

017-169 - North Dakota Conservation Forage Program - 2020

Status Report Details

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Benefactor:

Vendor ID:

PeopleSoft Supplier ID:

Comments:

Location Code:

SAM.gov Entity ID:

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SAM.gov Entity ID Expiration Date:

State Issued ID:

Category #:

Year Begin:

Year Closed:

NCES#:

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Unrestricted Indirect Cost Rate: 0.0%

Document Approval

Level	Approved By	Approved Date	Approval	Comments
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Interim Report

Interim Report

Work Accomplished*:

Twelve projects were selected and Audubon Dakota is drafting landowner agreements to prepare for 2022 seedings. A second CFP enrollment period began on 11/15/21 and runs through 02/22. An October CFP partner meeting was held to share program updates and a CFP Best Practices guide. Communications include: press releases and articles, a story in Future Farmer magazine, a radio interview, emails, social media posts, and distribution of an FAQ sheet, flyer, and CFP vs. CRP document.

Certification

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Do you agree?*: Yes

Photos

Description	File Name	Type	Size	Upload Date
CFP vs CRP flyer	CFP-Vs-CRP_Flyer.pdf	pdf	53 KB	01/31/2022 03:11 PM
CFP Best Practices	CFP Restoration Best Practices_Draft2.pdf	pdf	128 KB	01/31/2022 03:12 PM
CFP FAQ	CFP_FAQ-Sheet.pdf	pdf	528 KB	01/31/2022 03:12 PM
CFP Info Sheet	CFP-InfoSheet8.5 x 11 in.pdf	pdf	15 MB	01/31/2022 03:13 PM
CFP Quicksheet	CFP_QuickSheet.pdf	pdf	7 MB	01/31/2022 03:13 PM

Tasks Report

Tasks

Task	Start Date	Completion Date	Percent Complete	Comments
Enroll 18,000 acres in the Conservation Forage Program	02/01/2021	01/31/2023	0.0%	Twelve projects covering over 2,000 have been selected from the first round of open enrollment. Agreements with landowners are being drafted and are anticipated to be signed by the end of 2/22. A second enrollment period is open through 2/22.
Restore enrolled acres	05/01/2021	12/31/2022	0.0%	Will begin spring 2022.
Provide transition payments and cost share payments for grazing infrastructure to landowners	02/01/2021	01/31/2025	0.0%	Will begin in 2022

Description of Tasks

Please Describe Tasks:

The first two years of implementation will be focused on enrolling at least 18,000 acres. To assist the selection process, projects will be ranked based on specific criteria; however, projects not meeting each criteria will not be disqualified. Between May '21 and Dec. '22 enrolled landowners will receive financial and technical assistance to seed enrolled acres. Throughout the entire project period landowners will be offered transition payments and cost share for grazing infrastructure.

Deliverables Report

Deliverables

Deliverable	Quantity	Unit of Measurement, if applicable	Status
Program Enrollment and Transition Support	18000	Acres	Agreements are being drafted to enroll the first 2,000 acres. The second enrollment period is open through the end of February.
Restore enrolled acres and provide cost-share for grazing infrastructure	18000	acres	Will begin in spring 2022

CFP vs. CRP

Why CFP?

CFP is less competitive than CRP. Landowners are able to use enrolled acres to produce forage and therefore income from grazing or haying.

Audubon Dakota and partners provide a technical assistance partner and one-on-one planning to ensure your projects success.

Technical Assistance Partner – Either an Audubon Dakota staff member or one of our partners. The technical assistance partner is available to guide the process and answer any questions that come up.

“The biggest benefit of enrolling in CFP is the flexibility it offers beyond year 3 for producers to graze, hay, and otherwise manage their land.”

- Josh Lefers, Audubon Dakota Working Lands Program Manager

ITEM	CFP	CRP
Term Agreement	10 Year	10-15 Year
Payments	3 Year Established*	Yearly Rental Payments
Cost Share	60% forage seed mix 50% grazing infrastructure (perimeter fencing, water)	---



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Conservation Forage Program:

Goal:

Audubon Dakota's Conservation Forage Program (CFP) is designed for North Dakota's producers to restore marginal crop lands back to grasslands to improve forage availability and quality for grassland birds. The CFP aims to accelerate grassland restoration and recover overall soil health and grassland bird habitat across the state.

Eligibility Requirements:

- No minimum requirement of land ownership
- Land capability classes between a score of 4 through 8 on at least 25% of the priority given to land that meets that classification
- Cannot be enrolled in CRP to be enrolled in CFP
- Project area must be located in North Dakota, regardless of owner's address
- Currently cropland (no minimum number of years)

Payments*:

- Based on the most recently published NASS rate for the year enrolled for your county (*Cash rental rate for non-irrigated cropland for your county*)
- Cost share assistance: Provided to participants who establish approved cover on eligible land.
- Includes 60% of actual forage seed-mix cost based off EQIP Rates for 2020
- Includes 50% of grazing infrastructure.

