOST SINCE 1970

**-53%**  
POPULATION LOSS  
IN GRASSLAND  
BIRDS SINCE 1970

**3 IN 4**  
EASTERN MEADOWLARKS  
LOST SINCE 1970



Eastern Meadowlark by S. Queen/Waralley Library, Prairie Grasslands by Joshua May/Getative Commons

- One fourth of birds in North America have been lost!
- Grassland birds have suffered the worst losses
- Birds reflect losses throughout the natural world
- 70 species of birds are now at the **TIPPING POINT**
- Prairie Grouse are SGCN

Courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Source: Science, 2019

# Why Should We All Care?

- Lots of money for TA and FA
- Infrastructure & systems
- Vast existing partnerships



NOTE: There's a lot of legislative and administrative overlap in our priorities.

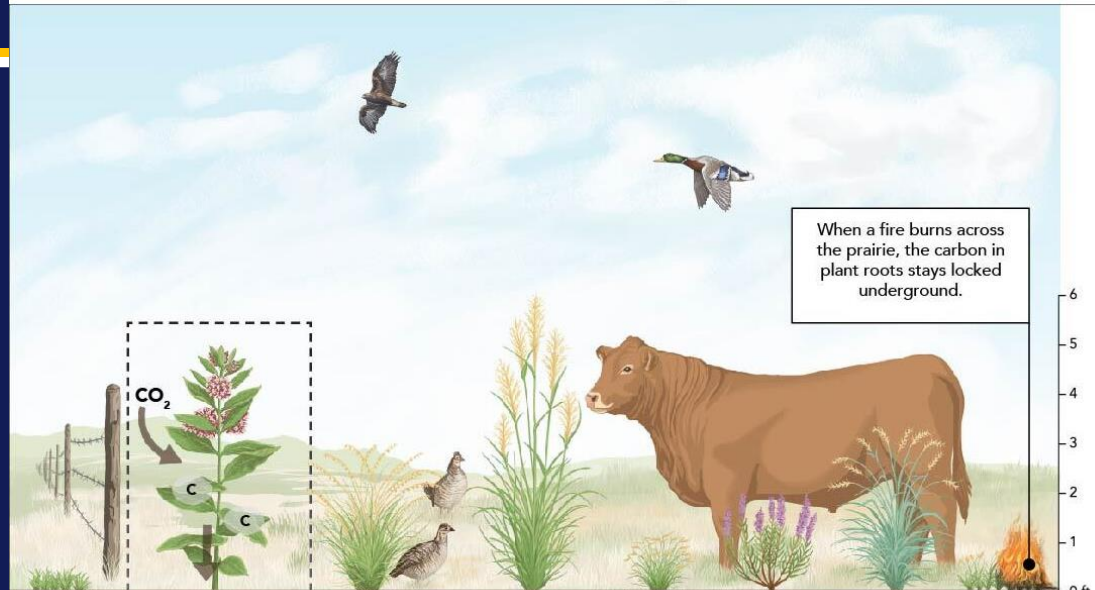
# ABC's *Bird Saver* Top Priorities



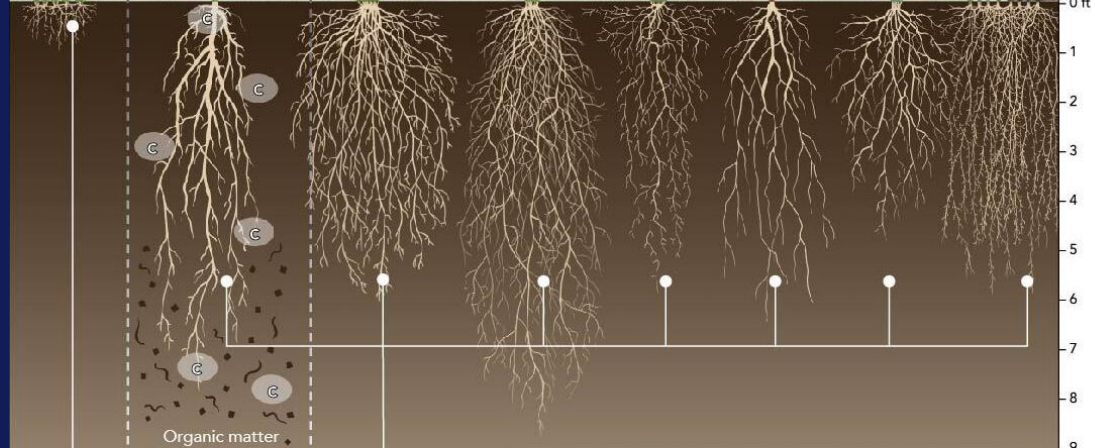
1. Radically improve incentives for grassland conservation
2. Develop better models to build NGO delivery capacity
3. Strengthen the CRP Program







When a fire burns across the prairie, the carbon in plant roots stays locked underground.



6  
5  
4  
3  
2  
1  
0 ft  
-1  
-2  
-3  
-4  
-5  
-6  
-7  
-8  
-9  
-10

Non-native grasses and overgrazed pastures have shallow root structures.

The roots of native prairie plants run several feet underground, storing carbon all along the way.

**THE CONSERVATION RANCHING TRIFECTA—CATTLE, CRITTERS, AND CARBON SEQUESTRATION**  
 Restored prairie can provide optimal forage for livestock and habitat for wildlife, while also sequestering vast amounts of greenhouse gases underground. Via photosynthesis, prairie plants glean carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and fix it into carbon that's stored in their robust root structures.

- Non-native grass
- Common Milkweed
- Sideoats Grama
- Indiangrass
- Blue Grama
- Dotted Blazing Star
- Little Bluestem
- Buffalo Grass

# What FB Incentives Do You Need for Grassland Conservation?

- I'll share one of our concepts next, but I wanted to queue up this question for later.

