

Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant Application

Working Grassland Partnership Phase III



Name of Organization: North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

Federal Tax ID#: 36-3512179

Contact Person/Title: Kathy Kirschman, Administrative Assistant/Biological Technician

Address: 1605 East Capitol Ave, Suite 101

City: Bismarck

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Web Site Address: www.ndnrt.com

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Additional Supporting Agencies:

North Central Soil Conservation District

Ducks Unlimited

US Fish and Wildlife Service – ND Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

ND Game and Fish Department

MAJOR Directive: Choose only one response

Directive A. Providing access to private and public lands for sportsmen, including projects that create fish and wildlife habitat and provide access for sportsmen;

Directive B. Improving, maintaining and restoring water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems and by supporting other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching;

Directive C. Developing, enhancing, conserving and restoring wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands; and

Directive D. Conserving natural areas and creating other areas for recreation through the establishment and development of parks and other recreation areas.

Additional Directive: Choose all that apply

Directive A. Providing access to private and public lands for sportsmen, including projects that create fish and wildlife habitat and provide access for sportsmen;

Directive B. Improving, maintaining and restoring water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems and by supporting other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching;

Directive C. Developing, enhancing, conserving and restoring wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands; and

Directive D. Conserving natural areas and creating other areas for recreation through the establishment and development of parks and other recreation areas.

Type of organization:

State Agency

Political Subdivision

Tribal Entity

Tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation.

Project Name: Working Grassland Partnership Phase III

Abstract/Executive Summary: The ND Natural Resources Trust (Trust) and partners sincerely appreciate the Outdoor Heritage Fund Advisory Board and ND Industrial Commission’s support of our previous grant applications to promote working grasslands across much of North Dakota. Working Grassland Partnership (WGP) Phases I and II concentrated on transitioning expired/expiring CRP acres for benefiting grasslands and declining grassland birds. WGP has been implemented successfully and landowner demand continues to grow. The program concept has had such a positive reception that the Trust and partners routinely field calls from interested landowners who are not in those WGP program counties. In order to address the growing interest in cost-share for livestock and wildlife-friendly developments for these landowner’s operations, we are requesting funding to broaden the coverage of the WGP principles to encompass the entire state. Phase III would engage the counties not covered at all in I and II, with only minor overlaps in some of the counties that were allowed at up to 10% of the other WGP programs. The Trust and partners understand that this grant request is running concurrently with previous WGP grant funding, and although this will add to a substantial workload, we are confident in the promptness of utilizing these grant funds (including Phase III, if awarded). We will be diligent to ensure we give our full attention to interested landowners while providing them with technical assistance.

The Phase III project area will include 28 counties (see attached map). The total volume of CRP acreage expiring from 2017 to 2019 in that area is approximately 279,000 acres. Counties that have contacted the partnership concerning funding availability include Benson, Pierce, McHenry, and Stutsman. These counties also have mixed cattle and cropping operations with a higher number of expiring CRP acres.

The Working Grassland Partnership III provides a “one stop shop” for landowners through a local in-the-field partnership approach. Partners who deliver private lands projects in this project area will work directly with landowners to provide planning and technical assistance. The opportunity to help these landowners is upon us. With drought-like conditions in 2017, the interest in cattle operators to gain additional grazing acres is pressing. Grant funding presents the opportunity to incorporate enhanced soil/water management and wildlife species conservation while increasing the livestock profitability for the landowner.

Project Duration: 10 years

Amount of Grant request: \$396,850.00

Total Project Costs: \$743,250.00

Amount of Matching Funds: \$346,400 (47% of total project costs)

Cash	\$ 60,000.00
In-kind	\$286,400.00

Source(s) of Matching Funds

North Dakota Natural Resources Trust	\$ 60,000	(Cash)
Landowners	\$256,400	(In-kind)
North Dakota Natural Resources Trust	\$ 10,000	(In-kind)
Ducks Unlimited (DU)	\$ 10,000	(In-kind)
ND Partners For Fish and Wildlife Program	\$ 10,000	(In-kind)

Certifications

X I certify that this application has been made with the support of the governing body and chief executive of my organization.

