

Overview

This inventory provides a summary of responses to the recent States and the Central Grasslands Roadmap survey. The goals of this survey were to solicit examples on how practitioners are currently engaging with the three Roadmap strategy areas of Partnership & Engagement, Policy & Funding, and Research & Evaluation, as well as to understand how the Roadmap aligns with existing State Wildlife Action Plans, and to initiate thinking about how additional funding could be put to use. The information collected here will be used to document what's already happening in the Grasslands, what could happen, and to generate discussion during the upcoming States and the Central Grasslands Workshop on April 8th.

The inventory was updated after the April 8th Workshop to include new ideas presented or reported, and to provide an overview of the workshop. Summaries of each presentation are provided, along with notes from breakout groups, and workshop materials (agendas and worksheets) to provide easy resources if the workshop were to be repeated or adapted for another audience.

ANNOTATED TABLE OF CONTENTS

THREE STRATEGY AREAS P. 2-7

- **Strategy Area 1: Partnerships & Engagement p. 2-3**
- **Strategy Area 2: Policy & Funding p. 4-5**
- **Strategy Area 3: Research & Evaluation p. 6-7**

These three strategy areas are an organizing tool for big buckets of work that need to be accomplished, as defined in the Roadmap. The survey was designed to inventory these three strategy areas. Another layer of themes within each was developed to group programs and mitigation approaches that were reported. These groupings show common threads and the broad diversity of conservation delivery, implementation, and focus areas across the states of the Central Grasslands.

HOW THE ROADMAP ALIGNS WITH SWAPs P. 8-9

This section is presented by state, and the descriptions for each state's SWAP were taken verbatim from the survey. The objective is for states to deepen their understanding of others' approaches and how participants see alignment. Additionally, the Roadmap and these gatherings can be an organizing tool to develop regional collaborations, potentially resulting in regional SWAPs in the future.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH \$15 MILLION? P. 10-11

With Recovering America's Wildlife Act on the horizon, and other potential new funding becoming available and dedicated to Grasslands, it is prudent that we begin discussing and brainstorming how money could be spent, and where priorities exist.

STATE AND ROADMAP WORKSHOP P. 12-21

Section offers the agenda, worksheets, summaries of each presentation, and breakout group themes.



Strategy Area 1: Partnerships & Engagement Inventory

Collaboration to procure and/or distribute funds

- Habitat related, including:
 - Statewide Habitat Plan & Habitat Trust Fund
 - The Meadowlark Initiative, a new statewide strategy to combine efforts of partners with similar programs and practices and produce value-added contributions to recover grasslands in North Dakota
 - North Dakota GFD and conservation partners work cooperatively on delivery of several grassland enhancement and establishment projects across the state funded through North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund grants
 - Supporting two landowner cooperatives and 15-20 prescribed burn associations across the state that implement prescribed fire on grasslands
 - A "Habitat Share" program where partners contribute funding to assist us with management on our public lands
 - Providing technical assistance visits and cost-share grants to landowners to assist in grassland plantings and enhancement through planting forbs.
 - Delivering and funding priority-habitat-targeted private lands conservation programs using state, grant, non-profit conservation organization and/or USDA grant funds via a habitat contract with Pheasants Forever
- Wildlife related, including:
 - State Wildlife Grants
- Fund state coordinator position with PF & NRCS to enhance collaboration and increase effectiveness of the farm bill biologist program and enhance funding and obtaining grants to enhance conservation delivery to private lands

Collaboration to develop and/or implement regional or statewide plans

- Engagement with Inter-state organizations, including:
 - NBTC/NBCI, AFWA, SEAFWA, WAFWA
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Programs
 - Intermountain Joint West Venture
 - Migratory Bird Joint Ventures
 - Northern Great Plains Joint Venture
 - Trilateral Wildlife Committee
- Engagement with statewide or within-state organizations, including:
 - Collaboration with Wildlife Conservation Society to incorporate climate science into long-term planning and priority setting through the Statewide Habitat Plan
 - Invasive Annual Grass Plan
 - South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Private Lands Habitat Program
 - South Dakota GFP Wetland & Grasslands Program
 - The Rangelands Resources Program
 - South Dakota Grassland Coalition
 - Sandhills Task Force



