

Contract No. 013-141
Central Coteau Prairie Management Toolbox
Submitted by Audubon Dakota
Primary Contact: Marshall Johnson
Directives B, A, C

PARTICIPANTS

Sponsor		Cost Share
The Nature Conservancy	\$ 10,000.00	
Landowners	\$348,933.00	
Subtotal Cash Cost Share		\$358,933.00
Audubon Dakota	\$ 30,000.00	
The Nature Conservancy	\$ 10,000.00	
Ducks Unlimited	<u>\$ 10,000.00</u>	
Subtotal In-Kind Cost Share		\$50,000.00
Audubon Dakota	\$ 7,398.00	
The Nature Conservancy	<u>\$ 4,426.00</u>	
Subtotal Indirect Cost Share		\$11,824.00
North Dakota Industrial Commission	<u>\$529,874.00</u>	
Subtotal OHF Funding		<u>\$529,874.00</u>
Total Project Cost		\$950,631.00

Project Schedule: 2 years
Contract Date: 1/23/2019
Start Date: 12/27/2018
Completion Date: ~~1/31/2021~~ 1/31/23

<u>Project Deliverables</u>	
Status Report:	November 1, 2019 ✓
Status Report:	November 1, 2020 ✓
Status Report:	November 1, 2021* ✓
Status Report:	November 1, 2022* ✓
Final Report:	December 31, 2023**

**denotes change from original contract*

OBJECTIVE/STATEMENT OF WORK:

This objective of this project is to provide landowners with financial and/or technical assistance to promote conservation practices on approximately 2,700 acres of grazing lands, prairie enhancement and restoration on 750 acres. Partner in-kind match will control invasive species on 9,000 additional acres. Counties include Burleigh, McLean, and Sheridan. A 40% cost share is required for participating landowners. OHF funds may not be used for invasive species control/removal.

STATUS:

The contract has been approved and executed by all the parties.

November 2019

Audubon Dakota has cooperated with Ducks Unlimited and Burleigh, Sheridan, and Mclean County Soil Conservation Districts to identify landowners that would benefit from the Toolbox program.

To date, Audubon Dakota has entered into agreements for grazing infrastructure and prairie restoration projects with 3 landowners. Additionally, Audubon Dakota Range Ecologists are in the process of completing agreements with 4 landowners for new projects. Combined, these 7 agreements enroll 3,027 acres in the Toolbox program. Agreements range in length from five to ten years and ensure the habitat is managed as grassland habitat for the full contract term.

One grazing infrastructure project has been fully completed; providing a source of water to allow cattle grazing on 160 acres of land and creating an additional pasture to be part of a rotational grazing system. The total cost of the project was \$6,938, with the landowner responsible for \$2,775. Two additional grazing infrastructure projects are underway in 2019 and are expected to be completed in 2020. The estimated total costs of those projects is \$144,702 with a landowner contribution of \$57,881.

March 2020

Audubon Dakota continues to work with partners to identify landowners that would benefit from the Toolbox program. Program brochures are nearing the final stages of design and will be distributed to local partners. Additionally, Audubon Dakota designed, ordered, and will be distributing project site signs. Landowners will be given a sign to post on their project site, recognizing it as a Prairie Management Toolbox site, and crediting financial supporters such as the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund.

In the current reporting period, one grazing infrastructure project was completed on 294 acres in Mclean County. The project improved grassland grazing and management capabilities with the installation of 15,150 feet of fencing, 3,255 feet of pipeline, and a 1,100 gallon water tank. Additionally 14,407 of 29,615 feet of fencing was installed on a 2,040 acre project in Mclean County (invoice is not yet reflected on financial statements and is not included in fund budget table on page 1).

November 2020

Three projects were funded during the report period that included the installation of 60,945 feet of cross fencing, 23,550 feet of water pipeline, and four water tanks. This grazing infrastructure will benefit management on 3,360 acres of priority habitat within the Missouri Coteau mixed-grass prairies, allowing for the incorporation of additional paddocks into pre-existing grazing systems and the use of cattle to stimulate native plant growth. Additionally, three landowners have expressed interest in restoration projects and five in grazing infrastructure projects for 2021.

