

118TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 9945

To establish a North American Grasslands Conservation Council, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 8, 2024

Ms. MACE (for herself, Ms. DAVIDS of Kansas, Mr. FITZPATRICK, and Mr. THOMPSON of California) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Agriculture, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To establish a North American Grasslands Conservation Council, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the  
5 “North American Grasslands Conservation Act of 2024”.

6 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for  
7 this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Findings.
- Sec. 3. Purpose.

- Sec. 4. Definitions.
- Sec. 5. North American Grasslands Conservation Council.
- Sec. 6. Regional Grasslands Conservation Councils.
- Sec. 7. North American Grasslands Conservation Strategy.
- Sec. 8. Grasslands conservation grant program.
- Sec. 9. Approval of grasslands conservation projects.
- Sec. 10. Native seed crop systems research.
- Sec. 11. Regenerative grazing data collection.
- Sec. 12. Report to Congress.
- Sec. 13. Authorization of appropriations.
- Sec. 14. Rules of construction.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds that—

3 (1) grasslands provide vital habitat for a mul-  
4 titude of species which represent the lifeblood of  
5 local and regional economies that depend on income  
6 generated by sportsmen and women and other forms  
7 of outdoor recreation;

8 (2) grasslands have been managed for millennia  
9 by Indian Tribes through the use of practices re-  
10 ferred to as “Indigenous Traditional Ecological  
11 Knowledge” to conserve and restore habitat for na-  
12 tive flora and fauna, including practices such as res-  
13 toration and conservation of grassland ecosystems to  
14 support continued cultural traditions, including sub-  
15 sistence agriculture, cultural burning, and manage-  
16 ment of culturally significant wildlife and their eco-  
17 systems;

18 (3) the maintenance of healthy populations of  
19 grassland species and working lands that are critical  
20 for rural economies and carbon sequestration is de-

1       pendent on the conservation, restoration, and man-  
2       agement of grassland ecosystems, which are com-  
3       posed of tallgrass, mixed grass, and shortgrass prai-  
4       ries, sagebrush shrub-steppe, and savannah grass-  
5       lands (referred to in this Act as “grassland eco-  
6       systems”);

7               (4) grassland and rangeland ecosystems pro-  
8       vide—

9                       (A) essential and significant habitat for  
10                      mammals, pollinators, reptiles, and other wild-  
11                      life of commercial, recreational, scientific, aes-  
12                      thetic, and cultural value; and

13                     (B) an abundance of critical ecological  
14                      services, including forage and hay for grazing  
15                      livestock, carbon sequestration, carbon storage,  
16                      drought and flood resilience, water filtration,  
17                      and water storage;

18               (5) grasslands cover 358,000,000 acres of the  
19       United States, 85 percent of which are privately  
20       owned and serve as an important habitat for 29  
21       breeding obligate grassland bird species;

22               (6) sagebrush occupies 161,000,000 acres of 14  
23       Western States;

24               (7) over the last decade alone, millions of acres  
25       of grassland ecosystems in North America have been

1 converted to cropland and residential and commer-  
2 cial development;

3 (8) grassland ecosystems are threatened by  
4 fragmentation, invasive species, wildfire, degrada-  
5 tion, and land conversion;

6 (9) on average, about 1,200,000 acres of sage-  
7 brush burn each year in the United States due to  
8 invasive annual grasses that fuel catastrophic  
9 wildfires;

10 (10) in addition to wildfires, there has been a  
11 decrease in the number of working farms and  
12 ranches due to—

13 (A) pressures to convert or sell land; and

14 (B) challenges in keeping ranching profit-  
15 able;

16 (11) effective restoration strategies for land  
17 managers of grassland ecosystems require—

18 (A) access to adequate quantities of high-  
19 quality, regionally appropriate, and diverse na-  
20 tive plant seeds;

21 (B) science-based guidance on cultivating  
22 native plant species; and

23 (C) as stated in the National Seed Strat-  
24 egy for Rehabilitation and Restoration devel-  
25 oped by the Plant Conservation Alliance and

1           chaired by the Director of the Bureau of Land  
2           Management, more research on seedling estab-  
3           lishment and species interaction in order to in-  
4           crease the use of native plant species;

5           (12) many plant species most often associated  
6           with grassland and rangeland ecosystems are  
7           drought tolerant, characteristics that will help en-  
8           sure the viability of critical wildlife habitat and other  
9           ecosystem services in the face of increased drought  
10          prevalence brought on by the effects of climate  
11          change;