Collaboration to identify, monitor, and/or meet conservation objectives

- General Conservation and Restoration
 - Lands Branch Division conservation easements
 - Working with PLJV and private landowners to restore playas
 - Prescribed burns with USFWS
 - Helping support partnership in the Chihuahuan Desert to work on grassland conservation through Southern Wings
 - State private land conservation program delivered via habitat contract with Pheasants Forever
 - Grassland habitat work on State Wildlife areas including development of targeted prescribed grazing to achieve specific habitat conditions for grassland birds
 - South Dakota James River Watershed CREP
 - Habitat Protection Program - work unit that provides guidance and recommendations to industrial-scale developers, permitting entities, and for large-scale land management planning
 - CRP-SAFE grassland practices and a grass-associated riparian CREP through USDA
 - Habitat restoration on hunter access acres
 - Nebraska Invasive Species Council
 - Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force
 - Healthy Soils Task Force
 - Oaks and Prairies JV Grassland Restoration Incentive Program (GRIP)
- Species-Specific Conservation
 - Colorado Lesser Prairie-chicken State Implementation Team
 - Kansas Lesser Prairie-chicken State Implementation Team
 - Black-footed ferret reintroduction & management on public and private lands
 - Black-tailed Prairie Dog Range-wide Monitoring Protocol
 - IMBCR
 - Lesser Prairie-Chicken Range Wide Plan
 - Pheasant Management Plan; Berggren Pheasant Plan
 - Grouse management work
 - Red cedar removal projects
- Monitoring
 - Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions
 - Upland Game Monitoring

Collaboration to educate

- Wyoming Outdoor Expo - annual multi-day event with environmental education focus
- Annual all-partners meeting to share recent successes and plan for the future
- Grazing and grassland management schools
- Training, mentoring and support of the farm bill biologists in the Pheasants Forever partnership contract.
- Media campaigns to educate the public about the importance of grasslands, for both wildlife and people



Strategy Area 2: Policy & Funding Inventory

Policy for working lands, private lands, or development

- Working Lands
 - Public access program for hunting, fishing, and trapping on private lands across the state
 - Proposed EQIP incentive program for expiring CRP transitioning to grazing lands
- Private Lands
 - NDGF Private Lands Programs
 - Landowner cost-share programs
 - Landowner incentive programs to:
 - Maintain or improve grassland quality
 - Encourage rangeland management via hunting license voucher incentive
 - Conduct habitat restoration to support local biologist managed projects
 - Nebraska Prescribed Fire Council - a landowner led group that pushes for improvements in policies related to prescribed fire in the state
 - Midwest Private Lands Working Group
- Development
 - The Habitat Protection Program maintains scientifically-supported best practices and recommended methods for monitoring and estimating impacts to wildlife resulting from development
 - As part of the NDGFD's environmental review and consultation with energy and industry regulators and developers, we continue to highlight the high-value and importance of native grasslands and are, subsequently, advising and encouraging developers to avoid, minimize, and offset potential impacts to unbroken grasslands.
 - Working with NRCS on GPGI development for Colorado

Policy for land conservation

- Participate and provide recommendations for policy changes to USDA programs by working directly with NRCS and FSA state offices
- Write conservation programs/projects such as State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) proposals for inclusion in USDA programs to further grassland conservation.
- Communicating with state and local representatives on pertinent policies regarding grass conservation.
- Inventorying South Dakota last remaining tracts of native grasslands
- Conservation delivery through grass restorations, improved grazing infrastructure and management, and perpetual conservation easements

Policy for specific habitats or species

- Upland Game Monitoring
- Lesser Prairie Chicken Range-wide Plan
- Black-footed ferret reintroduction & management on public and private lands
- Habitat First, the state wildlife habitat management program



- Pastures for Upland Birds (PUB) program restores private exotic pastures to native grassland species
- Rainwater Basins Joint Venture's Landbird Management Plan
- Collaboration with the University of Nebraska to put together a statewide cedar management plan
- Supporting efforts by more southeastern states to add Northern Bobwhite to the Tier 1 species level for Working Lands for Wildlife

Involvement in inter-agency/group policy development

- Participation or engagement with:
 - Sub-committees of the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee
 - NBTC/NBCI, AFWA, SEAFWA, WAFWA
 - Farm Bill public commentary, working groups, or subcommittees
 - Joint Ventures



