

2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

Northern Great Plains Joint Venture

A Product of the NGPJV
Management Board

Edited by Catherine Wightman,
Steve Riley, and Lucinda Morris



**NORTHERN
GREAT PLAINS**
JOINT VENTURE

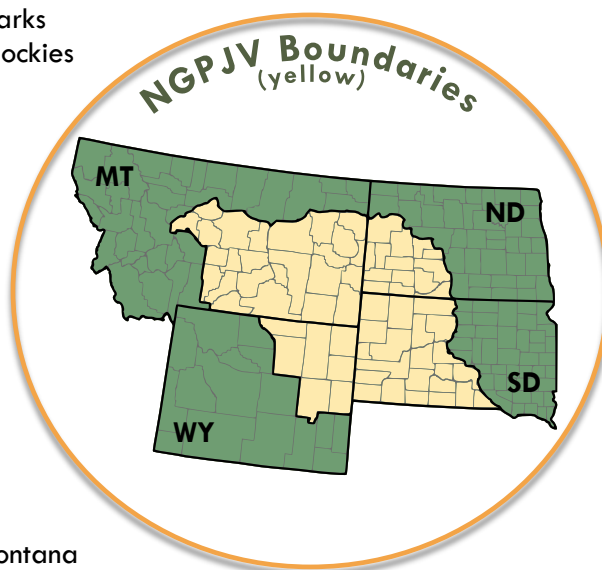
NGPJV MISSION & GOALS

Our *Mission* is to retain, enhance, restore, and protect grassland, sagebrush-steppe, wetland, and riparian ecosystems, with an emphasis on sustaining and increasing populations of migratory and resident birds while supporting working lands and communities that sustain these habitats.

Our *Overarching Goal* is to facilitate conservation efforts in the Northern Great Plains that result in healthy ecosystems and bird populations that benefit communities and private producers and support federal and state agencies and lawmakers as they prioritize grasslands conservation in their budgets, plans, and policies.

NGPJV MANAGEMENT BOARD

Paul Coughlin, co-chair, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks
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Jesse Beckers, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust
Josh Demorrett, Conoco Phillips
Al Eiden, Pheasants Forever
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RECOMMENDED CITATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) is a coalition of people who live, work, and recreate in the Northern Great Plains and who are concerned about the ongoing loss of our grassland resources and simultaneous declines in grassland bird populations. The Northern Great Plains (NGP) boasts some of the most intact shrub-steppe and grassland landscapes in North America and supports critical breeding habitat for five of the most imperiled species of declining grassland birds.

The NGPJV Management Board and staff participated in a strategic retreat in January 2022 to define the core values that guide how we operate and our path forward as a coalition. We emerged from that work rallying around a shared vision of **resilient grasslands**. Our philosophy is that we can help build resilient grasslands and sustainable bird populations by supporting the people who are working to retain, enhance, restore, and protect native grasslands (Appendix A). We are focused on resiliency because it characterizes the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions. Intact, native grasslands are inherently resilient, which is important because outside influences such as drought, flooding, invasive species, changing commodity markets, and government policies will continue to shape the region and influence local conditions. NGPJV partners are dedicated to building and supporting resilient grasslands to ensure grassland birds, local communities, and ecosystem services are sustained over time and can recover from stressors.

The NGPJV partnership will work across fences to support conservation that bridges gaps across public, private, and Tribal lands and across cultures. NGPJV will engage with regional initiatives that provide a broader platform for our work. We will convene, leverage, and grow our partnership by making connections, providing capacity and resources, and helping to catalyze conservation actions. Specifically, the NGPJV partnership will work within five priorities: 1) communications, education, and outreach, 2) conservation design and implementation, 3) science, monitoring, and research, 4) conservation policy, and 5) human dimensions. This work will lead to better awareness of the ecological and economic importance of grassland communities among the public and the critical role that ranchers and land stewards play in retaining vibrant grasslands.

Science-based conservation is a foundational component of the NGPJV, and we will use, develop, and share science products and Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge to inform conservation actions and to strategically target conservation efforts in the right places. Conservation policy has strong influence over the opportunities available for conservation; therefore, we intend to leverage our expertise to inform new and emerging policies as well as work within existing policies. The field of human dimensions is a relatively new frontier for the NGPJV, but it is critically important for our partnership to understand how knowledge, values, and behaviors influence individual conservation decisions. Greater engagement with people and communities, including Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities, will lead to more sustainable and resilient conservation over the long-term.

The NGPJV Management Board and staff have a renewed commitment and enthusiasm for grasslands and are poised to facilitate conservation efforts in the NGP that result in healthy ecosystems and bird populations, recognizing the critical role of private landowners and Tribes in supporting our vision of resilient grasslands.