12          (13) grassland and rangeland ecosystems are  
13          often comprised of disturbance-dependent commu-  
14          nities that rely on disturbances such as fire to main-  
15          tain the desired plant community composition, re-  
16          duce fuel loading, and arrest ecological succession;

17          (14) beneficial fire, when scientifically applied  
18          and in accordance with local fire prescriptions, is a  
19          critical tool in the maintenance of grassland and  
20          rangeland ecosystems, particularly in the face of cli-  
21          mate change which has been linked to an increase in  
22          the frequency and intensity of wildfires in areas in  
23          which beneficial fire has been excluded and fuel  
24          loading is high;

1           (15) the migratory bird treaty obligations of the  
2           United States with Canada, Mexico, and other coun-  
3           tries require conservation of grasslands and range-  
4           lands that are used by migratory birds for breeding,  
5           wintering, or migration and are needed to achieve  
6           and to maintain optimum population levels, distribu-  
7           tions, and patterns of migration;

8           (16) the 1988 amendments to the Fish and  
9           Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 require the Sec-  
10          retary of the Interior to identify conservation meas-  
11          ures to assure that nongame migratory bird species  
12          do not reach the point at which measures of the En-  
13          dangered Species Act are necessary; and

14          (17) conservation of migratory birds and their  
15          habitats requires long-term planning and the close  
16          cooperation and coordination of management activi-  
17          ties by Canada, Mexico, and the United States with-  
18          in the framework of the North American Wetlands  
19          Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 4401 et seq.), the  
20          1916, 1969, and 1986 Migratory Bird Conventions,  
21          and the Convention on Nature Protection and Wild-  
22          life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere.

23 **SEC. 3. PURPOSE.**

24          The purpose of this Act is to take bold action to con-  
25          serve and restore grasslands in North America while sup-

1 porting ranchers, farmers, Indian Tribes, sportsmen and  
2 sportswomen, rural communities, and other interests by  
3 drawing from existing conservation plans, programs, and  
4 models with a proven track record of success through—

5           (1) encouraging voluntary grassland conserva-  
6           tion and restoration as an alternative to additional  
7           conversion and loss of native grasslands ecosystems  
8           and sustaining those ecosystems as working lands by  
9           creating a flexible, voluntary, and innovative grant  
10          program;

11          (2) improving grassland and rangeland health  
12          and management;

13          (3) restoring marginal lands to native grass-  
14          lands in areas that were historically grasslands;

15          (4) mitigating the impacts of severe drought  
16          and wildfire on grasslands;

17          (5) supporting farmer and rancher stewards,  
18          private landowners, and Tribal partners;

19          (6) improving biodiversity and habitat for  
20          grassland and sagebrush birds, pollinators, and  
21          other wildlife;

22          (7) increasing carbon sequestration and carbon  
23          storage;

1           (8) providing increased wildlife-dependent rec-  
2           reational and hunter and angler access opportuni-  
3           ties, at the discretion of private landowners;

4           (9) encouraging stronger public-private partner-  
5           ships in support of landscape-level grassland con-  
6           servation efforts conducted by State fish and wildlife  
7           agencies, Indian Tribes, regional and Federal enti-  
8           ties, nongovernmental organizations, farmers and  
9           ranchers, and other stakeholders both in the United  
10          States and in Canada and Mexico, and comple-  
11          menting the public-private partnerships working on  
12          grassland conservation as of the date of the enact-  
13          ment of this Act, such as the Partners for Fish and  
14          Wildlife;

15          (10) identifying voluntary opportunities for  
16          grassland conservation, restoration, and manage-  
17          ment not currently available through existing pro-  
18          grams; and

19          (11) providing opportunities for Indian Tribes  
20          and Tribal organizations to conserve, restore, and  
21          manage grasslands, including through—

22                  (A) the ethical incorporation of Indigenous  
23                  Traditional Ecological Knowledge into grass-  
24                  land management and restoration activities; and



1 (B) identifying, encouraging, and providing  
2 funding for partnerships between Indian Tribes  
3 and Federal agencies to co-manage grassland  
4 ecosystems, including ecologically important  
5 flora and fauna.

6 **SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

8 (1) COMMISSION.—The term “Commission”  
9 means the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission  
10 established by section 2 of the Migratory Bird Con-  
11 servation Act (16 U.S.C. 715a).