Strategy Area 3: Research & Evaluation Inventory

Research pertaining to animals

- Converse County Oil and Gas Project raptor nesting productivity study
- SWG projects (demographics of grassland nesting birds, high intensity short duration grazing impacts to grassland birds)
- USFWS HAPET including products on grassland birds and pollinators
- Grassland Bird Demographics with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
- Long-billed Curlew Survey with American Bird Conservancy
- Bird Community Dynamics with NDSU
- Birds & Beef High Intensity Short Duration Grazing with UND and TNC
- Pollinator Inventory with NDSU
- Enhancing Floral Resources for Pollinators with NDSU
- Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Black-footed Ferret, Lesser Prairie Chicken, Northern Bobwhite Quail, Gunnison and Greater Sage-grouse, Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse research with nexus between biology and habitat
- CPW avian research staff and grad student project on habitat treatments including targeting livestock grazing and invasive annual grass treatments and northern bobwhites
- CPW avian research work on shortgrass nesting birds, mountain plover, prairie-dog colonies
- CPW avian research on food availability for waterfowl in playa wetlands located in northeastern Colorado grasslands and farmlands
- Annual surveys for American burying beetles
- Effects of wildfire in mixed-grass prairie on lesser prairie-chicken and vegetation
- Burrowing owl movement study
- Annual range-wide LPC population surveys and ground-based LPC and GPC lek surveys

Research pertaining to plants or habitat

- Annual invasive management via fertilizer and herbicide applications
- Evaluation of effects of grazing on CRP
- Eastern redcedar management and invasion research to inform our statewide cedar management plan
- Multi-partner funded native grassland inventory
- Identifying and ground-truthing locations of prairie remnants and associated SGCN
- CPW avian research assessments of diverse grassland habitat development in previously farmed areas

Monitoring of habitat or species, or program evaluation

- Monitoring
 - Grassland Bird Monitoring Plan
 - IMBCR Bird Monitoring
 - North American Bat Monitoring Program
 - Black-tailed prairie dog population monitoring
 - Development of Massasauga monitoring strategy



- Annual population monitoring of three prairie grouse species, northern bobwhite and scaled quail, ring-necked pheasant and mourning dove populations in eastern Colorado grasslands
- Annual population monitoring and modeling of pronghorn and plains mule and whitetail deer
- Monitoring of swift fox populations and occupancy
- Monarch monitoring and tagging
- USGS Breeding Bird Survey routes
- Program Evaluation
 - Independent assessment of USDA and NGO BMPs for restoring grasslands

Reassessment of or update to past research

- Update to distribution models for bird & mammal SGCN
- Improving plague management techniques, tools, and methods

Novel research ventures

- Collaborative pilot study investigating the effects of invasive annual grass treatments on grassland birds



How does your state's SWAP work towards the vision defined by the Roadmap?

Colorado

- The SWAP provides support for some of the grasslands work that CPW is doing but it is not the sole source for determining priority species and habitats as it is primarily targeted at non-game species or species in decline. CPW also uses core economically important game species to set grassland habitat priorities. The current Colorado SWAP recognizes priority habitats, although it is primarily organized to target specific SGCN.

Kansas

- Focus areas identified and incorporated into EQIP ranking.
- Upland focus areas are on grasslands throughout the state.

Nebraska

- The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project has a similar vision as that defined by the roadmap. We primarily work with working landowners, have "community" focus (ecologically and socially), provide educational opportunities to communities, target healthy landscapes - make them healthier through use of natural processes (like grazing, fire, etc.), help avoid catastrophic wildfire, keep common species common and help at-risk species increase, etc.

New Mexico

- It allows us to use SWG dollars to work on SGCN species in grasslands.

North Dakota

- North Dakota's SWAP indicates the key to ensuring Species of Conservation Priority long-term survival is to maintain diverse habitats over a broad landscape. 48 of the 115 Species of Conservation Priority addressed in North Dakota's SWAP are grassland-associated species. Because NDGFD does not have the means to conduct individual species-by-species management, we direct our attention and efforts into native grassland conservation actions. There are five recurrent conservation actions identified throughout the SWAP:
 - Offer incentives and programs to protect, enhance, and restore habitat;
 - Urge ecologically responsible ordinances and suitable reclamation standards;
 - Promote and support holistic grazing and work with grass-based agricultural groups;



- Use best management practices or ecological site descriptions; and
 - Public education and outreach.
- The SWAP was developed in coordination with numerous partners in North Dakota. A wide array of projects is tied to the SWAP and endorsed by partners across the wildlife and agriculture communities. Its strength is also demonstrated by its integration into the daily workings of partners.

