

## General Guidance

The primary objective of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture's (NGPJV) Northern Grassland Restoration Incentive Program (N-GRIP) is to reverse the decline of grassland bird populations through voluntary habitat conservation on working lands. Projects should help to meet habitat objectives while helping our producer partner continue to operate a successful agricultural enterprise.

## Eligibility

Before you begin, you should make sure that the producer is eligible based on Partner requirements if appropriate.

- Proposals *must* be signed by the Project Manager and the Producer.
- Projects are within the administrative boundaries of the NGPJV or the Montana portion of the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture.
- Landowner must consent to allowing NGPJV to share spatial data with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation or other entities providing financial assistance.

## Ranking Criteria

Projects will be ranked using factors that help to identify those with the highest likelihood of improving and sustaining bird habitat. Fortunately, those criteria also represent better grassland health and often provide for strong mutual benefits for the producer, wildlife, and our funders. The surrounding landscape, while perhaps not in the producer's control, is also often important in evaluating these planned benefits.

Evaluation factors will include the robustness of the project plan and its intended outcomes. We will also consider the project location relevant to priority bird habitats and proximity to existing conservation projects or protected sites.

## Step-by-Step Instructions and Guidance

### **PAGES 1 & 2—The Proposal**

The Project Score and Project Number both will be added later, so you do not need to do anything with these fields.

### Contact Information/Contact Person

Contact information is vital. Please provide a complete mailing address, email address, and at least one working phone number for the producer and their preferred contact person (if there is one). This information will become important when we need to get an agreement signed or provide payment for the project.

### Project Location and Size

Please complete all the fields in this section. For the coordinates, make sure you use decimal degrees. It is best to provide the coordinates for the approximate center of the project, but just do your best if that is not practical.

## Easements

The question about conservation easements has two purposes. The first is to ensure that we are not planning to pay for something that is already required under the terms of an easement. The second is a conservation easement may provide protections relevant to the project and additional consideration (more points) may be given to the project based on the ability of the conservation easement to offer protections to the work we are proposing.

## Producer Property Holdings, Treatment Acres, and Impacted Acres

For *property holdings*, we are looking for an approximate area of the contiguous acres the producer controls associated with the project (control may mean adjacent land that they own, lease, or have some business interest in). Understanding the extent of the broader property may give us some insight into the future impact, or catalyst effect the project might offer.

*Treatment acres* means the actual footprint area of the project.

*Impacted acres* typically means the area of the allotment in which the project is being conducted, like a pasture or paddock. If the project allows for better distribution of cattle, consider all relevant pastures as impacted. For example, if water infrastructure in one pasture will move livestock away from streams and into new areas, the entire grazing system may be considered impacted.

## Nearby Partner Projects

We are interested in relevant, nearby conservation projects that you know about. It may be worth additional consideration for the project if the review team is aware of nearby projects that may expand upon the landscape benefit of the project being designed.

## Project Description, Treatment Details, and Other Pertinent Information

The next four fields are provided to allow you to briefly explain the details of your project including what it proposes to accomplish and the practice design elements that will lead to the desired outcomes. Since we cannot think of everything to ask and since you may have more to say than the boxes provide, you can use the “Other Pertinent Information” box to provide overflow information from the first two boxes or additional details that may help to make the case for the project.

## **PAGE 3—Attachment A1—Vegetation Status and Plan**

This page is provided as a basic conservation planning tool. It is not intended to be an exhaustive instrument and you should be able to complete the form in less than thirty minutes. Use it as needed to describe current and planned ecological conditions and plans that the producer has indicated.

Note that there are two columns on the right that allow for a starting condition and one that you plan to achieve in the five years after the project is implemented. This before and after assessment/projection allows you to quantify 5-year project goals.

## Vegetation Assessment

To complete vegetative elements of the form, you may either provide ocular estimates or conduct a quick line transect or use your own system.

### Grazing Operation

If grazing is, or will be, a part of the plan, we would like you to provide a basic sense of how the current grazing system is designed and if there will be any changes as a part of the plan. It may not always be possible for you to provide this information but do your best.

### Bird Information

NGPJV has 5 top priority grassland bird species that we are targeting for conservation. While we are interested in a lot of other birds, we would like to know if you or someone credible has seen any of these species on the project site. If they have not been identified on the project site but are birds you would expect to see there, we would like to know that too. Additional space is provided for notes on other birds; 21 additional species have been identified as priorities in the JV (Joint Venture). Please describe in the space provided information about these other birds that the site should harbor or other observations you have for the record. Please refer to the [NGPJV Web Tool](#) for bird species presence/abundance on the project property.