12 (2) CONSERVATION STRATEGY.—The term  
13 “Conservation Strategy” means the North American  
14 Grasslands Conservation Strategy established under  
15 section 7(a).

16 (3) COUNCIL.—The term “Council” means the  
17 North American Grasslands Conservation Council  
18 established by section 5(a).

19 (4) DIRECTOR.—The term “Director” means  
20 the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife  
21 Service.

22 (5) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-  
23 ty” means—

24 (A) a grazing land coalition;

- 1 (B) an agricultural or livestock producer  
2 group;
- 3 (C) an Indian Tribe;
- 4 (D) a Tribal organization;
- 5 (E) a land trust;
- 6 (F) a State or local government;
- 7 (G) a Federal agency;
- 8 (H) a nongovernmental organization;
- 9 (I) a community-based organization;
- 10 (J) a group of individuals that are private  
11 landowners; and
- 12 (K) a regional fish and wildlife agency.

13 (6) GRASSLANDS.—The term “grasslands”  
14 means tallgrass, mixed grass, shortgrass, native  
15 prairie, sagebrush shrub-steppe, savanna grasslands,  
16 glades, wet meadows, coastal grasslands, and other  
17 related grassland ecosystems, including certain  
18 rangelands.

19 (7) GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION PROJECT.—  
20 The term “grasslands conservation project” means  
21 any conservation, restoration, protection, or en-  
22 hancement activity that is carried out with a grant  
23 awarded under the Program.

24 (8) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”  
25 has the meaning given the term in section 4 of the

1 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance  
2 Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

3 (9) INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL  
4 KNOWLEDGE; ITEK.—The terms “Indigenous Tradi-  
5 tional Ecological Knowledge” and “ITEK” mean ob-  
6 servations, oral and written knowledge, practices,  
7 and beliefs of Indian Tribes that promote environ-  
8 mental sustainability and the responsible steward-  
9 ship of natural resources through relationships be-  
10 tween humans and environmental systems and are  
11 applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cul-  
12 tural, and spiritual systems.

13 (10) PROGRAM.—The term “Program” means  
14 the grant program established under section 8(a).

15 (11) REGIONAL GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION  
16 COUNCIL.—The term “Regional Grasslands Con-  
17 servation Council” means a Regional Grasslands  
18 Conservation Council established by section 6(a).

19 (12) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary”  
20 means the Secretary of the Interior.

21 (13) TRIBAL ORGANIZATION.—The term “Trib-  
22 al organization” has the meaning given the term in  
23 section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Edu-  
24 cation Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

1 **SEC. 5. NORTH AMERICAN GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION**  
2 **COUNCIL.**

3 (a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—There is established the  
4 North American Grasslands Conservation Council.

5 (b) **MEMBERSHIP.**—

6 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Council shall be com-  
7 posed of the following 13 members:

8 (A) The Director, who shall be the respon-  
9 sible Federal official for ensuring Council com-  
10 pliance with the National Environmental Policy  
11 Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.).

12 (B) The Chief of the Natural Resources  
13 Conservation Service of the Department of Ag-  
14 riculture, who shall coordinate interdepart-  
15 mental efforts with the Director.

16 (C) 1 representative of the National Fish  
17 and Wildlife Foundation, appointed by the Sec-  
18 retary.

19 (D) 4 members who shall each—

20 (i) be appointed by the Secretary;

21 (ii) be a director of a State fish and  
22 wildlife agency; and

23 (iii) represent a different regional as-  
24 sociation.

25 (E) 2 members who shall each—

26 (i) be appointed by the Secretary;

1 (ii) be a director, or an equivalent  
2 role, of a natural resources agency of an  
3 Indian Tribe; and

4 (iii) represent a different intertribal  
5 organization dedicated to natural resources  
6 and the environment.

7 (F) 2 members who shall each—

8 (i) be appointed by the Secretary of  
9 Agriculture; and

10 (ii) represent a separate working  
11 lands organization that represents land-  
12 owners, farmers, or ranchers actively par-  
13 ticipating in carrying out voluntary grass-  
14 lands conservation projects.

15 (G) 2 members, of whom—

16 (i) both shall be appointed by the Sec-  
17 retary;

18 (ii) both shall be a member of a chari-  
19 table nonprofit conservation organization;  
20 and

21 (iii) 1 shall be a member of a wildlife  
22 hunting conservation organization.