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2022, the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) Management Board and staff held a virtual, facilitated¹ strategic retreat. The goals of the retreat were to build a more cohesive team within the NGPJV partnership and to reimagine our shared vision and purpose. While the basic tenets of the NGPJV and the landscape have not changed in the 16 years since this partnership was formed, the operating environment, staff capacity, and opportunities have evolved, precipitating the need for reimagining.

Participants in the retreat began by identifying Core Values within which the partnership will operate. The group then focused on answering reflection questions about who we are as a partnership and identifying our unique niche. The partnership rallied around a shared vision of **resilient grasslands** in the Northern Great Plains (NGP). Group discussion emphasized that resilient grasslands are more than just grass, also including forbs, shrubs, sagebrush-steppe, water, wetlands, riparian corridors, woody draws, and all the other ecological features that support the grassland and sagebrush-steppe ecosystem. The people who live, work, and recreate in the NGP (e.g., agricultural producers, Indigenous people, industry, and rural communities) are also an important component of the landscape. A focus on resilient grasslands recognizes change agents on the landscape and in social and political systems that require an adaptable and nimble approach to conservation.

Grasslands Include:

- ☐ Grass
- ☐ Forbs
- ☐ Shrubs
- ☐ Sagebrush-steppe
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Wetlands
- ☐ Riparian corridors
- ☐ Woody draws
- ☐ Ecological processes
- ☐ People

The 2022 Strategic Plan is presented as a streamlined and contemporary update to the [2006 Implementation Plan](#), providing the vision and direction for the Joint Venture in the near-term, given a vastly different operating environment from over 16 years ago. The 5-year Action Plan steps down the overarching strategies in this plan to articulate key goals, objectives, priority actions, and metrics for tracking outcomes for each priority area. Specific tasks will be defined in Annual Operating Plans that will be approved by the Management Board at the start of each calendar year. All actions and decisions will be made in accordance with the NGPJV Core Values listed below. Management Board members and staff are committed to working within identified priorities to advance our shared vision of resilient grasslands.

- The **5-Year Action Plan** steps down overarching strategies in the Strategic Plan to articulate key goals, objectives, priority actions, and metrics for tracking outcomes.
- **Annual Operating Plans** are approved by the Management Board at the start of each calendar year to identify specific annual tasks for the NGPJV.

¹ Rachel Gooen of Rachel Gooen Consulting facilitated the NGPJV strategic planning process from October 2021-January 2022.

NGPJV CORE VALUES

Core Values serve as the guideposts for NGPJV Management Board, staff, and partners when planning, designing, and implementing work to accomplish the NGPJV mission. The NGPJV will operate in ways that embody these values and will use them as a screen when making decisions.

PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION

Forming a cooperative and open-minded alliance to focus on effective contributions

TRUST

Acting with individual integrity and mutual respect

WONDER

Engaging with creativity and curiosity, and exercising innovative thinking

FLEXIBILITY

Practicing adaptive readiness and willingness to adjust

PURPOSEFUL PERSISTENCE

Building intention through personal authenticity, group accountability, and ordered priorities

Acting in accordance with these Core Values will enable the NGPJV to build trust and respect among a diversity of people that will in turn enable collaborative conservation. This will enable the NGPJV to respond to new and innovative approaches and partnerships while maintaining the integrity of the existing alliance. It will allow flexibility and adaptability in an open-minded cooperative based on a foundation of trust and respect. By aligning around the Core Values, the NGPJV partnership will be well poised to provide strong and reliable conservation leadership within the NGP.

RESILIENT GRASSLANDS – OUR SHARED VISION

The NGP boasts some of the most intact sagebrush-steppe and grassland landscapes in North America and is a breeding stronghold for five of the most imperiled declining grassland birds – Sprague’s pipit, chestnut-collared longspur, thick-billed longspur, lark bunting, and Baird’s sparrow (Correll et al. 2016, Somershoe 2018). In addition to breeding habitat for grassland-obligate birds, the NGP plays a critical role in providing other grassland ecosystem services. Temperate grasslands are third in the world for soil carbon storage, and aboveground native vegetation sequesters additional atmospheric carbon dioxide. Grasses, forbs, and shrubs native to the NGP have deep roots that help stabilize soils and retain water, which reduces runoff and erosion and minimizes downstream flooding. Water is a limited resource in the NGP; wet years and wet places are critical to supporting grassland function across the region. NGPJV partners are dedicated to building and supporting resilient grasslands to ensure grassland birds, local communities, and ecosystem services are sustained over time and can recover from stressors.