South Dakota

- Grassland species - particularly birds - are widely represented on SD's SGCN list, and on-the-ground habitat projects to benefit grassland species is a priority for SWG funding.

Texas

- The Texas SWAP is strongly disconnected from actual conservation outcomes like more habitat; this should be fixed.

Wyoming

- The Wyoming SWAP identifies leading conservation challenges for prairie grasslands and the 35 grassland-associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (birds, mammals, herps). To address these challenges, the SWAP describes conservation actions, including:
 - ways to improve siting, operations, and mitigation for energy development;
 - reducing the establishment and spread of invasive plants.
 - improving land management practices, including developing incentives and techniques to incorporate natural disturbances and flexibility in grazing plans and practices to create desired conditions
 - Monitor to detect changes in wildlife populations, and changes with management actions or changing environmental conditions to continue to develop best practices and to manage proactively.



What would you do with \$15M?

Additional staff or contractors

- Hire experts to draft and lobby for legislation that requires energy efficiencies and strongly incentivizes siting renewable energy development with existing development
- Create a new class of shared position with appropriate partners to focus on wildlife group monitoring/surveys/research and implement conservation projects
- Hire more social scientists to connect with and better understand communities
- Hire additional staff in accounting and contracting to deploy conservation efforts

Expanding or adding programs

- Build public support through social media campaigns
- Plague management
- Develop an incentive program similar to CRP but implemented at the local level rather than being tied to the National Farm Bill.
- Develop relationships with private landowners, contribute to restoration, and work to develop more sustainable land use practices that will protect and maintain grasslands
- Develop a technical assistance program to help with conservation efforts that aren't tied to a specific agency's program funding
- Conduct large-scale public education and outreach on the value of grasslands
- Facilitate additional landowner cooperatives - getting more groups where "neighbors help neighbors" while we help them help us
- Consider expansion of access programs (including non-consumptive activities) and education programs
- Expand existing programs with a high ROI, such as prescribed grazing and prescribed fire

Funding or endowment related

- Create an endowment to support South Dakota Ag land trust to offer voluntary grassland easements
- Establish a conservation trust fund
- Provide matching funds for federal and private grant programs to deliver conservation incentives and easements to private landowners
- Establish incentive-based conservation programs for landowners, such as payments for conservation

Research

- Create robust estimates of the species- or community-specific habitat and population losses resulting from common energy development
- Complete research and monitoring of our non-game grassland species, including insects
- Conduct a more detailed Black-Tailed Prairie Dog survey
- Establish more robust tracking of ongoing projects to understand what is and isn't working



Land conservation

- Land acquisition or designation
 - Identify the best-quality remaining grasslands for grassland-obligate or area-sensitive wildlife values and purchase conservation easements (including mineral rights) to maintain those values
 - State-funded CRP or pasture easements to incentivize planting/idling and deter breaking sod
 - Conservation easements aimed at tallgrass and shortgrass prairies that benefit SGCN populations
 - Establish relatively undisturbed grassland patches primarily within pheasant-favorable landscapes through CREP or similar state-sponsored short-term program
- Identify conservation objectives
 - Expand and maintain our existing private land habitat conservation efforts
 - Continue to improve targeted conservation delivery in priority grassland areas
 - Work with the flyway on prioritizing conservation objectives of grassland birds.
 - Bring together other grassland conservation stakeholders to identify critical needs, develop ways and means of leveraging the money, and apply it to long-term grassland conservation practices that meet the identified needs
 - Develop proactive management programs for landowners and industry developments seeking protections from potentially listed species (e.g., HCPs or CCAAs)

