

BIRD CONSERVATION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the Wyoming Bird Conservation Plan will require a broad range of partnerships, an extensive amount of cooperation, and sizeable financial resources. Participation will be necessary from federal and state natural resources agencies, agricultural organizations, private conservation organizations, academia, and private landowners. The biological objectives and recommendations presented here will benefit on-the-ground bird conservation through increased public awareness, education, commitment, and political support.

The step-wise process for implementing the Wyoming Bird Conservation Plan, Version 2.0 is to distribute this document to land managers and natural resources personnel in federal and state agencies and conservation and agricultural organizations, to landowners in the private sector, to those in academia, and to any other interested parties. The Plan will also be converted to a working web-based document, which will help ensure that it will continue to evolve and contain the latest available science, species natural history information, biological objectives and recommendations, species monitoring data, and additional habitat types and bird species.

The Wyoming Bird Conservation Plan, Version 2.0 can and should be applied to other conservation planning efforts taking place in Wyoming and regionally. Information presented in this Plan should be integrated into existing habitat restoration programs and used in the development of site-specific conservation plans such as state and private Habitat Conservation Plans, agency and interagency Management Plans, and local land-use planning strategies.

Federal, state, and private sources of funding, tax incentives, technical support, and other forms of assistance are available to landowners wishing to establish or improve wildlife habitat. Brief descriptions of these programs are presented below.

Federal Funding Programs

There are numerous voluntary programs available under the 2002 Farm Bill that provide financial and technical assistance to landowners for habitat improvement. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers these programs through the Farm Services Agency (FSA), and they are implemented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

This program provides technical assistance, cost-share, and rental payments to create and maintain habitat. It is available to producers with highly erodible cropland

that was in production for four of the six years preceding enactment of the 2002 law. Marginal pastureland is also eligible. Contract agreements range from 10 to 15 years. The goals of this program are to prevent soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat through planting grass, trees, and other long-term cover.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The purpose of this program is to enhance, restore, protect, and expand wetland areas. It provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetlands, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private land in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. This program provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. Most private wetlands converted to agricultural use prior to 1985 are eligible. Wetlands must be restorable and suitable for wildlife benefits. Contract agreements range from 10 to 30 years to permanent contracts.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

This program provides technical assistance and rental payments, and pays up to 90% of the cost to create and maintain habitat. Private grassland, shrubland, and land containing forbs or land that historically contained those features is eligible. Contract agreements range from 10, 15, 20, or 30 years, to permanent contracts.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

This program provides technical assistance and pays up to 75% of the cost for the development of high quality wildlife habitat on upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas. Cost-share agreements are for 5 to 15 years. The program objectives are to connect upper and lower watershed habitats, enhance native plant communities, increase biodiversity, and improve habitat for threatened and endangered species. All private land is eligible, unless it is currently enrolled in CRP, WRP, or a similar program.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

This is a conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals. This program provides financial and technical help to install or implement structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land. Contracts are for one to ten years and are based on a conservation plan to improve environmental quality. All private land in agricultural production is eligible; includes cropland, grassland, pastureland, and non-industrial private forestland.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

This program provides financial and technical assistance for the conservation, protection, and improvement of soil, water, and related resources on tribal and private lands. The program provides payments for producers who historically have practiced good stewardship on their agricultural lands and incentives for those who want to do more. Contracts are for five to ten years and are based on a conservation security plan to install and/or maintain conservation practices on working lands. All private agricultural land and forested land that is an incidental part of an agricultural operation is eligible.

Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)

This program provides technical, financial, and educational assistance. Contracts are for ten years or more based on the development and implementation of a management plan. All non-industrial private forestlands are eligible.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

This is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. It provides matching funds to state, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements or other interests in land. Producers must continue to use the land for agricultural purposes and develop a conservation plan.

State Funding Programs

Grant programs are available from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. A total of \$7,500 is available for water development projects and \$10,000 for riparian and wetland projects; these also include terrestrial development. Larger grants are available from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Trust Fund.

Private Funding Programs

A number of private programs for conserving, restoring, and enhancing habitat on private lands are also available. Two of these programs are presented below.

Conservation Easements

These are voluntary, legal agreements between property owners and a land trust to protect significant property features. Terms of the agreement are registered on the title and apply to the donor and all future owners. Conservation easements can be made for

the protection of wildlife habitat, open spaces, or agricultural lands. This “donation” creates a charitable income tax deduction on the landowner’s federal and state tax returns.

Conservation Research and Education

The National Natural Resources Conservation Foundation is a charitable, not-for-profit corporation that funds research and educational activities relating to conservation on private lands. This foundation will offer grants for research, education, and demonstration projects. Grants will also assist conservation districts in building resources to carry out local conservation programs.