Sustainable:	able to be maintained at a certain rate or level
Resilient:	able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions

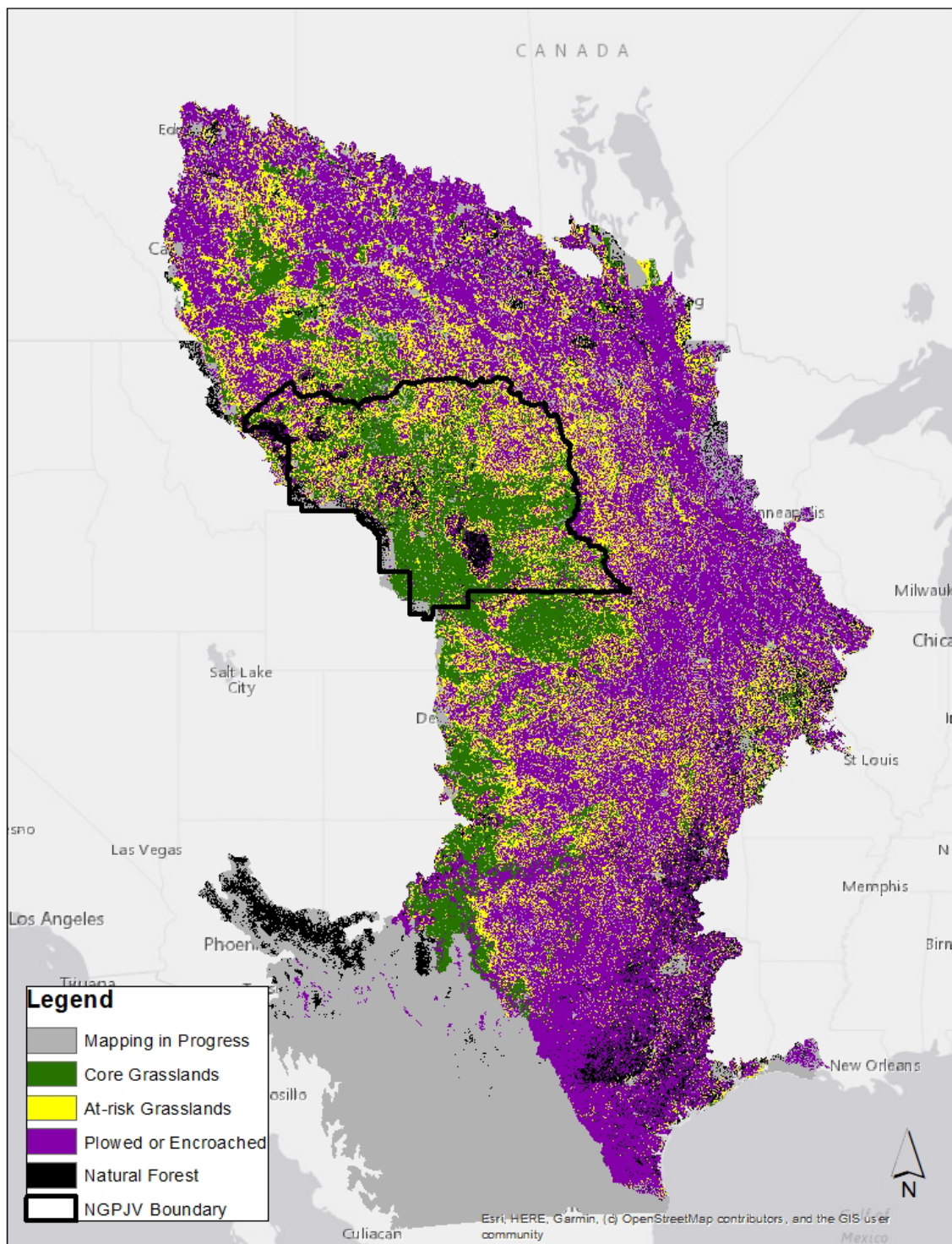


Change Agents

Climate change – The NGP region is expected to experience changes in precipitation patterns, warmer temperatures, and more extreme rainfall and drought events by the middle part of the 21st century (Conant et al. 2018). These conditions are predicted to increase the abundance and competitive ability of weeds and invasive species, alter plant phenology, and decrease the quality of forage for livestock, among other changes. Large-scale wildfire is becoming more common while warmer temperatures and reduced winter snowpack are leading to warmer stream temperatures, impacting fish and riparian communities. The region is already experiencing many of these stressors.

Social change – Challenging environmental conditions, along with inflation and changing economics, mean that family-owned ranching and farming operations are experiencing increasingly unstable and declining profit margins. Rural populations are remaining stable or declining, as fewer young people are returning to the family farm or ranch in many places. Changes in regional demographics and economies will lead to changes in land use decisions.

Political change – Changes in federal and state administrations and elected officials are often followed by changes in conservation program approaches, rules, incentives, and funding. This leads to less predictability in long-term program availability. It also impacts program enrollment, as often-changing rules can cause confusion and function as a barrier to program adoption. Some government programs that include incentives to convert native grasslands, such as crop insurance on poor soils, can work at cross purposes to conservation.