Restoration

- Develop the infrastructure and partnerships necessary to facilitate cottonwood restoration work for our habitat biologists
- Enhance, restore, and protect diverse native grasslands (already being pursued as part of the Meadowlark Initiative)
- Tie together existing blocks of native sandy grasslands/sand-sage rangelands supporting our core greater prairie-chicken habitat, important mule deer habitat, and core high quality habitat for a suite of grassland birds
- Bolster delivery capacity and program incentives to target our cedar removal in areas where we can build a core of grasslands and continue to build that core
- Incentivize grassland restoration similar to a CRP effort but designed more toward grazing management objectives
- Conduct habitat enhancements through State Wildlife Agency initiatives related to grazing, seeding, annual invasive management
- Augment existing state-based CRP-like grassland restoration program, including incentives, delivery personnel



State and Grasslands Roadmap Workshop

PURPOSE

To bring together a diverse group of state representatives from across the Central Grasslands to learn about their state strategies for addressing conservation goals, supporting landowners, and building collaborations on-the-ground that are positively impacting grassland ecosystems and rural communities. We want to create an opportunity for peers across state lines to learn from one another, identify best practices that can be shared about what is working, and understand innovative, ground-breaking opportunities, and how these connect to the vision and strategy of the Central Grasslands Roadmap.

GOALS

1: Engage more state representatives that are not yet involved in the Roadmap

- Provide context-setting about Roadmap progress prior to and during the meetings
- Include a look at the GAP Analysis (summary of programs) and resources about SWAP species research (Amanda)
- Offer updates about RAWA (Sean)
- Feature state leaders to provide initial thoughts/guidance/examples

2. Create peer-learning opportunities for participants to answer: *“How might the programs and strategies you’re working on now, help achieve the vision laid out by the Central Grasslands Roadmap?”* [focus here is on what’s working and what else could be done, not on barriers and gaps ... those can be deduced during the synthesis process]:

- What are you doing that is working towards the Roadmap strategy areas?
(see more under “Listening Survey” below)

3. Determine how state reps want to contribute to the scorecard and report efforts that are made in their state. Are your state’s priorities addressed in the Roadmap?

PARTICIPANTS

This workshop included field staff, biologists, and leaders from state Departments of Natural Resources and/or state conservation offices. There are concurrent efforts to meet with NRCS representatives to connect the Roadmap to the Great Plains Framework. This does not exclude NRCS from this work, but encouraged more local NRCS to attend.



Workshop Agenda

PART 1: 10 AM – 11:30 AM, MDT, 11 AM – 12:30 PM CENTRAL

1. **Welcoming and Objectives for the session (Matt, 5 minutes)**
2. **Roadmap Status (25 minutes total)**
 - a. Provide context-setting about Roadmap progress (Matt, 5-10 mins)
 - b. Provide additional context for Roadmap (Tammy, 5-10 mins)
 - c. Provide context about the AFWA Grasslands Resolution, relevance of GAP Analysis and SWAP species research (Jim, 5-10 mins)
3. **RAWA & Southern Wings (10 minutes each, 20 mins total)**
 - d. Offer updates about RAWA (Sean Saville)
 - e. Updates about Southern Wings and helping with SWAPs (Deb Hahn)
4. **Examples of Current State Initiatives (30 mins = 10 mins each)**
 - f. **Partnership/Engagement:** Derek Wiley, Steve Riley, Catherine Wightman: GRIP
 - g. **Policy and Funding:** Sandra Johnson and Greg Link, Meadowlark Initiative
 - h. **Research and Monitoring:** Jennifer Timmer, Liza Rossi, IMBCR overlays
5. **Provide additional time for questions and preview afternoon (Matt, 10 mins)**

-- LUNCH BREAK --

PART 2: 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM MDT, 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM CENTRAL

6. **Breakout Groups Round 1 (See 1st Worksheet, 20 minutes)**
7. **Report Out: Each breakout group shares examples/highlights (10 minutes)**
8. **Reporting to the Roadmap Scorecard (Matt, <5 minute explanation)**
9. **Scorecard Questions and Discussion (Full Group, ~15 minutes)**
10. **Breakout Groups Round 2 (see 2nd Worksheet (p. 2), 20 minutes)**
11. **Report Out: Each breakout group shares examples/highlights (10 minutes)**
12. **Conclude and Adjourn (Matt, 5-10 minutes)**