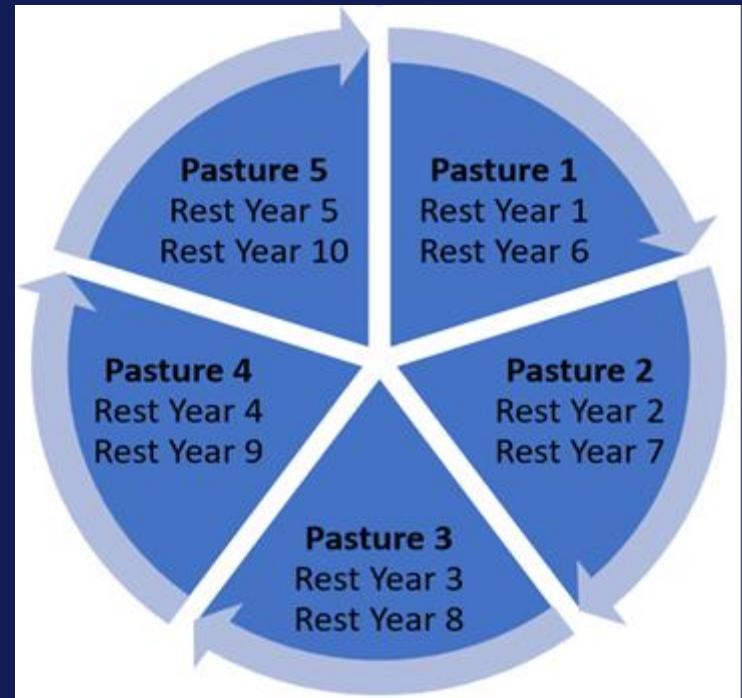


# Rest-Recover-Recapture

## *Grazing Rest—Why & How?*

Periodic rest improves:

- Plant species diversity
- Heterogeneity
- Soil health
- System stability, resilience, and sustainability, stores carbon, and increases forage production.



**Example of a 10-year Contract**



# Improve Partner TA Model



- Increase and stabilize partner conservation delivery capacity in RCPP and elsewhere
- Modify the administrative cap of RCPP and expand the overall partner TA limit from 25% to 30%

# How Would You Use More Staff?

- NRCS Announced 3,000 new TA Staff
- Consider match sources.
- Who can host positions?



# Strengthen CRP

- Increase CRP enrollment Cap.
  - The Inflation Reduction Act did not address CRP (as it did with other conservation programs) so we recommend a similarly aggressive CRP expansion.
  - Grassland-CRP savings can “pay for” more acres with no more \$.
- Require the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to adjust rental rates annually to encourage more enrollment.



# What is Wrong with Grassland CRP?

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- Grassland CRP = 1/3 of acre cap
- Working lands with no added conservation
- Acres used for come from somewhere else; leads to a net loss of grasslands.

# Other Recommendations

RCPP: Authorize and mandate the use of a simple RFP process as is used in VPA-HIP.

ACEP: Authorize funding for restoration and management activities to maintain taxpayer investment and authorize USDA to hold Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) in certain circumstances. Encourage the restoration of native wetland and grassland vegetation and hydrology.

Forest Conservation Easement Program: Authorize and fund—separate from ACEP—a Forest Conservation Easement Program. Include native forest plant community restoration and working forest components.

Expand use of native plant materials and to switch to seeds-per-square-foot seed mixture approach.



# Other Recommendations Continued

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EQIP: Maintain 10% minimum funding for wildlife: ensure that practices achieve State Wildlife Action Plan objectives.

Forestry Title: Authorize a Forest Climate Mitigation Fund to encourage landowners to sequester carbon through longer rotation forestry, and/or by managing areas as refugia for carbon, water, wildlife, or recreation.

Sod Saver: Expand Sodsaver nationwide and strengthen disincentives for native sod breaking.

Crop Insurance: Discourage the preemptive use of pesticides. Reduce crop insurance premium subsidies in proportion to the land's productivity to disincentivize cropping on marginal land.



Working for a  
stronger Farm Bill  
to **bring back**  
**grassland birds**





# Discussion and Questions







# There Are Only a Few Things We Can Do To Influence Change

- Learn and Share
  - ✓ Science & Education
- Expect People to do the “Right Thing”
  - ✓ = Duty of Care
- Regulate Unwanted Behavior
  - ✓ Fines and other sanctions
- Incentivize Wanted Behavior
  - ✓ The Farm Bill Conservation Title

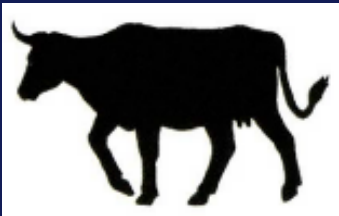




# Conservation Practices, According to Aldo Leopold, include the Ax, Cow, Plow and Fire



**Brush Management**—Using mechanical and chemical means to remove or reduce woody plants from grasslands to restore grassland functions and manage unwanted invasive plants.



**Prescribed Grazing**—Establishing a grazing management system that incorporate rest and foster resilient and complex native plant communities to provide more productive grazing and healthy wildlife populations.



**Native Reseeding**—Replanting native grasses, forbs and shrubs adds productivity and resilience to grasslands. *And now we beat our plowshares into native grass drills.*



**Prescribed Fire**—Deliberately, and by prescription, setting fires to manage plant materials and reset ecosystem functions.

# Continuum of Responsible Stewardship or Land Ethic



**Premise**

- All bands are individually variable
- All are states are individually changeable

*Basic and Advanced need to be switched.  
Rewards are Basic and Land Ethic is advanced*