The Grasslands Risk Map (data courtesy of the Central Grasslands Roadmap) shows that 56% of the central grasslands biome has already been converted from grasslands to other uses or encroached by woody vegetation (e.g., eastern red cedar). Of the remaining grasslands, over half are considered at risk of conversion to cropland or woody encroachment. The NGPJV region supports the greatest expanse of intact core grasslands across the biome and is ground zero for retaining, enhancing, and expanding grasslands for the benefit of birds, other wildlife, and people.

ROLES AND CAPACITY

NGPJV STAFF

The NGPJV will maintain existing staff capacity for the short-term. A gap analysis will be conducted to identify additional capacity needs to implement this strategic plan and assess whether NGPJV partners can help fill any gaps or if new staff are required. In the meantime, staff will work to balance the priorities of 1) communications, outreach, and education, 2) conservation design and delivery, 3) science, research, and monitoring, 4) policy, and 5) human dimensions. There will be an emphasis on dedicated outreach and communications and maximizing return on investment when doing conservation.

Staff will continue to manage NGPJV finances in coordination with the Management Board and will seek grants and other funding opportunities to support partners and strategies identified in this plan. A gap analysis of Management Board membership and expertise will occur periodically to ensure the right mix of disciplines are represented to maximize effectiveness of the Board.

NGPJV MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Management Board is the policy-making body that provides guidance and establishes direction for the NGPJV. The Management Board is committed to achieving the NGPJV's priorities of sound science, adequate funding, proper staffing, good planning, project development and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, accountability, and reliance on strong partnerships to accomplish the goals and objectives of the NGPJV.

Specific Management Board commitments identified in this strategic plan include:

- Committee engagement – Board members and/or their staff have committed to serving on the following committees to support the NGPJV:
 - Communications Committee,
 - Technical Committee, typically technical or other appropriate staff appointed by a Board member,
 - Board member liaison to Technical Committee,
 - Ad hoc Conservation Delivery Workshop Committee and other ad hoc committees as needed (e.g., policy), and
 - A Strategic Think Tank to inform the NGPJV's evolving approach to conservation.
- Association of Joint Venture Management Boards participation (co-chairs and others).
- Dedicate resources to support NGPJV planning tools and projects (e.g., Conservation Guidance Web Tool and communications).
- Identify and engage new and unconventional partners.
- Honoring sovereignty of Tribes and Indigenous communities while addressing cultural barriers, improving relations, and identifying opportunities for collaboration.
- Identify additional funding and capacity opportunities to help serve the partnership and gain multiple perspectives.
- Share NGPJV priorities and success stories internally among their agencies or organizations and externally with partners.

NGPJV STRATEGIES

Developing Holistic Relationships and Management

The NGPJV partnership will work across fences to support conservation that bridges gaps across public, private, and Tribal lands and across cultures. The NGPJV will employ an ecosystem approach to conservation that considers the ecological and social implications of actions. For example, NGPJV partners are working to support non-regulatory options for retaining grasslands that work for landowners and tribes. We will continue to build relevant science, both ecological and social, and will incorporate western science, Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and local knowledge to balance conservation delivery, communications, and policy. A dedicated outreach program will focus on partner engagement and highlight a diversity of public and private entities.

Leveraging Larger Regional Initiatives

There are several regional initiatives focused on grasslands that can provide a broader platform for the NGPJV's work. These initiatives encompass breeding, migration, and wintering habitat, putting our work in the context of the full annual life cycle for grassland birds. The NGPJV partnership will engage with and support these efforts through the Management Board and staff.

1. [Central Grasslands Roadmap](#) – *Guiding us toward resilient and sustainable grasslands and human communities.* The Central Grasslands Roadmap is a collaborative guide to increase conservation of North America's Central Grasslands, which span 500 million acres across Indigenous Lands, Canada, the United States, and Mexico. By bringing together these three countries and eight diverse sectors, the Roadmap identifies common principles and collaborative priorities for the many people and organizations living in, working on, and influencing the Central Grasslands.
2. [JV8 Central Grasslands Conservation Initiative](#) – *Eight Migratory Bird Joint Ventures unified for conservation of the Central Grasslands.* The JV8 vision is for the central grasslands from Canada to Mexico to support stable, thriving, and diverse communities of birds, other wildlife, and people into the future. The mission of the JV8 is to engage and expand Migratory Bird Joint Venture partnerships across North America for the stewardship of native grassland ecosystems.
3. [NRCS WLFW Great Plains Grasslands Biome Framework](#) – *Conserving resilient rangelands for people and wildlife.* Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) maximizes outcomes for wildlife and working rangelands by focusing efforts in core areas where local data show there are wildlife strongholds, and where communities are willing to participate in conservation efforts. This action-based framework addresses the two most severe and large-scale threats to the Great Plains biome: woodland expansion and land use conversion.

