

North Dakota Grassland Restoration Project

Name of Organization: North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

Federal Tax ID#: 36-3512179

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MAJOR Directive:

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

Directive B. Improve, maintain, and restore water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems and to support other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching;

Directive C. Develop, enhance, conserve, and restore wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands; and

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

Additional Directive:

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X **Directive B.** Improve, maintain, and restore water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems and to support other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching;

O **Directive C.** Develop, enhance, conserve, and restore wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands; and

O **Directive D.** Conserve natural areas for recreation through the establishment and development of parks and other recreation areas.

Type of organization:

X Tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation, as described in United States Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. § 501 (c))

Project Name: North Dakota Grassland Restoration Project

Abstract/Executive Summary

Grasslands in North Dakota that are both undisturbed and properly managed are the states most important wildlife habitat for game and nongame wildlife species. Grasslands provide nesting cover, young-of-year protection, food, and winter thermal cover for many resident and nonresident species. For migratory species like waterfowl, grasslands in combination with abundant wetlands provide the necessary components for population survival. This grant proposal is a partnership between private landowners, USFWS’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program, and North Dakota Natural Resources Trust (Trust) to restore grasslands that will enhance soil conditions, provide forage for livestock and provide wildlife conservation habitat.



Through this grant, landowners will work with the Trust and PFW program to identify acres for grass seeding and then collectively work on a management plan to maximize wildlife benefits and agricultural production. The seeded acres will be used for three main purposes:

- 1.) Livestock grazing, in which a rotational grazing plan will incorporate a grazing and resting/recover period.
- 2.) Hayland with a haying day after July 15th.
- 3.) Habitat, seeded specifically for wildlife conservation.

Private landowner interest in seeding grass has dramatically increased in the last four years and this proposal is being submitted to help address that demand. Landowners want to increase their natural resources, diversify their operations, and improve agricultural stewardship as cost efficiently as possible. This proposal will foster partnerships and leverage OHF investment with funding from the Trust, PFW and private landowners to help address the growing demand for grass seeding on private lands. Landowners in all counties in North Dakota will be eligible for the project but areas with the highest wetland densities will be the priority.



The North Dakota Grassland Restoration Project (NDGRP) grant proposal would assist landowners with cost-share to plant grass. The goal of NDGRP is to work with landowners to restore 2,000 acres of grassland within 3 years to benefit wildlife species and grassland agricultural.

Project Duration: 3 years

Amount of Grant request \$104,500

Total Project Costs \$255,000

Amount of Matching Funds \$150,500 (59%)

Cash - \$55,000
In-kind - \$95,500

Source(s) of Matching Funds

NDNRT - \$33,000
PFW - \$27,500
Landowners - \$90,000

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

Applicant Information:

North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

The North Dakota Natural Resources 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: 1) promote the productive use of private agricultural lands private property rights that result in the enhancement and protection of private lands; 2) effectively use North Dakota's public lands both for agriculture and recreation; 3) promote good land use planning along urban river corridors, and 4) 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, three full-time staff and one part-time staff person.

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.

PFW Information:

USFWS - PFW

The USFWS PFW program has a long history of working closely with private landowners, providing financial and technical assistance through voluntary conservation efforts to restore, enhance and create wetland and grassland habitat on private land. The PFW program works with private landowners through conservation agreements 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. The PFW approach is simple: engage willing partners through non-regulatory incentives to conserve fish and wildlife values on their property. The PFW program in North Dakota 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. The PFW program is known nationwide as one of the leading Federal programs that promotes and implements voluntary, incentive-based community-based stewardship for fish and wildlife conservation.

The PFW program recognizes that more than 90% of land in North Dakota is in private ownership and understands that conservation of our nation's fish and wildlife populations depends on working in partnership with private landowners to develop and implement conservation solutions that are beneficial to working farms and ranches as well as wildlife populations.

Purpose of Grant – Describe the proposed project identifying how the project will meet the specific directive(s) of the Outdoor Heritage Fund Program.

The 2015 North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) has eight elements that include: (1) information on the distribution and abundance of wildlife species, including low and declining populations; (2) descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types; (3) problems affecting species and priority research or survey efforts needed; (4) conservation actions needed to conserve the identified species; (5) plans for monitoring species and the effectiveness of conservation actions; (6) plans for reviewing the plan; (7) coordinating with federal, state and local agencies and Tribal government on the development and implementation of the plan; (8) and involve broad public participation.

The SWAP increased the number of species of conservation priority to 115. The current list includes 47 birds, two amphibians, nine reptiles, 21 mammals, 22 fish, 10 freshwater mussels and four insects. It is important to recognize that species of conservation priority often depend on several habitat types or landscape components for survival. The key to ensuring their long-term survival is to maintain diverse grasslands, wetlands, woodlands, rivers and streams.