X I certify that if awarded grant funding none of the funding will be used for any of the exemptions noted on Page 1 of this application.

Narrative

Organization Information: The Trust was created in 1986 and was originally called the North Dakota Wetlands Trust until 2000. The Trust's mission is to preserve, restore, manage, and enhance wetlands and associated wildlife habitat, grasslands, and riparian areas in the state of North Dakota. The Trust achieves this mission by partnering with agricultural and conservation organizations to promote productive use of private agricultural lands and private property rights that result in enhancement and protection of private lands, to effectively use North Dakota's public lands both for agriculture and recreation, to promote good land use along urban river corridors, and to enhance the state's significant water resources. The Trust helps shape the landscape through its programs and does its best to help shape both public attitude and public policy to support natural resource protection.

The Trust is managed by a six-member board of directors. Three of the directors are appointed by the governor of North Dakota, one by the National Audubon Society, one by the National Wildlife Federation, and one by the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director is an ex-officio member. The Trust has an Executive Director and four staff members.

From its inception, the Trust has played a role as facilitator between agricultural and conservation interests. In addition to facilitating and funding sound, on-the-ground conservation of natural resources, its goal is to identify common issues, create dialogue, and resolve conflicts.

Purpose of Grant: When the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was initially launched in the 1985 Farm Bill, its primary goals included soil erosion control and improved water quality, with wildlife habitat added shortly after. With uncertainty of what will be included in the 2018 Farm Bill, the WGP III program provides an option for landowners to keep the expired/expiring CRP acres in grassland and improve the livestock production value on those acres.

Funding Urgency: Statewide, there has been no CRP enrollments in since May 2017 and none in 2018. With a new Farm Bill having an expectation for an increase in national acreage cap, that does not mean that North Dakota will be competitive in receiving those additional acres. Landowners will have to make a decision on retaining the CRP as grass cover or converting the land back to cropland.

The 2017 drought negatively impacted rangeland production across North Dakota this coupled with past grassland conversion, have impacted pasture availability as producers attempt to secure additional grazing acres.

Utilizing expiring CRP for grazing has proven to be a beneficial option for grazing operators, landowners (including absentee landowners) and wildlife. If livestock producers can connect with CRP owners, retention of these grasslands for grazing/haying is agreeable depending on CRP landowner interests and values. Developing a grazing plan for expiring CRP provides for the building of strong relationships with the CRP owner. Without understanding the grazing alternative, CRP landowners may gravitate back to crops out of expediency or feeling like there are no other options.

Currently, several agencies and organizations are willing to work with landowners to convert expiring CRP acres into working grasslands. Local SCD, DU, PF, NDASCD, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife, NRCS, and NDGFD offer excellent assistance options through this private lands program.

Goals, Strategies and Benefits: WGP III will focus on grasslands from expired 2017, and expiring 2018 and 2019 CRP contracts with landowners. The fate of many of the 2017 expired acres is being decided right now. The goal of this grant is to provide options to landowners looking to retain these acres in grassland. By providing 60% cost-share on livestock and bird-friendly developments, the grant has a goal of signing agreements on over 6,500 acres.

In addition to OHF funding for developments, the Trust will provide a habitat lease only on acres expired from CRP. This would be a one-time, upfront payment that would be issued when WGP III agreement are signed. The habitat lease will serve as an additional incentive to keep these acres in grassland. This proposal is asking for OHF to provide funding for grazing system developments that include livestock water and fencing. Technical advice, such as grazing plans, will be provided by the co-applicants and supporting partners. NDGFD may offer PLOTS payments on land in and around the WGP III program acres.

The WGP III aims to build on the initial success of Phase I and II, benefiting grassland productivity and condition, water quality, soil health, and enhance wildlife habitat for grassland birds. Equally valuable, this will improve the sustainability and profitability of many existing livestock operations. By supporting grazing infrastructure we believe these former CRP acres will transition into working, bird-friendly, grazing lands for livestock operations, potentially for long-term investment.

Directives and Timeline: The OHF major directive states (B) improving, maintaining and restoring water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems, and by supporting other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching. This is the major directive of this OHF grant request and will provide landowners the cost assistance and technical guidance to accomplish this directive on their property.