Workshop Presentations

GRASSLAND BIRDS AND THE STATES

by Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

When published in 2019 in *Science*, *Decline of the North American Avifauna* stoked deep concern throughout the conservation community with the startling finding that North America's bird population has declined by almost 3 billion birds since 1970 (Rosenberg, et al., 2019). In response, many local, state, national, and international agencies and organizations elevated grassland birds' priority in conservation and protection as more than one in four of the 3 billion birds lost were grassland birds. The Road to Recovery (R2R) initiative is one response to the "3 Billion Birds" paper by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), aiming to determine and highlight birds in need. The R2R initiative tracks four separate population metrics: High Concern, Population Loss, Urgency, and Half-Life, utilizing analyses by Adam Smith, a biostatistician with the Canadian Wildlife Service. If a bird meets all three criteria for "highest concern," R2R gives it a "3X" or three-strike rating. Seven of the 73 birds considered "most urgent" are grassland obligates, and all seven of the grassland obligates have a three-strike rating. Furthermore, there are several non-grassland birds on the list of the 73 "most urgent" birds whose habitat overlaps with other high-concern grassland birds on the list, underlining the fact that grasslands and wetlands "occur in a matrix" within the Northern Great Plains. In summary, using R2R to best target conservation needs and recognizing overlapping areas of conservation will be key to collaboratively changing the trajectory of North American grassland decline.

RAWA UPDATES

by Sean Saville, Campaign Manager for the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife

A collaborative effort backed by over 90 companies and organizations, Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife is a campaign directed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) designed to generate public will and unite large organizations behind Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). RAWA would provide states, territories, and tribes with funding to distribute for incentive-based, voluntary, and proactive conservation. From a legislative action standpoint, the prospect of RAWA passing is "good." While RAWA has not yet been introduced to the House, it will be soon (potentially a few weeks) following extensive, proactive "homework" on its path through both congressional bodies. RAWA may also have a path to enactment via the infrastructure passed by the last congress. Another element of RAWA is the creation of RAWA Project Spotlights for each state, beginning with "Tier 1" states. These Project Spotlights reports include information on Conservation Benefits, Partners, Economic Impact, and Estimated Budget. The reports are also intended to focus on projects that would be forced to the back burner without the funding RAWA may provide. The Project Spotlights are intended not only for the public but for congresspeople and senators to convince them to be on the right side of RAWA. RAWA will also support international conservation efforts, funding "full life cycle habitat and species conservation." Finally, many partners, especially those participating in the Roadmap, will be of great help in getting RAWA across the finish line.



SOUTHERN WINGS: A PARTNERSHIP OF STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

by Deb Hahn, International Relations Director for Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Created in 2008, Southern Wings is an international “partnership of state fish and wildlife agencies” working to achieve annual life cycle conservation of migratory birds, especially species of greatest conservation need (SGCNs). More specifically, Southern Wings aims to support conservation efforts in Mexico and other Central American countries, as funds spent south of the U.S. border can have a very positive impact on grassland bird populations. Published by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [eBird Status and Trends animated maps](#) remind us how deeply connected different North American bird habitats are to each other. State wildlife agencies participate in Southern Wings for four reasons: funding south of the border compliments in-state investment in SGCN species, can leverage state funds at least at a 1:1 ratio, diminish limiting factors that may not be in the U.S., and help keep birds off the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Through Southern Wings, 39 state agencies have contributed over 3.2M to the conservation of 81 shared SGCN in 11 countries through 24 projects. A successful example of one of these international partnerships is the creation of a Sustainable Grazing Network led by the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies partnered with the state agencies of Colorado, Arizona, Montana, and New Mexico, as well as IMC-Vida Silvestre. This project has enrolled 504,000 acres in the SGN since 2013 and improved over 105,000 acres of grassland. Bird monitoring has tracked an annual upward trend in Sprague’s pipit populations, which is an SGCN for thirteen U.S. states. Overall, Southern Wings successfully and strategically addresses the need for full life cycle conservation by creating and sustaining collaborative international partnerships.