Convening and Activating the Partnership

The NGPJV is governed by 17 discrete federal, state, non-governmental, industry, and private formal partners, with many more partners across the network. There is a wealth of experience, expertise, vision, and resources contained in the coalition. The NGPJV will convene, leverage, and grow this broad partnership by making connections, providing capacity and resources, and helping to catalyze conservation actions.

Specifically, NGPJV partners will work to:

- Increase conservation effectiveness across local, regional, interstate, and national scales,
- Deliver effective messaging and outreach,
- Empower local communities and tribes by helping with funding, technical expertise, communications, local capacity, and other needs for delivering place-based conservation,
- Support local and state-based partnerships,
- Expand understanding of human dimensions in partnership with social scientists, and
- Define capacity (people and resources) needed to meet NGPJV conservation targets, including estimates of financial and socio-economic needs.

OPPORTUNITIES AND PRIORITIES

The NGPJV partnership will work within the priorities of 1) communications, education, and outreach, 2) conservation design and implementation, 3) science, monitoring, and research, 4) conservation policy, and 5) human dimensions. This strategic approach identifies ways to leverage existing efforts and partners, work holistically to achieve shared outcomes, and grow the partnership and conservation footprint.

Communications, Education, and Outreach

Effective communications will lead to a greater understanding of the ecological and economic importance of grassland communities among the public and the role ranchers and land stewards play in retaining vibrant grasslands. The NGPJV partnership will raise awareness of the value of grasslands to declining grassland birds, other wildlife, and agricultural production, showcase the role of the NGPJV in helping to maintain resilient grassland communities, and elevate the science around the importance of grasslands to national and global conservation. To effectively implement communication, education, and outreach activities, the NGPJV will engage a communications committee, solicit feedback from Management Board members, develop a communications calendar, and identify communications gaps.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

The NGPJV will re-energize a Communications Committee made up of 3-5 Management Board members, 1-2 communications staff from partner agencies or organizations, and NGPJV staff members. This committee will provide strategic guidance and oversight to NGPJV communications, evaluate the effectiveness of NGPJV communications, and identify steps to promote partners, states, organizations, and coalitions.

The committee will identify key audiences, communication tools, and the best messenger and methods to reach specific audiences, which may or may not be NGPJV staff or Management Board members. Partner staff and communications tools will be leveraged geographically. For example, North Dakota's Meadowlark Initiative is a powerful communications tool for reaching North Dakota audiences, and the Central Grasslands Roadmap is preparing communications tools intended to reach national and international decision makers. The committee will work with NGPJV partner communications staff to adapt messaging from larger landscapes for the NGP and provide opportunities for staff to participate on other grassland-related communications teams (e.g., JV8, Central Grasslands Roadmap). Human dimensions and social science will also inform NGPJV messaging, and science outputs from the NGPJV Technical Committee and partners will be translated for different audiences.

MANAGEMENT BOARD ENGAGEMENT

The NGPJV Management Board will provide feedback on how well communications are going within the Joint Venture and with our partners. Board members will commit to providing content for NGPJV newsletters, social media posts, and conservation success stories. NGPJV staff will help craft stories when needed, and Board members will identify relevant stories and details. The Communications Committee will provide regular updates to the Management Board to receive feedback and identify ways Board members and their staff can contribute to shared communications.

COMMUNICATIONS CALENDAR

The communications calendar will provide an annual overview of NGPJV activities, such as an e-newsletter distribution schedule, timeline for a new website, and regional and national activities that may have communications campaigns, such as World Migratory Bird Day.

Some initial communications, education, and outreach activities may include:

- Branding and design of a new logo
- New website platform,
- Revisiting NGPJV communications framework to focus on resilient grasslands,
- NDGF video showcasing the Northern Great Plains,
- Engagement with tribal colleges,
- Factsheets and campaigns focused on a specific message (e.g., CRP SAFE and N-GRIP), and
- Other tasks as defined in NGPJV Communications Framework or by NGPJV Communications Committee.

COMMUNICATIONS GAPS

To further enhance communications, NGPJV partners will work toward fostering relationships with the social science community and developing shared products. We will develop an education platform to identify desired outcomes from educational activities, such as raising awareness or training the next generation of conservation professionals. The NGPJV will also continue to close the gap between science and implementation and will work to translate science, monitoring, and technology to the people implementing conservation.

Conservation Design and Implementation

It is critical that conservation efforts are targeted in the right places and strategically implemented using the most effective tools to achieve our shared vision of resilient grasslands and sustainable bird populations. The NGPJV partnership is dedicated to amplifying the scale and scope of on-the-ground conservation. To help facilitate and provide leadership towards effective conservation design and implementation, the NGPJV will catalyze, energize, and convene partnerships, serve and develop the partnership, engage the Management Board, and identify gaps in conservation design and implementation.