In addition, directive (A) of providing access to private and public lands for sportsmen, including projects that create fish and wildlife habitat and provide access for sportsmen will be achieved by NDGFD offering landowners PLOTS through this project.

Directive (C) of developing, enhancing, conserving and restoring wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands will be achieved by NDNRT habitat conservation leases in combination with the OHF development assistance.

The proposed project will be 10 years in length, with the majority of the lease payments and livestock/bird-friendly development practices being completed in the first two years. WGP III will create sustainable agriculture and conservation benefits to an expected 6,500 acres.

Management of Project: The Trust will provide management, coordination, and administration of the WGP III funding. The Trust and partners will work collectively to provide landowners with program options. The Trust will complete all program coordination from our office located in Bismarck, ND. Kathy Kirschman, Administrative Assistant/Biological Technician, Terry Allbee, Biologist/Business Manager, and Jesse Beckers, Conservation Program Coordinator have a combined 25 years of experience in delivering conservation projects for the Trust. The Trust will provide tracking and reporting of all landowner agreements following grant guidelines.

Ducks Unlimited conservation program biologists will work collaboratively with USFWS – Partners for Fish and Wildlife biologists, NDGF biologists, as well as Trust staff to deliver WGP III. Specifically, DU biologists will visit farmers and ranchers to provide program guidance, offer technical assistance, and help develop rotational grazing plans. Together, DU biologists and managers have more than 25 years of experience delivering voluntary, working lands conservation projects for DU.

USFWS – Partners for Fish and Wildlife: The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program (PFW) has six biologists spread across the state, three of which work in the WGP III project area. These three biologists will refer interested landowner to the Trust for consideration for funding. Where appropriate, the PFW program will provide technical assistance to help implement the conservation practices. When working with these landowners, the PFW program can provide additional funding in order to stretch all of the conservation dollars. These funds will be to provide additional conservation and will also require a landowner contribution that is consistent with the requirements outlined in this proposal. The PFW program has been in existence since 1987 and has worked with landowners to complete over 3,500 conservation projects on privately owned land in North Dakota that have helped restore, enhance and establish more than 320,000 acres of wetland and grassland habitat.

The partnership provides a “one stop shop” through a team of in-the-field partners for landowners to work with from beginning to end. Private lands delivery partners help promote and work directly with landowners. In addition to the Trust staff, local SCD’s, DU Conservation Biologists, and USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Biologists, other landowner contacts will be done by NDGFD private lands biologists, NDASCD’s Farm Bill Specialists, and PF’s field staff. As these field staff work with landowners that are interested in USDA conservation programs or on expiring CRP, grazing infrastructure development options, conservation habitat leases, and NDGFD PLOTS agreements will be promoted. All grant funds will be paid as agreements and development activities are completed and proper documentation is supplied to the Trust.

Evaluation: We are fortunate with how this diverse partnership came together for implementation and evaluation reasons. Our partners enable “boots on the ground” contact with landowners, and that relationship development sets the tone for positive results in how the program can benefit their operation and wildlife habitat. Our field agent partners help with contract facilitation and the implementation aspects, verifying that fence and water resources are completed as prescribed and following up on grazing plans. Our administration ensures timely payments and support lines for both participating landowners and partners. More specifically, success will be measured on the level of agreements completed with landowners and the amount of acres benefited by the lease and development activities—by increased conservation habitat for grassland birds, satisfied landowners, and increased access for public enjoyment.

Project Budget:

X I certify that a project budget will be sent to the Commission

Sustainability: The WGP III, if funded, will be implemented and delivered in 2018-2019. The Trust will work with partners to promote the program and landowner agreements will start as soon as possible and be completed when all funding is obligated. Operation and maintenance of land development activities will be completed throughout the agreement period by landowners. The partnership will perform periodic field checks. Creating working relationships with landowners provides potential for furthering other OHF funded grants.