23 (2) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT; VACANCIES.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in  
2 subparagraph (B), a member of the Council  
3 shall serve for a term of 3 years.

4 (B) INITIAL APPOINTMENTS.—

5 (i) DIRECTORS OF STATE FISH AND  
6 WILDLIFE AGENCIES.—Of the members  
7 first appointed under paragraph (1)(D)—

8 (I) 1 shall be appointed for a  
9 term of 1 year;

10 (II) 2 shall be appointed for a  
11 term of 2 years; and

12 (III) 1 shall be appointed for a  
13 term of 3 years.

14 (ii) OTHER MEMBERS.—Of the mem-  
15 bers first appointed under subparagraphs  
16 (E), (F), and (G) of paragraph (1)—

17 (I) 2 shall be appointed for a  
18 term of 1 year;

19 (II) 2 shall be appointed for a  
20 term of 2 years; and

21 (III) 2 shall be appointed for a  
22 term of 3 years.

23 (C) VACANCIES.—

24 (i) IN GENERAL.—With respect to a  
25 member appointed to the Council under

1           subparagraphs (C) through (G) of para-  
2           graph (1), a vacancy in the Council shall  
3           be filled in accordance with that subpara-  
4           graph for the remainder of the applicable  
5           term of that member.

6           (ii) ALTERNATE MEMBERS.—Until a  
7           vacancy referred to in clause (i) is filled, or  
8           in the event of an anticipated absence of a  
9           member described in that clause from any  
10          meeting of the Council, the Secretary shall  
11          appoint an alternate member to the Coun-  
12          cil who shall—

13                   (I) be knowledgeable and experi-  
14                   enced in matters relating to grass-  
15                   lands conservation and restoration;  
16                   and

17                   (II) perform the duties of a mem-  
18                   ber appointed to the Council under  
19                   subparagraphs (C) through (G) of  
20                   paragraph (1).

21          (3) EX OFFICIO MEMBERS.—The Secretary may  
22          include as ex officio, nonvoting members of the  
23          Council—

1 (A) the Under Secretary for Farm Produc-  
2 tion and Conservation of the Department of Ag-  
3 riculture;

4 (B) the Under Secretary for Natural Re-  
5 sources and Environment of the Department of  
6 Agriculture; and

7 (C) representatives of—

8 (i) other appropriate Federal, State,  
9 or Tribal Government agencies that are ac-  
10 tively participating in grasslands conserva-  
11 tion projects or have technical expertise in  
12 grasslands conservation;

13 (ii) the Federal, provincial, territorial,  
14 Indigenous, or State government agencies  
15 of Canada and Mexico that are actively  
16 participating in carrying out grasslands  
17 conservation projects;

18 (iii) nonprofit charitable organizations  
19 that are actively participating in grass-  
20 lands conservation projects; and

21 (iv) Tribal organizations that are ac-  
22 tively participating in grasslands conserva-  
23 tion projects.

24 (4) CHAIRPERSON.—



1 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Council shall select  
2 a Chairperson from among the members of the  
3 Council.

4 (B) TERM.—A Chairperson shall serve for  
5 a 3-year term, except that the first selected  
6 Chairperson may serve for an initial term of  
7 less than 3 years.

8 (5) VICE CHAIR.—

9 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Chairperson shall  
10 select a Vice Chair from among the members of  
11 the Council.

12 (B) TERM.—A Vice Chair shall serve for a  
13 2-year term, except that the first selected Vice  
14 Chair may serve for an initial term of less than  
15 2 years.

16 (c) MEETINGS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Council shall meet at  
18 the call of the Chairperson.

19 (2) FREQUENCY.—The Council shall meet not  
20 less frequently than once per year.

21 (3) FORMAT.—A meeting of the Council may be  
22 conducted in person, virtually, or in a hybrid format.

23 (4) AVAILABILITY.—Meetings of the Council  
24 shall be open to the public, and the Council shall

1 give public notice of the time and place of such  
2 meetings.

3 (5) QUORUM.—A majority of the members of  
4 the Council shall constitute a quorum for the trans-  
5 action of business.