GRIP - A TPWD PERSPECTIVE

by Derek Wiley, Conservation Delivery Specialist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Focusing on in-state/regional conservation efforts, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has invested its resources in the Grassland Restoration Incentive Program (GRIP), which provides direct payment to landowners as an incentive to conduct “approved habitat improvement practices.” TPWD has invested in GRIP due to increasing public concern surrounding the decline of iconic grassland species, as well as to build a blueprint for agencies to use federal programs to deliver grassland conservation. GRIP also helps state TPWD employees feel ownership of a cost-incentive program as opposed to assisting in the implementation of federal programs. GRIP provides a number of benefits to TPWD and its partners, including the ability to network with other state agencies in the Oaks and Prairies Ecoregion of Texas and Oklahoma to build a better regional conservation model as well as refine land management to improve habitat conditions and negative impacts to landowners. GRIP also allows TPWD flexibility, through varied funding sources, collaborative efforts, and adjustable geographic targeting. On the direct action level, GRIP is striving to promote seven different management practices among landowners that sustain healthy habitats, from prescribed burning techniques and appropriate grazing methods, to the removal or addition of certain vegetation. Partners within GRIP are crucial: one partner may be able to compensate for another partner’s weakness and allow agencies to focus more on landowners, less on paperwork. Furthermore, partners can take the lead where state agencies are not likely to (and visa versa). While GRIP may not prove to be scalable and flexible in all situations, GRIP in the Oaks and Prairies Ecoregion of Texas and Oklahoma may certainly be considered a successful blueprint.



N-GRIP IN THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS

by Catherine Wrightman, NGPJV Coordinator for Northern Great Plains Joint Venture

Far north of Texas and the Oaks and Prairies Ecoregion, the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) has started to modify the GRIP model for eventual implementation considering their ecological and social-political differences. On the ecological front, managed grazing is prioritized over prescribed burning techniques in many parts of the region as conversion to cropland is more threatening than woody plant encroachment. Additionally, the priority for the NGPJV is to sustain existing intact habitats, then restore and enhance other habitats. From a social-political standpoint, NGPJV's region isn't entirely different from the Oaks and Prairies Ecoregion with a culture of working lands agriculture and strong support for voluntary, incentive-based programs. However, all four states in the JV have existing private land cost-share programs. Goals for implementation include: revising the project proposal/review process, building a ranking system, and establishing a strong feedback loop between leaders and project managers.

THE MEADOWLARK INITIATIVE

by Sandra Johnson, Conservation Biologist for North Dakota Game and Fish Department

To the mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF), abundant grassland habitat is crucial. 48 species of conservation priority, as well as countless pollinators and game species, depend on grasslands in North Dakota, though it can be difficult to catch North Dakotans' interest in grassland conservation. Enter the Meadowlark Initiative, designed to bring about public support for grassland conservation by spotlighting the decline of North Dakota's iconic state bird: the Western Meadowlark. Many residents have noticed the decline firsthand, including state policymakers. By recognizing the need for habitat for the Meadowlark, North Dakotans can see the state's need for working grasslands. The Initiative has 5 elements that tie into North Dakota's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP): revitalize, reconnect, and sustain existing working grasslands and ensuring profitability; reinvent a statewide grassland reconstruction program; offset impacts to grassland habitat function and value as development advances; Meadowlarks for human well-being; and advance grassland ecosystem recovery by learning (science). Prior to implementation, NDGF surveyed a variety of stakeholders to formulate its draft vision and goals for the Initiative and found broad support for the grasslands-focused initiative. NDGF applied for support through the National Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Through the RCPP, NDGF and its partners identify the necessary conservation activities and NRCS delivers the program. NDGF expects to hear back from NRCS in April 2021.

INTEGRATED MONITORING FOR MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

by Liza Rossi, Conservation Biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife
and Jennifer Timmer, Conservation Delivery Biologist

Back in 2007, prior to the well-known *Decline of the North American Avifauna* (nicknamed the "3 billion birds paper"), the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) released *Opportunities for Improving Avian Monitoring* to highlight the need for better bird monitoring systems. The report stressed



the following four goals: coordination among organizations and scales, improved statistical design, modern data management systems, and integrating monitoring into management and conservation practices. Growing out of NABCI and inspired by the *Opportunities* report, the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program is now “the second largest breeding bird monitoring program in North America.” IMBCR allows Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and its partners to monitor birds across the entirety of the Shortgrass Prairie region (BCR18). IMBCR monitoring spans federal, state, public, and private land. IMBCR is greatly beneficial to Colorado’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and the tracking of its 52 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) birds, as IMBCR estimates are the only reliable information available for Tier 2 species. IMBCR monitors breeding land birds from local to regional scales, providing rigorous population estimates such as density and trend. Such a comprehensive effort would not be possible without the pooling of resources and communication between IMBCR’s 30-some partners.