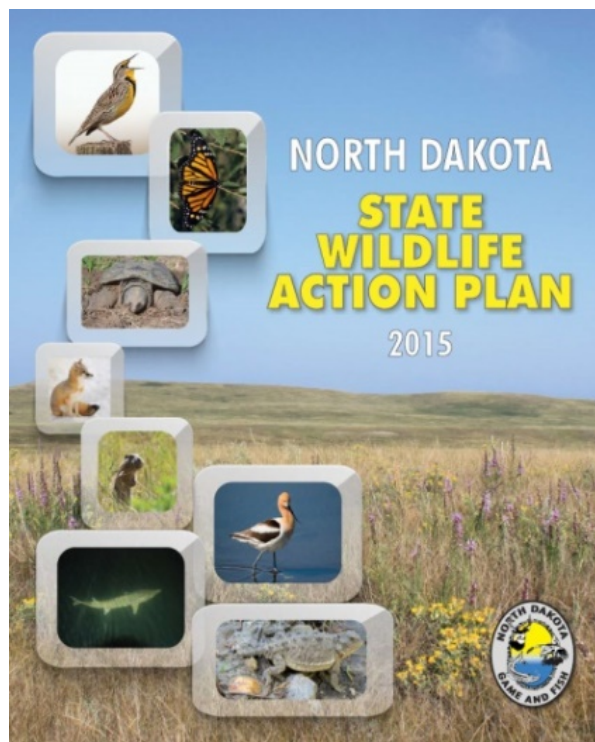
Partial Funding: If the grant proposal is partially funded, the Trust would reduce the number of development activities, focusing the highest priority activities and the number of acres that can be improved would be reduced.

Partnership Recognition: The Outdoor Heritage Fund will be recognized as the major partner in WGP III. All promotional material will have the OHF logo and describe the OHF recognition. All WGP III agreements will have OHF logo on the agreement header. All landowner interaction with WGP III will be aware the importance of OHF funding to this beneficial project.

References:

2015 State Wildlife Action Plan

<https://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/swap>



WGP Press Coverage:

AGWEEK

NEWS CROPS LIVESTOCK POLICY AND POLITICS PEOPLE COLUMNS OPINION AGWEEKTV LIVE COMMODITIES

By [Jenny Schlecht, Bismarck \(N.D.\) Tribune](#) on Oct 7, 2016 at 9:13 a.m.

BISMARCK — More than 1 million acres of grassland in North Dakota have been converted to other land uses since 2007, and the state could lose thousands more as Conservation Reserve Program contracts expire, according to the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust's application for an Outdoor Heritage Fund grant.

"There's been a change, whether there's CRP expiring or because of an additional need for producers to have more crop production," said Terry Allbee, business manager and biologist for the trust.

The state Game and Fish Department's 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan attributed the declining populations of some birds — including the state bird, the western meadowlark — to grassland losses, which could be exacerbated by fewer CRP acres nationwide.

The Working Grasslands Partnership, a program funded by the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund, is working to help landowners keep their land in grass and use it for grazing after it exits CRP.

The primary organization behind the WGP is the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust. The partnership will help provide working lands for cattle producers while maintaining grass cover for declining grasslands bird species, Albee said.

Project Budget:

X I certify that a project budget will be sent to the Commission

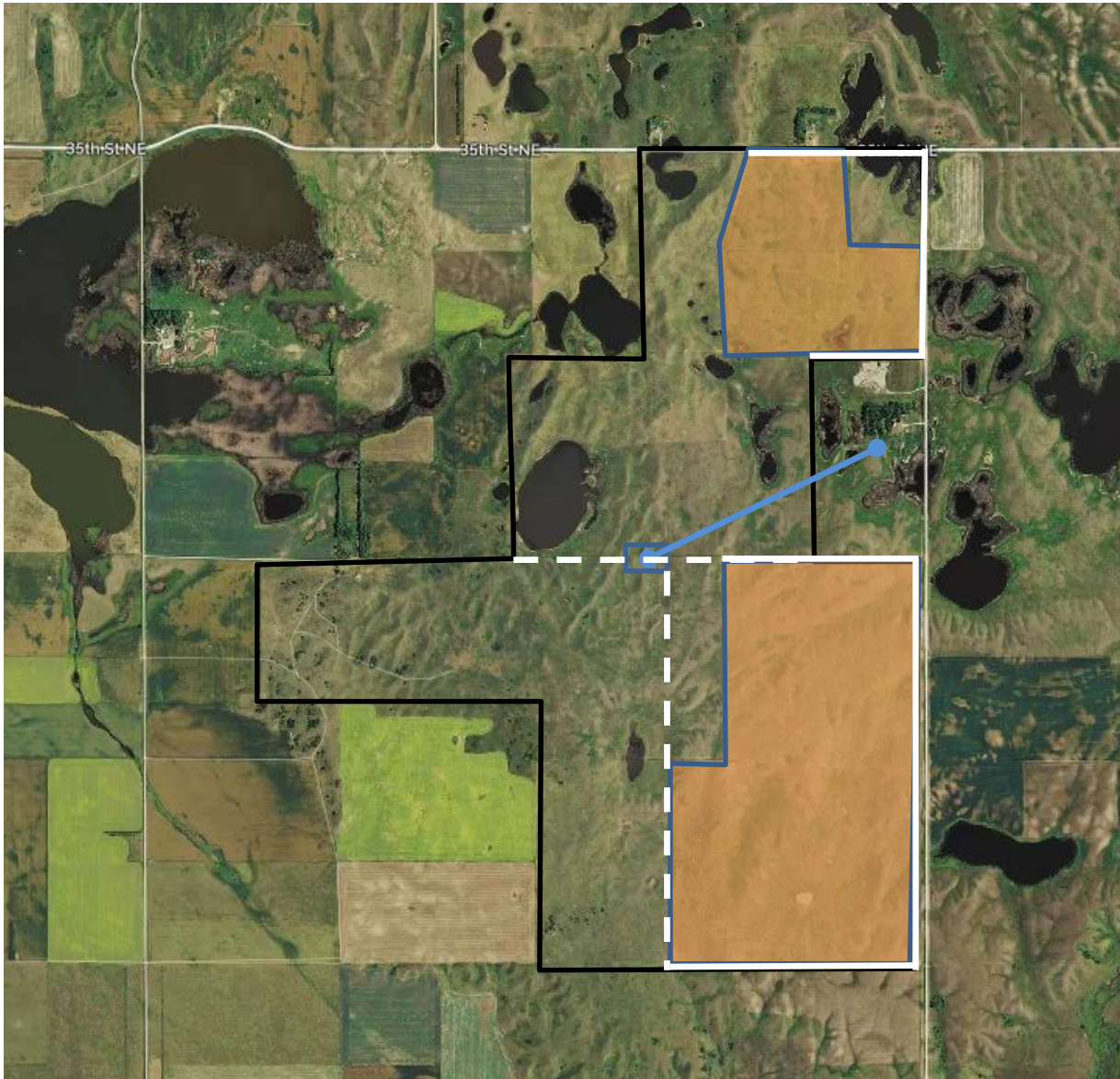
Project Expense	OHF Request	Applicant's Match Share (Cash)	Applicant's and Other Project Sponsor's Match Share (In-Kind)	Total Each Project Expense
OHF - Livestock and Grassland Bird Friendly Development Practices 60%	\$ 384,600			\$384,600
OHF - Livestock and Grassland Bird Friendly Development Practices 40%			\$256,400	\$256,400
Trust Lease		\$60,000		\$60,000
Contracted Services	\$12,250			\$12,250
Project Staffing			\$30,000	\$30,000
Total Costs	\$396,850	\$60,000	\$286,400	\$743,250

- Agreements – All WGP III agreements with landowners will be 10 years.
- Livestock and Grassland Bird Friendly Development Practices:
 - Fencing will follow the June 2016 North Dakota Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program’s Cost-Share Guidelines for Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Best Management Practices (319 program). The grant will provide landowners a 60% cost-share payment based on the BMP cost-share payment rates. Landowners will provide the remaining 40% cost-share.
 - Water Development will follow the June 2016 North Dakota Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program’s Cost-Share Guidelines for Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Best Management Practices (319 program). The OHF grant will use the BMP planning rates for agreement development, but will pay 60% cost-share based on actual costs. The landowners will provide the remaining 40% cost-share.
- Trust Habitat Conservation Lease - The Trust will offer landowners a lease payment for all CRP acres expired in 2017 and/or expiring 2018 that are included in the agreement. The lease rate will be \$5.00 per acre per year, so landowners will receive a \$50/acre one-time payment for the 10 year agreement. Lease payments will be on expired/expiring CRP acres only.