6 (d) DUTIES.—The Council shall—

7 (1) provide input to the Director in the develop-  
8 ment of the Conservation Strategy;

9 (2) establish publicly available project evalua-  
10 tion criteria for applications submitted under the  
11 Program;

12 (3) recommend grasslands conservation projects  
13 to the Commission in accordance with section 9;

14 (4) receive input from regional conservation en-  
15 tities who have a vested interest in developing multi-  
16 State and Tribal conservation plans; and

17 (5) provide annual updates on the status of the  
18 objectives and goals identified in the Conservation  
19 Strategy to the Commission.

20 (e) COMPENSATION.—A member of the Council shall  
21 receive no compensation as a result of serving on the  
22 Council.

23 (f) FACA APPLICABILITY.—Chapter 10 of part I of  
24 title 5, United States Code, shall not apply to the Council.

1 **SEC. 6. REGIONAL GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION COUN-**  
2 **CILS.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—There is established a Regional  
4 Grasslands Conservation Council for each region of the  
5 United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

6 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—Each Regional Grasslands Con-  
7 servation Council shall be composed of not more than 10  
8 members, which shall include—

9 (1) representatives of nongovernmental and  
10 Tribal organizations representing the conservation  
11 community;

12 (2) representatives from Tribal Governments;

13 (3) representatives of rancher and farming in-  
14 terests;

15 (4) representatives from State fish and wildlife  
16 agencies; and

17 (5) any other representatives, as determined  
18 necessary by the Secretary in coordination with the  
19 Council.

20 (c) RECOMMENDATIONS.—Each Regional Grasslands  
21 Conservation Council shall provide recommendations to  
22 the Council regarding—

23 (1) the selection of grasslands conservation  
24 projects; and

25 (2) key grasslands conservation strategies with  
26 respect to the region served by such Regional Grass-

1 lands Conservation Council that draw from estab-  
2 lished regional grasslands conservation plans.

3 (d) FACA APPLICABILITY.—Chapter 10 of part I of  
4 title 5, United States Code, does not apply to a Regional  
5 Grasslands Conservation Council.

6 **SEC. 7. NORTH AMERICAN GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION**  
7 **STRATEGY.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—After the appointment of the first  
9 7 of the initial members of the Council under section 5(b),  
10 the Director shall, in consultation with the Council—

11 (1) develop a coordinated strategy, to be known  
12 as the “North American Grasslands Conservation  
13 Strategy”, for the conservation, restoration, and  
14 management of grasslands ecosystems across North  
15 America; and

16 (2) support implementation, monitoring, and  
17 communication efforts relating to the Conservation  
18 Strategy.

19 (b) EXISTING CONSERVATION PLANS AND FRAME-  
20 WORKS.—The Conservation Strategy shall draw from ex-  
21 isting local, State, regional, and international conservation  
22 plans and frameworks, conservation plans of Indian  
23 Tribes, and State wildlife action plans, with an emphasis  
24 on supporting existing science- and ITEK-based frame-  
25 works.

1 (c) INCLUSION.—The Conservation Strategy shall—

2 (1) identify key areas with—

3 (A) grasslands at high risk of—

4 (i) conversion to cropland or residen-  
5 tial or commercial development;

6 (ii) shrub or woody encroachment; or

7 (iii) invasion of annual grasses or  
8 other undesired vegetation;

9 (B) the highest potential of conserving na-  
10 tive grasslands, restoring grasslands, and re-  
11 ducing fragmentation;

12 (C) ecologically and culturally significant  
13 grasslands remnants;

14 (D) populations of grasslands-dependent  
15 species of greatest conservation need, as identi-  
16 fied in—

17 (i) State wildlife action plans;

18 (ii) Tribal conservation plans;

19 (iii) the report of the United States  
20 Fish and Wildlife Service titled “Birds of  
21 Conservation Concern 2021 Migratory  
22 Bird Program” (published April 2021), or  
23 a successor document; or

24 (iv) other appropriate science-based  
25 grasslands conservation plans; and

1 (E) grasslands habitats important to the  
2 recovery of species listed as a threatened spe-  
3 cies or an endangered species under section 4 of  
4 the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C.  
5 1533) or identified by a State or Tribal fish  
6 and wildlife agency as a species of greatest con-  
7 servation need;

8 (2) identify specific goals for North American  
9 grasslands conservation, including goals for—

10 (A) conserving grasslands identified under  
11 paragraph (1)(A);

12 (B) increasing grasslands acreage through  
13 the restoration of marginal cropland and  
14 pastureland to native grasslands in areas that  
15 were historically grasslands; and