The SWAP prioritizes conservation actions to assist the wildlife species with habitat for increasing their populations. **The number one conservation action plan is to offer incentives and programs to protect, enhance, and restore habitat.** The NDGRP goal is to do just that.

The PFW program is also guided by a 5-year strategic plan and two of their five primary goals identified in the Mountain-Prairie Region Strategic Plan (which includes North Dakota) align directly with the goal for the NDGRP:

1. Conserve Habitat - restoring and protecting priority habitats to increase or maintain federal trust species populations.
2. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships – accomplish our work through voluntary partnerships.

Project Goals, Strategies and Benefits: The goal of NDGRP program is to restore 2,000 acres of grassland throughout the state of North Dakota in a three year timeframe. The NDGRP will provide landowners a ten-year partnership agreement to cost-share grass seed costs. This voluntary private lands program will be offered to landowners to seed cropland acres to grassland.

This proposal provides an innovative way to bring partners together by prioritizing natural resource restoration and provides landowners with the opportunity to participate. Another innovative aspect of this proposal is the ability of landowners to layer multiple programs to achieve the desired outcome. This layering of the NDGRP program will be very complementary to the other program, all the time not being excessively burdensome or complex for landowners.

The NDGRP program addresses OHF Directive C that will develop, enhance, conserve, and restore wildlife habitat on private lands. The primary wildlife species include declining grassland birds, migratory waterfowl species and other resident species. It also addresses Directive B by supporting agricultural stewardship and improving water quality. The NDGRP program will encourage grazing and haying management on the restored acres, which will be beneficial to livestock operations. If the grass seeding is planted for grazing purposes a rotational grazing management plan may be developed to further enhance the grassland. If intended to be utilized for haying, the grass can be hayed after July 15th.

All grass seeding will adhere to PFW grass seeding specifications and/or USDA-NRCS and state planting specifications. The grass seed should be seeded with a correct calibration seed drill. Likely a lot of grass seed will be planted with airseeder, which tend to drill deeper hurting germination. We will encourage the use of no-till grass drills when possible. A combination of warm and cool season grass will be obtained from a reputable seed dealer with weed-free assurance.

All participating landowners will be informed about public access opportunities. Any and all public access agreements would be through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's PLOTS program.

Timetable for implementation: The NDGRP program outreach and education will start immediately after the grant is approved. The Trust will meet individually and/or collectively with groups to inform organizations of the availability and details of the NDGRP program. The outreach and coordination activity will be the focus for the first year, but will be on-going throughout the grant period.

The NDGRP program will be open continuously to landowners, until all funds have been obligated through signed agreements. The Trust will manage and monitor the committed funds and completed projects. Grass seeding is very dependent on weather conditions. The timeframe to seed grass can be very short depending on weather conditions during the appropriate seeding times. Because of these factors the estimated total timeframe for grant completion will be 3 years. The Trust will coordinate with PFW program to monitor and report progress.

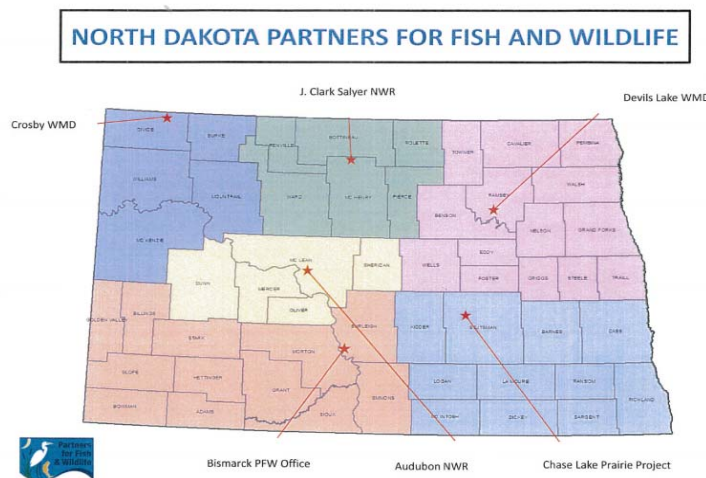
Management of Project – Provide a description of how you will manage and oversee the project to ensure it is carried out on schedule and in a manner that best ensures its objectives will be met.

The Trust will oversee and coordinate all activities associated with the NDGRP proposal. The NDGRP will be offered throughout the entire state of North Dakota, with priority given to projects with the highest level of wetland acres. The Trust will develop site specific agreements with landowners which will include a map defining boundaries, the payments amount, the responsibility of each landowner and the Trust. All agreements will be signed and dated by the landowner and the Trust.

The Trust's staff will coordinate the NDGRP program from our office located in Bismarck, ND. The Trust and/or PFW will provide technical assistance to landowners that would include grass seeding window dates, seed mix design, and post seeding management recommendations.

The Trust will provide tracking and reporting of all participant agreements following grant guidelines.

