

## **North Dakota Grassland Restoration Project 2**

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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**Type of organization:**

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 2**

**Abstract/Executive Summary**

The North Dakota Natural Resources Trust (Trust) has been successfully partnering with the Outdoor Heritage Fund to enhance the State’s natural resources while increasing agricultural productivity through partnership based grant proposals. An example of a successful past grant proposal would be the North Dakota Grassland Restoration Project (NDGRP) which received OHF approval in fall of 2018. The NDGRP is currently assisting landowners with cost-share for grassland restoration in partnership with the USFWS’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program. The landowner interest in grass restoration has been very high in late 2019 and is expected to continue to be even higher in 2020. The current NDGRP remaining funding level will not be adequate to provide cost-share to meet the level of landowner interest. The Trust and partners are requesting funding to meet this landowner interest through the submission of this OHF grant proposal titled North Dakota Grassland Restoration Project 2 (NDGRP2).



NDGRP2 will be offered throughout North Dakota, but will give higher priority to geographic areas in North Dakota with a biological focus on the state's migratory and resident wildlife species. Project areas with the highest wetland densities will have the highest priority. Many resident wildlife species depend on properly managed grasslands to complete their life cycle, from nesting to winter survival. In addition to wildlife and natural resources benefits, many of the restored grassland acres will be part of agricultural production for livestock operations.

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 date after July 15<sup>th</sup>.
- 3.) Habitat, seeded specifically for wildlife conservation.

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.

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.

The NDGRP2 grant proposal would assist landowners with cost-share to plant grass. The goal of NDGRP2 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**

**Schedule for Drawing Down OHF Funds**

- 2020 - 50-100% (\$50,000 - \$100,000)
- 2021 - 25-50% (\$25,000 - \$50,000)
- 2022 - 0-25% (\$0 - \$25,000)

**Amount of Grant request \$100,000**

**Total Project Costs \$255,000**

**Amount of Matching Funds \$155,000 (61%)**

- Cash - \$55,000
- In-kind - \$100,000



Amount of Match	Funding Source	Type of Match
\$90,000	Landowners	Cash/In-Kind
\$30,000	ND Natural Resources Trust	Cash
\$5,000	ND Natural Resources Trust	In-Kind
\$25,000	USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife	Cash
\$5,000	USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife	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**

**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 work 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 identified 115 species of conservation priority. 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.

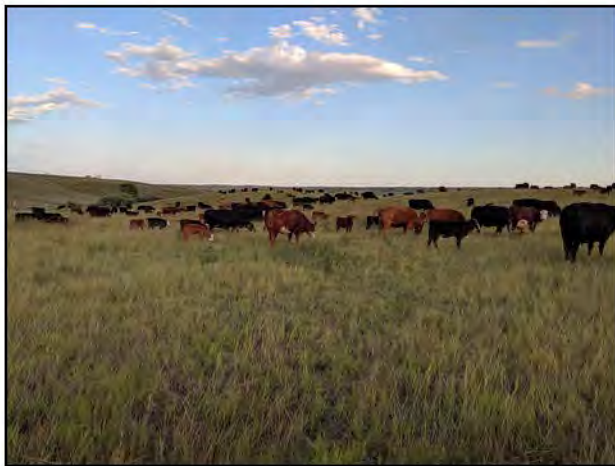
The SWAP prioritizes conservation actions to assist the wildlife species with habitat for increasing their populations. **The number one conservation action plan is to offer incentives and programs to protect, enhance, and restore habitat.** The NDGRP2 goal is to do just that.

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 NDGRP2:

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 NDGRP2 program is to restore 2,000 acres of grassland throughout the state of North Dakota in a three year timeframe. The NDGRP2 will provide landowners a ten-year partnership agreement to cost-share grass restoration costs. This voluntary private lands program will be offered to landowners to restore deteriorated/invaded cool season grassland and to seed cropland acres to grassland acres.

This proposal provides an innovative way to bring partners together by prioritizing natural resource restoration and provide 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 NDGRP2 program will be very complementary to other programs (for example, rotational grazing systems), all the time not being excessively burdensome or complex for landowners.



The NDGRP2 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 NDGRP2 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 15<sup>th</sup>.