16 (C) enhancing existing grasslands, pri-  
17 marily through incentivizing the voluntary res-  
18 toration of degraded grasslands and the man-  
19 agement of native prairie or sagebrush  
20 shrublands through conservation practices in-  
21 cluding—

22 (i) advanced grazing management or  
23 other prescribed grazing management that  
24 meets the objectives of the Conservation  
25 Strategy;

- 1 (ii) beneficial fire, including pre-  
2 scribed fires and cultural burning prac-  
3 tices;
- 4 (iii) invasive species management; and  
5 (iv) removal of encroaching woody  
6 vegetation;
- 7 (3) identify key grasslands conservation, res-  
8 toration, and management strategies for each of the  
9 grasslands regions identified by the Director;
- 10 (4) examine existing funding sources and iden-  
11 tify gaps from current Federal, State, Tribal, or  
12 local conservation programs as such programs relate  
13 to grasslands conservation, restoration, and manage-  
14 ment needs, including—
- 15 (A) conservation programs under the Agri-  
16 culture Improvement Act of 2018 (Public Law  
17 115–334) and amendments made by that Act;
- 18 (B) conservation programs under the Pitt-  
19 man-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (16  
20 U.S.C. 669 et seq.); and
- 21 (C) any Federal, State, Tribal, or local  
22 plans, programs, or initiatives that support  
23 grasslands conservation, restoration, and man-  
24 agement; and
- 25 (5) develop—

1 (A) baseline inventories and population es-  
2 timates of key indicator birds, pollinators, and  
3 other wildlife species at risk;

4 (B) goals to increase the population size  
5 and resiliency of such species, including through  
6 ensuring grasslands habitat connectivity; and

7 (C) a tool to track county-level aggregated  
8 conversion of native grasslands to cropland, res-  
9 idential and commercial development, and other  
10 uses that shall—

11 (i) protect the personally identifiable  
12 information of producers and landowners;

13 (ii) be made publicly available; and

14 (iii) be updated on an annual basis.

15 (d) AVAILABILITY.—Not later than 120 days before  
16 the date on which the Program is established, the Con-  
17 servation Strategy shall be finalized and made publicly  
18 available on the website of the United States Fish and  
19 Wildlife Service to help target investments in grasslands  
20 conservation projects.

21 **SEC. 8. GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM.**

22 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 2 years after  
23 the date of the enactment of this section, the Director,  
24 in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture and other  
25 heads of relevant Federal agencies, shall establish a com-



1 petitive grant program through which the Commission  
2 shall award amounts to eligible entities to carry out eligi-  
3 ble projects to support voluntary grasslands conservation  
4 projects, including projects—

5           (1) to conserve intact grasslands at risk of con-  
6 version to cropland or residential or commercial de-  
7 velopment;

8           (2) to restore degraded grasslands and improve  
9 grasslands health;

10           (3) to restore marginal cropland or idle land  
11 back to grasslands;

12           (4) to increase carbon sequestration and eco-  
13 logical function in soils and improve the resilience of  
14 grasslands;

15           (5) to support habitat and habitat connectivity  
16 for native grasslands and sagebrush birds, polli-  
17 nators, plants, and other wildlife, including big game  
18 species;

19           (6) to restore and enhance watersheds through  
20 grasslands restoration, management, and conserva-  
21 tion;

22           (7) to increase adoption of grasslands conserva-  
23 tion, restoration, and management practices; and

24           (8) carried out by Indian Tribes to protect cul-  
25 turally significant flora and fauna through the use

1 of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge re-  
2 lated to grasslands ecosystems.

3 (b) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible for a grant under  
4 the Program, an eligible entity shall submit to the Council  
5 an application at such time, in such manner, and con-  
6 taining such information as the Director determines ap-  
7 propriate, which shall include a description of the project  
8 the eligible entity intends to carry out with such a grant.

9 (c) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under the Pro-  
10 gram, the Commission shall prioritize grants to eligible en-  
11 tities the intended projects of which advance the goals of  
12 the Conservation Strategy.

13 (d) CONSIDERATIONS.—In awarding grants under  
14 the Program, the Commission shall consider the rec-  
15 ommendations made to the Commission by the Council  
16 under section 9.