The PFW program has a staff of six biologists working to deliver voluntary private land conservation projects across the state. The PFW program focuses on migratory bird habitat as well as species of decline or special concern by working with private landowners to restore wetlands, restore grasslands and implement rotational grazing systems. PFW program private lands biologists throughout ND will assist and help deliver NDGRP to landowners. PFW assistance with this proposal will include financial assistance for grass seed as well as technical assistance that include things such as providing grass seeding dates, designing seed mixes, recommendations for managing the grass, etc.



Evaluation – Describe your plan to document progress and results.

The Trust was awarded a similar OHF grant in spring of 2017 titled “Water Storage and Grass Seeding.” The OHF Advisory Board only had interest in providing partial funding for the grass seeding portion in the amount of \$67,500. Since that approval, the Trust and partners have been working with landowners to deliver and implement this grant. The last status report to OHF was submitted on June 2018, with four agreements

completed. Since that time all the funds have been obligated or are being included in current discussions with landowners to obligate. All grass seeding on these projects will be completed in spring of 2019, unless seeding conditions during the seeding window do not allow that to happen.

Based on this previous grant award the Trust is confident in its ability to complete all grassland restoration activities within 3 years. Knowing landowners interest and the past OHF grant history is why the grant is submitted now to allow time for Trust/PFW and landowner visit over the winter season before spring planting.

Evaluation success of the NDGRP program is directly related to landowner’s enrollment into the program. High landowner interest is the key to the NDGRP program success. The acreage goal can only be achieved by the willingness of landowners to enroll into the NDGRP program.

The Trust will monitor all NDGRP program agreements. Evaluations and progress reports will be completed. The Trust’s programs are structured to be flexible and accommodating to agreement participants. Maintaining good communication with agreement participants and the partners is important to the Trust.

Project Budget:

Project Expense	OHF Request	Applicant’s Match Share (Cash)	PFW Match Share (Cash/In-Kind)	Applicant’s Match Share (In-Kind)	Landowner Match Share (Cash/In-Kind)	Total Each Project Expense
Grass Restoration	\$100,000	\$30,000	\$25,000		\$90,000	\$245,000
Contracted Services/Staffing	\$4,500		\$2,500	\$3,000		\$10,000
Total Costs	\$104,500	\$30,000	\$27,500	\$3,000	\$90,000	\$255,000

Budget Narrative

Grass Restoration – Cost-share is based on total seeding and management costs per acre of \$120, which includes \$75 per acre for native/tame grass seed (OHF \$50/acre, Trust \$15/acre, PFW \$10/acre) The PFW will fund any additional seed costs over \$75/acre up to \$110 per acre (estimated total cost for project at \$5,000) and \$45/acre in landowner match for seedbed preparation, seeding, and establishment management.

Grass Seeding - 2,000 acre goal

OHF (\$50/acre) = \$100,000
 Trust (\$15/acre) = \$ 30,000
 PFW (\$10/acre) = \$ 20,000
 PFW (> \$75/acre) = \$ 5,000
Landowner (\$45/acre) = \$ 90,000

Total \$245,000

Contracted Services/Staffing – Contractual obligations for this project will include cultural review and specialized project implementation. All funds above the contractual services obligation will be used for actual Trust staff salary, benefits, travel, and overhead to deliver the NDGRP program. Activities include program promotion and outreach, meeting with landowners, partnering with state, federal, local, and nongovernmental organizations, processing payments, and agreement monitoring.

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

Sustainability – Indicate how the project will be funded or sustained in future years.

The NDGRP will only be available to private landowners. The NDGRP is a completely voluntary project that will focus on increasing wildlife habitat, increasing agricultural productivity and soil health. It is our vision in this proposal that landowners will restore grasslands that fit their farming/ranching operational goals by providing a modest cost-share and that these grass acres will be retained long after the NDGRP agreement has ended. If the interest in grass seeding by landowners in North Dakota stay at the same level it would be beneficial for this partnership (including OHF) to continue funding programs like NDGRP.

Partial Funding – Indicate how the project will be affected if less funding is available than that requested.

The Trust thanks the OHF Advisory Board for considering our NDGRP proposal. This request of \$104,500 of OHF funds with an additional \$55,000 in cash match is very important for participating landowners. If OHF advisory board recommends a reduction in funding from the original proposal, this will result in a lower number of agreements with landowners, less number of acres achieved, and a reduction in the amount of cash and in-kind match available by the Trust, PFW, and landowners.

Partnership Recognition - If you are a successful recipient of Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars, how would you recognize the Outdoor Heritage Fund partnership?

This NDGRP will provide OHF recognition on all landowner agreements by including OHF logo on top of agreements and all discussions with landowners in the delivery of this project will identify OHF as a funding source. If any signs are placed at project locations it will include OHF logo. All NDGRP distributed information for outreach and/or media will identify OHF as a funding source. Also all presentations or discussions to partners and/or other organizations will acknowledge OHF as a funding source.