CATALYZE, ENERGIZE, AND CONVENE PARTNERSHIPS

The NGPJV will activate and facilitate existing expertise within the partnership, utilizing experienced private lands program staff and strong intellectual capacity as it relates to science and spatial analysis. The NGPJV organizes a *Conservation Delivery Network* to coordinate among conservation professionals, a *Technical Committee* to advise on science tools, and dedicated staff to help facilitate technical transfer. We will facilitate integrated leadership by convening *Local Leadership Teams* within each state to guide shared conservation activities and collaboratively fill conservation delivery gaps. By convening and energizing these groups, the NGPJV will catalyze collaboration and information transfer. This will lead to more engagement by conservation delivery staff in the field and leverage the full power of the NGPJV partnership.

SERVE THE PARTNERSHIP

The NGPJV will continue to contribute in an additive way to the partnership. Initial activities may include:

- Facilitate information transfer,
- Host facilitated conservation delivery workshops,
- Host facilitated effectiveness monitoring workshops,
- Develop and share science to inform habitat conservation implementation,
- Develop clear, time-bound milestones and baselines for tracking successes,
- Work to retain and expand high-quality grassland bird habitat,
- Foster a network of conservation staff and programs,
- Foster collaboration to scale and fill gaps in conservation delivery,
- Mentor new, entry-level conservation delivery positions in cooperation with supervisors and *Local Leadership Teams*, while respecting existing experience,
- Improve understanding of economic tools that can maintain grasslands and utilize that understanding to incentivize conservation.
- Incorporate different cultural perspectives, especially enhanced connections with tribes, and
- Foster listserv for grasslands (e.g., Sage West).



Wind Ranch Tour by Dan Casey

DEVELOP THE PARTNERSHIP

The NGPJV will broaden new and existing partnerships to activate the full spectrum of people and resources within the region. This involves identifying organizations that have the potential for collaboration (e.g., more unconventional partners) and helping to organize regional activities. Initial activities may include:

- Listen and learn from tribes and tribal members and incorporate cultural perspectives into NGPJV activities,
- Listen and learn from agricultural producers about how conservation efforts can complement their operations,
- Incorporate renewable and nonrenewable energy partners in habitat conservation work and planning,
- Develop innovative, new ideas with partners and help bring them to fruition at scale,
- Identify ways to leverage carbon markets to better serve habitat conservation,
- Work throughout the geography to organize conservation work in the region,
- Develop expertise to provide guidance for ranchers interested in succession planning for conservation,
- Put NGPJV planning, tools, and activities in the context of climate change,
- Support local conservation delivery efforts and clarify the NGPJV's role in habitat delivery,
- Expand human dimensions and social science understanding and research, and
- Collaborate on and provide leadership for shared training opportunities.

MANAGEMENT BOARD ENGAGEMENT

The NGPJV Management Board will support a *Strategic Think Tank* populated by Board members and/or their staff and NGPJV staff to leverage existing expertise that can guide conservation design and implementation. Board members will recruit new and unconventional partners to help guide NGPJV conservation activities. Board members will also commit to participating on an *ad hoc Conservation Delivery Workshop Planning Committee* to guide the execution of a productive workshop. In addition, Management Board members will commit resources to ensure the NGPJV Conservation Guidance Web Tool is relevant, current, and growing.

CONSERVATION DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

The NGPJV partnership will work to identify capacity needs in terms of people and resources to achieve conservation targets. This will include an assessment of boots-on-the-ground staff, financial and socio-economic needs, science needs to address JV-specific issues, and new and emerging implementation tools that might help achieve the NGPJV vision (e.g., new policy initiatives).

Science, Research, and Monitoring

Science-based conservation is a foundational component of the NGPJV. Using the best available science and incorporating Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, the NGPJV helps ensure that the right conservation tools are used in the most effective way and at the right time and place to positively affect resilient grasslands and priority grassland birds. Our partners continue to research system dynamics and change agents within the grasslands to better inform and adapt conservation work. Monitoring information, such as trends in bird populations, agricultural economics, and biological and social outcomes from conservation actions, also guides and informs on-the-ground actions and helps partners articulate the value of our collective work. Outcome monitoring metrics assessing implementation of this strategy are described in the 5-Year Action Plan.

The NGPJV Management Board provides representatives to a Technical Committee that advises the partnership on NGPJV science, research, and monitoring. Technical Committee members work to identify priorities among the partnership, integrate science into conservation delivery, and foster, coordinate, and support science and science communications. The Technical Committee recently completed NGPJV [Grassland Bird Conservation Objectives](#) for five priority species to quantify conservation targets needed to help slow or stabilize declining populations of these birds. In December 2021, the Technical Committee participated in a strategic session to define guiding principles for NGPJV science and the highest priority science needs to inform habitat conservation in the region.