17 (e) USE OF FUNDS.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity may use a  
19 grant awarded under the Program to carry out  
20 grasslands conservation projects, including—

21 (A) voluntary conservation easements;

22 (B) grasslands restoration;

23 (C) management activities, including—

24 (i) voluntary incentives to producers  
25 for prescribed burns;

- 1 (ii) removal of pinyon juniper, eastern  
2 red cedar, salt cedar, or any other en-  
3 croaching woody species;
- 4 (iii) management of invasive species;
- 5 (iv) maintenance and monitoring of  
6 new or ongoing grasslands conservation  
7 projects;
- 8 (v) advanced grazing management ac-  
9 tivities;
- 10 (vi) drought monitoring and prepared-  
11 ness activities;
- 12 (vii) management activities informed  
13 by Indigenous Traditional Ecological  
14 Knowledge, including through cultural  
15 burns to manage ecosystems to manage,  
16 conserve, or restore native flora and fauna;  
17 and
- 18 (viii) such other restoration and man-  
19 agement activities identified in the Con-  
20 servation Strategy or otherwise determined  
21 appropriate by the Director;
- 22 (D) grasslands ecosystem education, out-  
23 reach, and conservation stewardship assistance,  
24 which may include—
- 25 (i) field days;

- 1 (ii) grazing management training pro-  
2 grams;
- 3 (iii) conservation planning; and
- 4 (iv) education and outreach relating  
5 to—
- 6 (I) grazing management;
- 7 (II) control of invasive species;
- 8 (III) beneficial fire;
- 9 (IV) native seed crop systems re-  
10 search, in accordance with the re-  
11 search carried out by the Secretary of  
12 Agriculture under section 10;
- 13 (V) land access, generational  
14 land transfers, and ensuring ranch-  
15 land viability;
- 16 (VI) best management practices  
17 relating to grasslands ecosystems;
- 18 (VII) participation in carbon and  
19 ecosystem markets;
- 20 (VIII) payment for ecosystem or  
21 conservation services; and
- 22 (IX) safeguarding and ensuring  
23 the perpetuation of Indigenous Tradi-  
24 tional Ecological Knowledge related to  
25 grasslands ecosystems; and

1 (E) such other activities that—

2 (i) benefit grasslands and associated  
3 wildlife and enable increased adoption of  
4 grasslands conservation, restoration, and  
5 management practices; and

6 (ii) are consistent with the Conserva-  
7 tion Strategy.

8 (2) RESTORATION ACTIVITIES.—For purposes  
9 of paragraph (1)(B), any restoration activity shall  
10 prioritize a diverse mix of appropriately sourced na-  
11 tive grasses and forbs, with such exceptions as the  
12 Director determines to be appropriate for eco-  
13 logically appropriate noninvasive and nonnative spe-  
14 cies.

15 (3) SAFE HARBOR.—An eligible entity that car-  
16 ries out a project pursuant to a grant awarded  
17 under the Program shall be eligible with respect to  
18 such project for a safe harbor agreement with the  
19 United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

20 (f) GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN MEX-  
21 ICO AND CANADA.—The Director shall grant or otherwise  
22 provide up to 10 percent of the amounts appropriated pur-  
23 suant to the authorization under section 13(a)(1) to Fed-  
24 eral agencies, eligible entities, and other individuals and  
25 entities, including foreign land management agencies, for

1 the purpose of assisting such agencies, entities, and indi-  
2 viduals in carrying out grasslands conservation projects in  
3 Mexico and Canada that—

4 (1) have been recommended by the Council; and  
5 (2) meet the goals of the Conservation Strat-  
6 egy.

7 (g) TRIBAL SET-ASIDE.—For each fiscal year, of the  
8 amounts made available to carry out the Program, the Di-  
9 rector shall set aside not less than 10 percent of such  
10 amounts to provide grants to Indian Tribes and Tribal  
11 organizations working with 1 or more Indian Tribes.

12 (h) COST-SHARING REQUIREMENT.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (2),  
14 the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out an  
15 eligible project using amounts from a grant awarded  
16 under the Program—

17 (A) shall be not less than 25 percent, in-  
18 cluding in-kind contributions; and

19 (B) may not be derived from a Federal  
20 grant program.

21 (2) WAIVERS.—

22 (A) INDIAN TRIBES.—The Director shall  
23 waive the cost-share requirement under para-  
24 graph (1) for grants awarded under the Pro-  
25 gram to Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations.

1 (B) OTHER ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—The  
2 Council shall establish waiver criteria under  
3 which the Commission may waive the cost-share  
4 requirement under paragraph (1), in whole or  
5 in part, for grants awarded under the Program  
6 to eligible entities other than Indian Tribes.