*Five Top Priority Species:* thick-billed longspur, chestnut-collared longspur, Baird's sparrow, Sprague's pipit, and lark bunting.

*Other 21 Priority Species:* black-billed cuckoo, black-billed magpie, brewer's sparrow, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, grasshopper sparrow, greater sage-grouse, loggerhead shrike, long-billed curlew, mallard, marbled godwit, mountain plover, northern pintail, red-headed woodpecker, sharp-tailed grouse, short-eared owl, spotted towhee, Swainson's hawk, upland sandpiper, wild turkey, and Wilson's phalarope.

### Prescribed Burning Regime

Provide information on the history of fire and how it may be used in the future. Complete this section only if it is pertinent.

## **PAGE 4—Attachment A2—Planned Practices and Estimated Payments**

As is described at the top of this form, select available practices and estimate the number of units of each practice. Use estimated actual costs or payment rate from a NGPJV partner also working on this project, e.g., state wildlife agency payment rates or NRCS EQIP practice rates. The Estimated Payment for each practice should auto-generate. Please provide an estimated completion date for each practice you select. Note that the Estimated Total N-GRIP Payment at the bottom should also auto-generate. The Estimated Total N-GRIP Payment is total amount requested through N-GRIP and may not be total project budget.

Some practices are listed in a more generic manner at the bottom of the list as "*Other—Make a Proposal*" to accommodate a bit more breadth to the program. These practices are somewhat ancillary to our normal work and thus will require that you submit a written proposal to describe how these are important to the overall project. You will need to provide the appropriate units and estimate the Unit Cost, since it is not provided on the Payment Rate List.

### Signature and Date

The signature and date are provided to make sure that the producer is aware and supportive of the request you are making on their behalf. This should increase transparency and help to limit surprises later in the process.

### **PAGE 5—Attachment A3—Producer Contribution Commitment**

The producer's contribution to the project is vital and we have included this page to capture them. This page has its own instructions, so we will not repeat them here.

### **PAGE 6—Attachment A4—Project Budget and Match**

If the overall project requires additional funding, please complete this information.

### **PAGE 7—Attachment A5—Spatial Data**

Spatial data (e.g. shapefiles of project location and practices) is now being required by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), which is a main source of funding for N-GRIP. Therefore, we request landowner consent to share this information with NFWF or other entities providing financial assistance at their request. NFWF does not share individual project location data but uses it to communicate outcomes. If a landowner declines to share this information, they are ineligible for an N-GRIP project.

### **PAGE 8—Attachment B1—Project Overview Map**

You will need to include a map of the project area to provide a landscape context of the project. This should be a satellite image that depicts the location of the project and should include the surrounding area (i.e., a township in size). Once you have prepared the map and saved it as an image file (i.e., jpg or png), you should be able to click on the icon in the center of the page to select the appropriate file from your computer and insert it into the form. Shapefiles of impacted acres are required. Please send project overview shapefiles to the project administrator.

### **PAGE 9—Attachment B2—Practice Map**

Like the Project Overview Map above, you will need to provide a map that shows the practices you have planned to use and where they will occur in the project area. This should be a GIS derived map that is saved as an image and uploaded per the instructions above. If you cannot provide a GIS generated map, do your best to create a map that will make it clear what the producer intends to do and where they intend to do it. Please send practice map and shapefiles to the project administrator.

### **PAGES 10 & 11—Attachment B3-4—Pre-project Photos**

Do your best to take at least a couple of pre-project photos that you can provide as a part of the Project Proposal. These will show the review team what you are working with. It should also provide you with the before part of a before-and-after series of photos, which are always important in project planning and in telling stories in the future. We advise that you establish some photo-points, which will allow you to create a series of comparable images.

### **Proposal Evaluation and Approval**

All proposals will be reviewed, evaluated and ranked by the NGPJV in an expedited manner. If funds are limited and multiple proposals have been submitted, the NGPJV will hold a batching period and fund the highest ranking projects first. Once a project is approved, funding will be assigned, and an agreement will be executed between the NGPJV funding partner and the Producer. The Project Manager will be kept informed of progress. Project compliance will need to be coordinated between the Project Manager and the NGPJV Program Administrator and completed prior to the producer conducting any project work.

Link to [Project Proposal](#)

For N-GRIP information contact the Program Administrator, Erin Fairbank ([efairbank@ducks.org](mailto:efairbank@ducks.org)) or visit our website at <https://www.ngpiv.org>