Afternoon Discussion Notes

CROSCUTTING THEMES REPORTED THROUGHOUT BREAKOUT GROUPS

- Scaling up programs will be important for more effective delivery. RAWA could help immensely in this regard.
- Use iconic, charismatic, or well-known species to “sell” grasslands and grassland conservation programs/partnerships. Also recognize when wildlife is not the selling point for landowners, and use economic, human health and safety, or other messaging instead. This issue is fundamentally about winning over the minds of people and shifting the culture.
- Monitoring should be more widespread to demonstrate outcomes and/or Return on Investment, and to increase partner/stakeholder investment. Existing programs that are effective at this include IMBCR and NABCI’s Coordinated Implementation Program.
- Existing partnerships are working. However, there are a number of challenges, including maintaining continuity and momentum in the face of unpredictable funding, identifying previous or ongoing work to prevent recreating the wheel, and accurately identifying the most important need(s) for the highest ROI.
- Best practices developed by one initiative should be strategically adapted to any new geographies (e.g., grassland loss from conversion to cropland vs woody encroachment).
- Invertebrates newly listed in SWAPs as SGCN present an upcoming challenge that may require additional partnerships. For instance, Wyoming uses their State Heritage Program, Nebraska uses the Master Naturalists Program, and North Dakota has partnered with university researchers to develop invertebrate data.
- While birds are appropriately a major focus for grassland conservation, don’t let insects, mammals, and flora get left behind.
- Being able to provide a central hub for both practitioners/professionals AND landowners to identify ongoing conservation efforts would be incredibly beneficial. This would require staff for related communication and digital marketing.



SCORECARD FEEDBACK

Common Goals for the Scorecard

- Show progress on all species. We're recovering species of greatest concern, and also keeping common species common

Important Considerations

- Tailor the language to the audience. For example, avoid language such as protection, easement, or acquisition when communicating with legislators
- Recognize the limits of geospatial data

What should be included?

- Acres restored or enhanced
- Extent of invasive control
- Info from landowners on what they are already measuring: soil health, productivity, profitability of land
- Utilize a variety of GIS layers, including human/community layers, tribal lands, community collaboratives, natural resources (e.g. birds through their annual cycle)

Who is maintaining the scorecard? What is the reporting structure?

- Joint Ventures are an important part of the equation
- County level reporting is about the scale we can do for reporting in Texas due to state statute
- The [Conservation Efforts Database](#) might serve as a model for record keeping
- States will likely be most focused on reporting updates to species of concern, keeping species out of Tier 1.



BREAKOUT GROUPS – ROUND 1 WORKSHEET

(20 minutes in randomized groups, please save yourself a couple minutes to summarize at the end)

Conversation Prompts:

Given what you might have read in the inventory or heard in today's presentations, what additional programs or best practices would you add? What's already working and contributing to these efforts?

What reactions or questions did you have to this morning's presentations?

Are some of the program ideas (last 3 examples of Policy/Funding, Partnership/Engagement, Research/Monitoring) we heard about applicable in your state (or similar to something you're already working on)?

What new ideas came up?

Summarize:

What themes of ideas/similar ideas emerged during the breakout group conversation?

What are the top 3 themes your group wants to share back at the larger meeting (pick someone to report out):

1.

2.

3.

Any Others?



BREAKOUT GROUPS – ROUND 2 WORKSHEET

(20 minutes in state/regional groups, please save yourself a couple minutes to summarize at the end)

Conversation Prompts:

What could your state agency do with an added input of \$15 million?
If RAWA happened, how will it help your state's conservation work?

What have you always wanted to do more of in terms of boots on the ground for conservation delivery with private landowners?

How can the collaborative effort of biome-level connectivity of the Central Grasslands Roadmap further support this work?

Summarize:

What themes of ideas/similar ideas emerged during the conversation?

What are the top 3 themes your group wants to share back at the larger meeting (pick someone to report out):

1.

2.

3.

Others:



Screenshot of April 8th, 2021 Workshop