OVERARCHING GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR NGPJV SCIENCE

NGPJV science and technical tools will:

- Inform and assess effective on-the-ground grassland habitat conservation,
- Be developed in cooperation with land managers to ensure end products are useful and interpretable to land managers, delivery practitioners, and other partners, including tribes, and
- Inform actions needed to stabilize or reverse population trends for all 26 [NGPJV priority species](#) within the next 15-20 years, starting with five declining grassland bird species and adding additional species as opportunities and need arise.

SCIENCE, RESEARCH, AND MONITORING PRIORITIES

15-20-year planning horizon

- A. Assess effectiveness of conservation actions toward wildlife species outcomes and ecosystem services (e.g., carbon, water)
 - a. Clearly define desired and measurable outcomes.
 - b. Measure and quantify avoided loss.
- B. Spatial and predictive models to prioritize actions and assess change
 - a. Improvements and synthesis of spatial and/or temporal models that integrate a range of biological and socio-economic factors (e.g., soil type, vegetation potential and land cover, Conservation Reserve Program, invasive plant species, and less commonly detected species).
 - b. Connectivity of geographic areas to cover full annual life cycle.
- C. Ecological research on birds to inform conservation decisions
 - a. Effects of management on bird habitat use and/or bird demographics.
 - b. Demographic and natural history information on species where little is known, to include measures of survival among age classes, migration survival rates, issues encountered during migration, winter habitat use, etc.
- D. Coordinated monitoring
 - a. Help carry out monitoring at scales meaningful to bird conservation.
 - b. Maintain database of monitoring projects to help inform and encourage collaboration.
- E. Social science to inform working with communities, tribes, producers, and practitioners
 - a. This is an emerging science for the JV but will likely focus on barriers to conservation, community readiness to engage in conservation, empowering local collectives, succession planning, or other topics related to sustaining rural communities and grass-based agriculture.

MANAGEMENT BOARD ENGAGEMENT

In addition to supporting staff and prioritizing their work to engage in the NGPJV Technical Committee, one Management Board member will serve as a Board Liaison to the Technical Committee. This liaison will ensure good communications between the Technical Committee and Management Board and will provide regular Technical Committee updates to the Board.

SCIENCE, RESEARCH, AND MONITORING GAPS

Funding and science capacity are identified needs for science, research, and monitoring. If NGPJV funds become available, Technical Committee members generally agreed that funding partner science, research, and monitoring is a higher priority than investing in new internal NGPJV science capacity. They also agreed there is a need for both science integration and human dimensions capacity within the partnership.

Conservation Policy

NGPJV staff and partners are experienced with conservation policy and will continue to stay informed of changing state and federal policies that influence conservation, such as state-based habitat programs and federal Farm Bill policy. The NGPJV will inform policy makers developing new and emerging policies, especially as it relates to how policies are implemented at scale and inform practitioners about policies and implementation opportunities. For example, NGPJV staff and Management Board members that are allowed to do so are advising on a proposed North American Grasslands Conservation Act, and, if passed, will be active in helping define how the Act will be administered. Other legislative actions, such as Recovering America's Wildlife Act and the Build Back Better and Infrastructure bills, can impact bird conservation if NGPJV partners are engaged in assisting agencies as they deliver these legislative priorities. The NGPJV is well-suited to help states implement projects that involve coordinated multi-state priorities.

The NGPJV will facilitate engagement between local community representatives, nationally elected officials, and agency leadership—both at home and in D.C.—to showcase success stories from the NGP and advocate for ongoing programming and Joint Venture funding. The NGPJV will also develop or modify larger-scale policy communications that are relevant to the NGP geography and people.

MANAGEMENT BOARD ENGAGEMENT

Many Management Board members are currently working to inform conservation policy and will continue to do so in collaboration with the NGPJV network and other regional partners. Whenever possible, NGPJV partners will continue to join broad coalitions to help guide policy development. Management Board members will participate in “Hill Visits” and legislative field tours to educate legislators about NGPJV actions and priorities. An ad hoc NGPJV Policy Committee may be convened in the future as specific regional issues arise. NGPJV Management Board members will provide policy updates at Board meetings to ensure partners stay informed.

POLICY GAPS

The NGPJV partnership will continue to look for opportunities to expand and leverage our collective expertise to make more informed conservation policy recommendations.

Human Dimensions

The field of human dimensions is a relatively new frontier for the NGPJV, focusing on how people's knowledge, values, and behaviors influence their decisions. NGPJV partners agree that human dimensions need to be considered as an integral part of our conservation work. As summarized by Bennet et al. (2017), "Greater engagement with the social sciences will facilitate more legitimate, salient, robust, and effective conservation." The NGPJV has recently employed a Science Integration Specialist who will work in the interface between science, conservation implementation, and human dimensions. We will consider community readiness when thinking about how to support and amplify local community conservation collaboratives. We will also strive to better understand tribal cultures and the unique challenges faced by tribes and tribal members who are interested in conservation. New partnerships with social scientists will be crucial for framing the most important questions and designing social research that effectively informs conservation delivery.