Conservation Reserve Program

Goal:

The long-term goal of the program is to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. Remove environmentally sensitive land from agriculture production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality

Eligibility requirements (must meet one of the following):

- A producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior
- Have a weighted average erosion index of eight or higher
- Be expiring CRP acres
- Be in national or state CRP conservation priority area
- Must have been crop land the past 3-5 years

Payments:

Rental Payment: rates are based on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent subject to a statutory 85 percent proration.

Cost-Share Assistance: provided to participants who establish approved cover on eligible land. Cannot exceed 50% of the participant's costs to establish approved practices.

CFP Restoration Best Practices

Audubon Dakota and partners have a vested interest in ensuring the long-term success of grassland seedings planted through the Conservation Forage Program to provide forage and habitat for years to come. We are also aware that real-world conditions may create situations where these practices cannot be followed every year. To that end, we've compile a list of best practices for the first three years of management as well as best practices for years 4-10 to help provide high-quality forage and wildlife habitat through the CFP contract period and beyond.

Seeding Best Practices

Work with your CFP project manager to develop a seed mix and site plan specific for your soils, budget, and goals.

1. Site preparation and seeding. Each site is unique, but generally need limited surface residue (no more than 50% ground cover) and a firm, weed free seedbed. Seeding should take place in spring (April-June) or fall (October-November). See NRCS Herbaceous Vegetation Establishment Guide or contact your CFP project manager or Audubon Dakota for more detailed practices.
2. Cover or nurse crops may be included at low levels to provide ground cover and weed suppression in year one. Work with your project manager to ensure that the cover crop will not suppress the perennial seeding.
3. Regular inspection of the seed box to confirm seed is properly flowing and calibration is adequate is essential. Any remaining seed, once initial planting is completed on all acres, is required to be planted. On second pass, the drill should be run perpendicular to the original planting direction until all seed is expended.
4. If the seeding will include some tame species, you must avoid smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass, crested wheatgrass, creeping foxtail, tall fescue, and sweet clover as components of the seed mix. Seed mixes that contain these species will be ineligible for financial assistance. Additionally, tame species cannot exceed 20% by PLS of the mix and alfalfa cannot exceed 5% of the mix; seed mixes that exceed this level will be ineligible for financial assistance.

Year 1-3 Best Practices

Contact your CFP project manager or Audubon Dakota before doing any management on the seeding.

This will ensure your continued adherence to your CFP contract while giving you a chance to hear what has worked for others in your situation.

1. Producers should plan to not get any production through haying or grazing from the new seeding in the first three years. The transition payments are meant to provide a financial safety net for these years while the seeding is established.
2. Control of Noxious weeds should be localized to the problem area and be addressed by spot spraying or clipping. The site should not be broadcast sprayed. Many of these new plantings will have a forb component that will not tolerate herbicides.
3. Annual weeds are likely to occur in a new planting but are rarely detrimental. Contact your technical assistance provider prior to implementing any management on annual weeds.
4. Clipping should be done after July 15 and before September 1, if clipping is needed. Clipping should leave 8-12 inches of stubble to provide snow catch and avoid stressing new seedlings. If

hay is removed as part of the clipping process, you will need to contact your technical assistance provider in advance of the clipping.

5. Grazing or burning is not recommended in year 1-3. These practices may stress new seedlings unnecessarily early in their establishment.

Year 4-10 Best Practices

You do not need to contact your technical assistance provider before doing management, but it is still encouraged if you are changing some part of your management.

1. Grazing should happen as part of a rotational system. Your technical assistance provider can help you set up a grazing plan for your entire ranch.
2. Hay after August 1 in any calendar year. This will allow the seeding to continue to flourish while also protecting grassland birds during their primary nesting season. July 15 is also an acceptable date to protect the majority of the primary nesting season. If you plan to hay before July 15, contact your TA provider. Haying should be conducted in a way that will allow wildlife to escape to the non-hayed area instead of getting trapped in a small strip of vegetation in the middle of the field. (NDGF provides a haying diagram for a reference found in the Management Considerations for Private Land publication)
3. Burning can be a useful tool to control some invasive grasses and allow the native plants to fully express themselves.
4. Broadcast spraying should be avoided. Most broadcast herbicides will reduce or eliminate forbs in the mix. These forbs fix nitrogen, cycle minerals, and provide important food sources for livestock, pollinators, and wildlife. Spot spraying can be a useful tool to control state listed noxious weeds if needed.
5. If you think you have a failed seeding, contact your CFP project manager to work through options for reseeding or starting over.



Conservation Forage Program Frequently Asked Questions



Q: How do I enroll?

CFP is administered through a number of partners in ND. If you have a contact with US Fish and Wildlife Service, ND Game and Fish, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, or the ND Natural Resources Trust, you can work with them to enroll. Some local NRCS or Conservation District offices may also be able to help you enroll. Otherwise, contact Audubon Dakota at 701-298-3373 or dakota@audubon.org and we will connect you with a range ecologist.

Q: What is covered in the seed mix and grazing infrastructure financial assistance?

The seed mix financial assistance covers 60% of actual seed costs, seeding and site preparation costs are responsibility of the landowner. Additional financial may be available through partner organizations for some landowners to cover additional costs.