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 NDGRP2 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 NDGRP2 program. The outreach and coordination activity will be the focus for the first year, but will be on-going throughout the grant period.

The NDGRP2 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. The Trust expects the funds to be obligated within the first year. However, due to short seeding windows, the total estimated timeframe to get the seed in the ground for grant completion may take up to 3 years. The Trust will coordinate with PFW Program to monitor and report progress.

Is this project part of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?      Yes       No

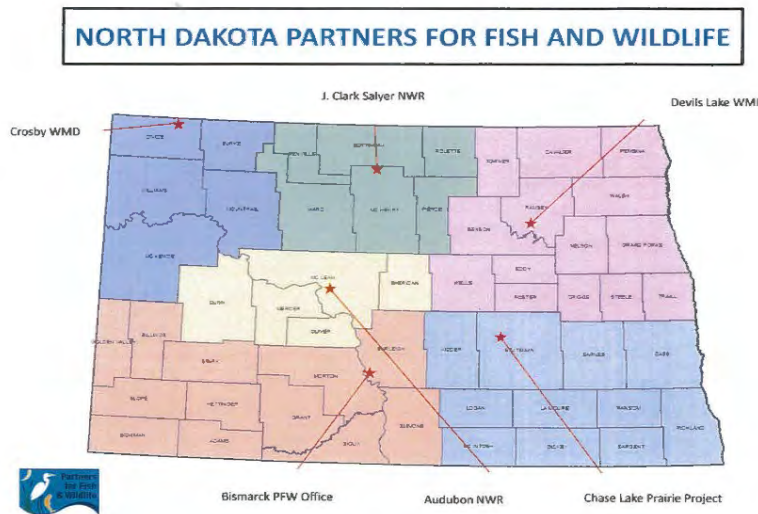
**Management of Project – Provide a description of how you will manage and oversee the project to ensure it is carried out on schedule and in a manner that best ensures its objectives will be met.**

The Trust will oversee and coordinate all activities associated with the NDGRP2 proposal. The NDGRP2 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, and 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 NDGRP2 program from our office located in Bismarck, ND. The Trust and/or PFW will provide technical assistance to landowners, including 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 and grasslands, and implement rotational grazing systems. The PFW Program private lands biologists, located throughout ND, will assist and help deliver NDGRP2 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 last status report to OHF was submitted in June 2019 for NDGRP. The grant was approved by NDIC on December 7, 2018. The status report only reported 2 completed grass seeding projects, but landowner interest in grass seeding was very high throughout the remainder of 2019 indicating that the funds will be obligated and ultimately spent during the seeding window in spring 2020. If the grass seeding on these projects is not completed in spring of 2020, the remaining projects would be completed in spring of 2021, 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 this grant is being submitted now, to allow time for Trust/PFW and landowners to visit over the winter season before spring planting.

Evaluation success of the NDGRP2 program is directly related to landowner’s enrollment into the program. High landowner interest is the key to the NDGRP2 program success. The acreage goal can only be achieved by the willingness of landowners to enroll into the NDGRP2 program.



The Trust will monitor all NDGRP2 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
Staffing			\$5,000	\$5,000		\$10,000
Total Costs	\$100,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$5,000	\$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 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$245,000</b>

The majority of the landowners in NDGRP2 will be planting native perennial grasses, multi species and introduced perennial and native mixes. The total OHF cost-share amount will follow the 2019 or most up-to-date NRCS Field Office Tech Guide Allowable Costs.

**Staffing** – This grant proposal is not requesting any staffing funding from OHF. All staffing will be at the cost of the Trust and PFW. Staffing will be based on actual costs of Trust and PFW staff salary, benefits, travel, and overhead to deliver the NDGRP2 program. Activities include program promotion and outreach, meeting with landowners, technical assistance, 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 NDGRP2 will only be available to private landowners. The NDGRP2 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 NDGRP2 agreement has ended. If the interest in grass seeding by landowners in North Dakota stays at the same level, it would be beneficial for this partnership (including OHF) to continue funding programs like NDGRP and NDGRP2.

**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 NDGRP2 proposal. This request of \$100,000 of OHF funds with an additional \$55,000 in cash match is very important for participating landowners. If the 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 NDGRP2 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 the OHF logo. All NDGRP2 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.