For one 470-acre project, the management goals are focused on protecting waterfowl nesting habitat, therefore the new fencing functions to exclude cattle from sensitive wetland areas. Another project that impacts management on 850 acres will be additionally managed under Audubon Conservation Ranching Initiative standards and will be incorporated into a habitat management plan that is third party audited to become certified as bird-friendly land.

To determine the true bird-friendliness of the acres impacted by this Toolbox program, baseline avian surveys were conducted on two project areas; nine transects spanning 2,890 acres. Six of the ten Audubon Dakotas' priority grassland bird species were recorded at both sites: Western Meadowlark, Bobolink, Upland Sandpiper, Northern Pintail, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Additionally, 21 species of water birds were recorded utilizing the prairie potholes and surrounding habitat, including Black Tern, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Wilson's Phalarope, and Forster's Tern. These results confirm that project areas already provide important breeding habitat for grassland and water birds, which will benefit from the 10-year term protection per the Toolbox agreement. Avian survey data will be further analyzed, shared with landowners, and used as a baseline with which to compare future survey results against to measure the effectiveness of using adaptive, planned grazing systems to manage grassland bird habitat.

A no-cost extension has been requested due to weather issues. This request has been granted.

November 2021

During the reporting period, program brochures were printed/distributed and two landowner projects that were in progress at the time of the last report have been completed including the installation of 24,840 feet of cross fencing, 27,400 feet of water pipeline, and ten water tanks. This grazing infrastructure will benefit management on 2,890 acres of priority habitat within the Missouri Coteau mixed-grass prairies, allow for the incorporation of additional paddocks into pre-existing grazing systems, and provide opportunities for producers to manage for improved plant diversity and wildlife habitat. Two new projects have been enrolled into the program and are expected to impact 1,680 acres with installation of 36,750 feet of fencing, eight tanks, 17,236 feet of pipeline, and two well and pump units. One project completed this report period that impacts management on 850 acres will be additionally managed under Audubon Conservation Ranching Initiative standards and will be incorporated into a habitat management plan that is third party audited to become certified as bird-friendly land.

To determine the true bird-friendliness of the acres impacted by this Toolbox program, baseline avian surveys were conducted by an Audubon Dakota grassland bird technician on two project areas; seven transects spanning 1,680 acres. Five of the ten Audubon Dakotas' priority grassland bird species were recorded at one or both sites: Western Meadowlark, Bobolink, Upland Sandpiper, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Additionally, Baird's Sparrow was recorded. While not a priority species, the Baird's Sparrow breeding range is small and requires large areas of intact grassland. These results confirm that project areas provide important breeding habitat for grassland birds and waterfowl, which will benefit from the 10-year term protection per the Toolbox agreement. Avian survey data will be further analyzed, shared with landowners, and used as a baseline with which to compare future survey results against to measure the effectiveness of using adaptive, planned grazing systems to manage grassland bird habitat.

April 2022

Audubon Dakota requested to re-allocate the remaining dollars that were originally allocated to prairie restoration to grazing infrastructure. Audubon had seen a decline in demand for projects to spend the grant dollars on prairie restoration due to drought conditions, so they decided to focus on the ongoing need for new grazing infrastructure. Their budget revision was proposed and approved as the total project expense will remain the same. Audubon Dakota also requested an extension to December 31, 2023, to allow adequate time for new projects to be completed and expensed.

November 2022

During this report period from October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022 there were five projects fully completed which included 47,234 feet of cross fencing, 15,928 feet of water pipeline, seven water tanks, and one well. The grazing infrastructure will benefit management on 3,087 acres of priority habitat within the Missouri Coteau mixed grass prairies, allow for the incorporation of additional paddocks into preexisting grazing systems, and allow for new infrastructure to shift from season long grazing to adaptive rotational grazing to allow for a mosaic of habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Baseline avian surveys were conducted by an Audubon Dakota grassland bird technician on 6 properties; 18 transects on 1,874 acres. Eight of ten Audubon Dakota priority grassland species were recorded at one or several sites. Across the six properties, a total of 446 birds were recorded representing 46 species. Avian data will further be analyzed, shared, and used.

Full details can be found in the report.

Dated 11/2/2022