The grazing infrastructure cost share covers 50% of EQIP posted rates for 2020. Remaining material and installation costs are the responsibility of the landowner.

Q: Can grazing infrastructure financial assistance be used in areas not seeded back to grass?

No. The financial assistance through CFP is meant to cover areas enrolled in CFP and actually planted back to grass. However, infrastructure installed as part of a CFP project can benefit existing grazing systems, i.e. a well or tank may serve a paddock that is not part of CFP as long as its primary use is for the CFP project area.

Q: Can I use grazing infrastructure financial assistance from another program on CFP acres instead of the one offered by CFP if it is a better fit for me?

Yes, you may choose financial assistance from another program and it will not affect your transition payments.

Q: When do I get the transition payments?

The first transition payment will be processed after you submit your receipts for the seeding and we can verify the land has been seeded. Normally it takes about a month or two for the payment to be processed. Year 2 and 3 transition payments will occur annually on or near the date of your first transition payments.

Q: What is covered in the CFP agreement?

The agreement will state that you agree to keep the land as grassland for 10 years and manage it according to your management plan. This could include grazing, haying, or other management. It is recommended that the site not be grazed, hayed, or sprayed for the first 3 years after planting to allow for full establishment, and that any haying after year 3 be completed after July 15 to avoid direct impacts on grassland birds during the primary nesting season. Nothing is filed with the county against the title of the land.

Q: What seed mix do I use?

You will work with a conservation partner to develop a seeding plan based off your planned management for the forage, to fit your budget and goals for the land. Some tame species are prohibited from financial assistance (smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass, sweet clover, creeping foxtail, tall fescue, crested wheatgrass) and other tame species can only be included at limited level (less than 20% by seed mix of other tame species, no more than 5% alfalfa).

Q: Do I have to allow hunter access or enroll in PLOTS?

No, you maintain access control for your land. Enrollment in PLOTS is optional, but may allow for additional income on project acres.

Q: What if the land is sold?

The contract goes for 10 years, so the land must stay as grassland for 10 years. The land can otherwise be sold or traded as normal.

Q: What if I want to put the land into cropland or develop it for another use before the end of the 10 years?

You will pay a pro-rated rate to cover expenses associated with establishment and administration of CFP on any acres converted from grassland. The highest rate paid will be in year 4, after all transition payments are made and the seeding is established, and will decrease year by year until year 10.

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR PROJECT PARTNERS



North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts

North Dakota Conservation Forage Program (CFP)



The North Dakota Conservation Forage Program (CFP) will begin accepting applications starting on November 15, 2021.

Mission

CFP partners with North Dakota's producers to convert marginal crop lands back to grasslands to improve forage availability and quality. By providing support through financial and technical assistance to landowners, CFP aims to accelerate grassland establishment across the state.

Objective

The North Dakota Conservation Forage Program aims to improve forage availability and quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat by restoring and integrating grazing and haying land management techniques on privately owned land.

Resources Available

- 3-year transition payments
- 60% forage seed mix cost share*
- 50% grazing infrastructure cost share*

*Cost share reimbursements are based off of and cannot exceed 2020 NRCS Field Office Technical Guide rates.



Application Process

Collaborate with a technical service provider to complete the North Dakota Conservation Program producer application form.

Contact information by region can be found in the North Dakota Conservation Forage Program producer guide to enrollment.

The North Dakota Conservation Forage Program "moves us in the direction of true innovation, keeping the working land working, knowing we can provide something for wildlife and those who enjoy driving in the countryside and seeing all the great things we see and sometimes take for granted as farmers and ranchers." - Daryl Lies, ND Farm Bureau

Applicant's Responsibilities

- **Commit:** selected projects will enter into a project agreement with Audubon Dakota committing to maintain enrolled land in grassland habitat for at least 10 years from the signing date.
- **Plan:** work with an Audubon representative or project partner biologist, to develop an establishment management plan. Plans will include site preparation, seed composition, seeding rate, timing, and post-planting management.
- **Implement:** complete seeding and any infrastructure installation.
- **Manage:** monitor and actively manage, which may include practices such as: weed control, haying, resting, and prescribed burning.



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Enrollment Opens
November 15, 2021



Evan Barrientos/Audubon



American Kestrel: Kristen Mauzy/Audubon
Photography Awards



Evan Barrientos/Audubon

The North Dakota Conservation Forage Program

CFP will work with North Dakota's producers to restore marginal crop lands back to grasslands to improve forage availability and quality. By providing support through financial and technical assistance to landowners, CFP aims to accelerate grassland restoration and recover overall soil health and grassland bird habitat across the state.



Financial Assistance

3-year transition payments
based on local county averages



Cost Share

60% forage seed mix cost share
50% grazing infrastructure cost share.

Project is encouraged to be grazed or hayed once fully established to provide income on the property after year 3.



Project

10 year term agreement

Unlike CRP, the CFP is targeted at increasing the acre's available for grazing and haying, producers are encouraged to create a haying or grazing plan.



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