MANAGEMENT BOARD ENGAGEMENT

The NGPJV Management Board, in cooperation with other partners, will help identify human dimensions questions, expertise, and information gaps, and will support opportunities to address those gaps. Board members will also facilitate connections with local communities, individual tribes, and tribal coalitions (e.g., Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance).

HUMAN DIMENSIONS INFORMATION GAPS

The NGPJV partnership currently lacks strong economic and human dimensions expertise, which is critical for informing communications, conservation delivery, and policy. The NGPJV will work across our regional and national networks to identify and cultivate expertise that can assist with human dimensions.

REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The NGPJV Management Board and staff will review this plan every five years to determine whether updates or revisions are needed. Metrics for tracking measurable outcomes are listed in the 5-year Action Plan. Flexibility is an NGPJV Core Value and will be a guiding principle of this strategic plan as we adapt to changing situations and opportunities over time.

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APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF HABITAT ACTION TERMS

(Modified from the JV8 Central Grasslands Conservation Initiative definitions to reflect NGPJV priorities)

HABITAT RETENTION/PERSISTENCE is the process of keeping working intact grasslands agriculturally functional through means other than direct habitat management or protection through lease or easement acquisition. This includes working directly with operators through technical assistance programs or ranch estate planning to ensure agricultural operations remain economically successful.

Example Practices: alternative revenue stream planning (e.g., agritourism, hunting leases); niche marketing (e.g., bird-friendly beef, Community Supported Agriculture programs, Farm to Institution initiatives); grassbank programs; grazing coalition mentor programs.

Partner Programs: NRCS Technical Assistance, Cooperative Agricultural Extension services, NGO estate planning services, North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition mentor program, state fish and wildlife agencies and NGO private lands programs, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, N-GRIP.

HABITAT ENHANCEMENT is the process of managing lands that have been degraded or damaged with the objective of returning land cover and vegetation to a desired condition or seral stage. This also includes maintaining/managing working lands habitat to keep it in its current state through grass-based agricultural practices.

Example Practices: grazing management (e.g., rotational grazing infrastructure development); prescribed fire, and/or biological, chemical, mechanical treatments to control invasive species and shrub encroachment, regenerative agriculture practices, or improving native grass and forb diversity.

Partner Programs: NRCS Technical Assistance, various private lands conservation programs noted above, Audubon Conservation Ranching, WWF Sustainable Ranching, N-GRIP.

HABITAT RESTORATION is the process of reestablishing land cover and vegetation, on lands that have been intentionally converted to uses other than its natural state, to a desired condition or seral stage. This also includes conservation actions on lands that have been altered by natural disasters (e.g., wildfire, flood, hurricane, etc.).

Example Practices: Agricultural transition of unproductive cropland back to diverse, preferably native grasses and forbs for working grasslands, returning natural hydrology to drained or altered wetlands.

Partner Programs: USDA programs (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Easements with restoration), USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, N-GRIP, state fish and wildlife agency and NGO private lands programs.

HABITAT PROTECTION is the process to reserve real property through the voluntary incentive-based encumbrance of specific private land property rights (e.g., residential development, wetland drainage, grassland tillage, etc.) for the preservation of natural resources and/or specific ecological values. Protected lands occur across the ownership spectrum (e.g., federal, state provincial, private, corporate, etc.).

Example Practices: perpetual private land conservation easements, fixed-term leases.

Partner Programs: USFWS wetland and grassland easement program, NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, DU Rotating Lands Program, Land Trust voluntary incentive-based easement programs, state-based conservation leases.

THE UNBOUND PRAIRIE

You see forever on the prairie
Both in distance and in time
You see the power of her making
The majestic and sublime

The wind abides and oft reminds
Of the storm that soon may come
And the wetlands foster life for all
While the storm the end for some

The grasses and the wildflowers
Are beauty, food, and homes
For most of those who live here
And for many on the roam

Beware. Don't take too much away
For the interest is ten-fold
You'll be gone 10,000 years and still
The prairie won't seem old

The sunrises and sunsets
Are unmatched upon the earth
The kestrel and the meadow vole
Tell the tale of death and birth

The clouds climb high and threaten
While the steers and heifers sport
And the gusts brawl with the swallowtails
As the sharptails dance and court

Be gentle with the prairie
She will give, not to exceed
Your bond must be well trusted
Your promise is your creed

Come look upon the prairie
Stroll her hills and vales and breaks
Breathe a breath of life forever
Dream a dream while you're awake

■ Steve Riley, 2022



NGPJV