- Contracted Services – All projects will be reviewed by State Historical Society of North Dakota for cultural resources and North Dakota State Historical and Preservation Office approval. If the project requires a cultural resources professional, we outsource that to conduct a field review. Contracted services for a pedestrian review cost \$1,250 and costs would advance depending on findings. The OHF contracted service funds will also be utilized to provide contracted services for any additional delivery and/or program monitoring.
- Project Staffing – The partners will provide the majority of additional in-kind staffing as match needed for program delivery.



Exhibit 1) Example of Benson County Working Grassland Partnership III



Landowner owns property in Benson County with two fields (shaded orange) with 2018 expiring CRP. The landowner wants the expiring CRP to transition into existing livestock grazing operation area outlined in black.

- Lease Payment: A one-time Trust funded lease payment will be made only on the expiring CRP acres. Lease payments will be 100% funded by the Trust.
- Boundary Fence: The grant will provide cost-share to complete boundary fence around the expiring CRP where no suitable fence exists (white lines on map). The

landowner will determine the type of fence this may include multi-strand barbed or electrical wire. All activity is cost-shared at 60% OHF grant and 40% landowner.

- Cross Fence: The grant will provide cross fencing (white dashed line on map) to complete the grazing system on expiring CRP and existing pasture land. The landowner will determine the type of fence this may include multi-strand barbed or electrical wire. All activity is cost-shared at 60% OHF grant and 40% landowner.
- Water Development: A water source will be developed which will include provide a hooking up to existing water well at farm site, shallow pipeline, water tanks and associated costs to complete the development (Blue squares and blue line on map). All activity is cost-shared at 60% OHF grant and 40% landowner.
- Rotational Grazing Planning: Determine landowners rotational sequence whether a once over or twice over rotation, number of animals units, desired pasture size, soil productivity, existing vegetation (cool season/warm season grasses), and length of grazing days. The grazing plan technical guidance will be delivered by the partnership through the partnership field staff.





**North Central Soil
Conservation District**
PO Box 158
Minnewaukan, ND 58351
Phone: 701-473-5324 ext: 3



March 28, 2018

Dear Karlene Fine,

This letter is being written to you to show the North Central Soil Conservation Districts support of the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust Working Grasslands Partnership III that they are submitting to the Outdoor Heritage Fund. We believe that expanding the program to the Eastern side of North Dakota will create a huge opportunity for cattle producers that have expired CRP and need assistance in implementing infrastructure. We strongly support grazing as a grassland management tool as it is one of the most effective and natural ways to enhance and invigorate grasslands for wildlife, and look forward to this program being another tool for producers to utilize.

Thank You,

Brandon Meyer

District Biologist NCSCD

District Supervisors

BRIAN MADDOCK

ARDON HERMAN,

RONALD SELZLER

BRENDA PFEIFER

DONNA GRANN-CHAIRPERSON

CODY WEGNER, District Manager

NRCS Personnel

MATT SEUFERT, District Conservationist – DON OLDS, ACTING TRIBAL LIASON

The North Central Soil Conservation District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.



Great Plains Regional Office
2525 River Road
Bismarck, ND 58503-9011
(701) 355-3500 fax (701) 355-3575
www.ducks.org

March 23, 2018

Karlene Fine, Executive Director
North Dakota Industrial Commission
ATTN: Outdoor Heritage Fund Program
600 East Boulevard Ave., Dept. 405
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Ms. Fine:

Please accept this letter of support by Ducks Unlimited in cooperation with the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust's "Working Grasslands Partnership III" Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. We commend the Trust for their hard work in the continuation of this successful project and efforts to bring together a diverse group of local, state, and federal stakeholders. We are pleased to provide \$10,000 of in-kind staff support for this project. On-the-ground Ducks Unlimited biologists and engineers will promote and assist private landowners with enrollment and delivery into this innovative program dedicated to providing simple and flexible options that work for both the producer and wildlife. Both Phases of the Working Grasslands Partnership project had tremendous landowner interest in working lands options that assisted in keeping thousands of acres in grasslands and wetlands on the landscape. With more CRP acres expiring in the next five years further east, the program has the potential to further assist producers with expanding grass and pasture in their operations.

We greatly appreciate the Industrial Commission and the Advisory Board's collective efforts to implement the Outdoor Heritage Fund program. It has provided the opportunity to foster strong partnerships exhibited in this proposal to achieve "win-win" solutions for both North Dakota producers and wildlife habitat.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stephen E. Adair
Director, Great Plains Region



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
North Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife Office
3425 Miriam Avenue
Bismarck, North Dakota 58501

March 28, 2018

Karlene Fine, Executive Director
North Dakota Industrial Commission
ATTN: Outdoor Heritage Fund Program
600 East Boulevard Ave., Dept. 405
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: Working Grassland Partnership Phase III

Dear Ms. Fine:

The US Fish and Wildlife Service's North Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program fully supports the Working Grassland Partnership Phase III (WGP III) OHF grant proposal. The USFWS has a long history of working closely with private landowners, providing financial and technical assistance on voluntary conservation efforts to restore, enhance and create wetland and grassland habitat on private land. The ND PFW program works closely with private landowners to foster partnerships on working lands that help conserve important wildlife habitat and also provide economic benefits for North Dakota's farmers and ranchers and other private landowners. Our approach is simple: Engage willing partners through non-regulatory incentives to conserve fish and wildlife values on their property. The ND PFW program was established in 1987 and since that time has worked on more than 4,200 habitat projects with more than 3,200 North Dakota farmers, ranchers and other private landowners.

As with Phase I and II, the ND PFW program once again stands ready to provide financial and technical assistance to interested landowners. In many cases, landowners working with the NDNRT on their expiring CRP have also had additional needs on other areas of their farms or ranches and the ND PFW program has been able to partner with the landowner and NDNRT to provide technical and financial assistance to help address those needs. When packaged with the improved management capability on expired CRP provided by the WGP program, these projects help landowners develop a more holistic approach to managing their farms and ranches that improves the forage for livestock and the habitat for wildlife. We feel that this has been a fantastic partnership that greatly improved the grazing management and wildlife habitat on thousands of acres in North Dakota.

ND PFW staff working in northeastern ND have had many landowner express an interest in the WGP program and therefore, we feel strongly that it will be successful if approved for funding by the by the OHF Advisory Board.

Sincerely,

Scott J. McLeod,
USFWS, State Coordinator, ND Partners for Fish and Wildlife

NORTH DAKOTA GAME & FISH DEPARTMENT

"Variety in Hunting and Fishing"

GOVERNOR, Doug Burgum

*DIRECTOR, Terry Steinwand
DEPUTY, Scott A. Peterson*

*100 North Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, North Dakota 58501-5095
Phone: (701) 328-6300
FAX: (701) 328-6352*

March 29, 2018

Karlene Fine, Executive Director
North Dakota Industrial Commission
ATTN: Outdoor Heritage Fund Program
State Capitol – Fourteenth Floor
600 East Boulevard Ave., Dept. 405
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Ms. Fine:

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's (Department) mission is to protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained public consumptive and nonconsumptive use. The Department is the agency responsible for managing the state's fish and wildlife resources and the Department's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is the principle document for safeguarding rare and declining species in North Dakota. Partnerships are critically important, ensuring the Department can carry out its mission and implement conservation actions outlined in the SWAP.

We continue to support partnership-based grant applications like the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust's (Trust) Working Grassland Partnership III (WGP). This Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) grant will provide the opportunity for landowners outside the previous WGP focus area to transition their expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to productive wildlife friendly agriculture practices and complements the Department's mission. Continued loss and fragmentation of grasslands has been identified as a conservation threat in the SWAP, negatively affecting several species of grassland bird and other wildlife species.

The Department agrees to evaluate lands enrolled into WGP III for consideration into the Private Lands Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) program, which allows public walk-in hunting. We feel that the expansion of this already successful program will provide landowners with valuable options for their grasslands and help maintain healthy grasslands and sustainable ranching communities.

We look forward to working with the Industrial Commission and our partners on this project.

Sincerely,



Terry Steinwand
Director