7 (i) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—An eligible entity that  
8 is awarded a grant under this section may use such grant  
9 award for reasonable administrative costs relating to that  
10 grant.

11 **SEC. 9. APPROVAL OF GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION**  
12 **PROJECTS.**

13 (a) RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Each calendar year, the  
15 Council shall submit to the Commission a report  
16 that includes a list of the grasslands conservation  
17 projects (including the costs of those projects), in  
18 order of priority, that the Council, in consultation  
19 with each Regional Grasslands Conservation Council,  
20 recommends to the Commission for funding under  
21 the Program.

22 (2) CONSIDERATIONS.—In making the list of  
23 recommended grasslands conservation projects under  
24 paragraph (1), the Council shall consider—

1 (A) the extent to which the grasslands con-  
2 servation project fulfills the purpose of this Act  
3 and the strategies and objectives of the Con-  
4 servation Strategy;

5 (B) the availability of sufficient non-Fed-  
6 eral funds to carry out the grasslands conserva-  
7 tion project and to match Federal contributions  
8 in accordance with section 8(h)(1), notwith-  
9 standing the waivers described in paragraph (2)  
10 of that section;

11 (C) the extent to which the grasslands con-  
12 servation project represents a partnership be-  
13 tween public entities, including Indian Tribes,  
14 and private entities, including landowners; and

15 (D) the substantiality of the character and  
16 design of the grasslands conservation project.

17 (b) COUNCIL BEST PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Council shall establish  
19 best practices and procedures for carrying out the  
20 requirements of subsection (a).

21 (2) REQUIREMENTS.—The best practices and  
22 procedures established under paragraph (1) shall re-  
23 quire that—

24 (A) a quorum of the Council be present be-  
25 fore any business may be conducted; and



1 (B) the Council may not refer a grasslands  
2 conservation project to the Commission under  
3 subsection (a)(1) unless the grasslands con-  
4 servation project is approved by a vote of  
5  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the members of the Council present  
6 and voting.

7 (c) COUNCIL REPRESENTATION ON COMMISSION.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other  
9 provision of law, the Secretary and the Secretary of  
10 Agriculture shall each select 1 member of the Coun-  
11 cil to serve as an ex officio member of the Commis-  
12 sion for the purposes of considering and voting on  
13 grasslands conservation projects recommended to the  
14 Commission by the Council under subsection (a)(1).

15 (2) REQUIREMENT.—A member of the Council  
16 selected under paragraph (1) shall be a citizen of the  
17 United States.

18 (d) APPROVAL OF COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS BY  
19 THE COMMISSION.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission, including  
21 the 2 members of the Council selected to serve as ex  
22 officio members on the Commission under subsection  
23 (c)(1), shall approve, reject, or reorder the priority  
24 of any grasslands conservation projects rec-  
25 ommended by the Council under subsection (a)(1)

1 based on, to the greatest extent practicable, the con-  
2 siderations described in paragraph (2) of that sub-  
3 section.

4 (2) APPROVAL OF PROJECTS.—If the Commis-  
5 sion approves a grasslands conservation project  
6 under paragraph (1), the Commission shall award a  
7 grant under the Program to the eligible entity that  
8 applied to carry out the grasslands conservation  
9 project.

10 (3) REJECTION OF PROJECTS.—If the Commis-  
11 sion rejects or reorders the priority of any grass-  
12 lands conservation project under paragraph (1), the  
13 Commission shall provide the Council and the Com-  
14 mittee on Natural Resources of the House of Rep-  
15 resentatives and the Committee on Environment and  
16 Public Works of the Senate a written statement ex-  
17 plaining the rationale of the Commission in rejecting  
18 or reordering the priority of, as applicable, the  
19 grasslands conservation project.

20 (e) NOTIFICATION OF APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES.—  
21 Not less frequently than annually, the Commission shall  
22 submit to the Committee on Natural Resources of the  
23 House of Representatives and the Committee on Environ-  
24 ment and Public Works of the Senate, and make publicly  
25 available, a report that includes—

1           (1) a list and description of the grasslands con-  
2           servation projects approved by the Commission  
3           under subsection (d)(2), in order of priority;

4           (2) the amounts and sources of Federal and  
5           non-Federal funding for those grasslands conserva-  
6           tion projects;

7           (3) a justification for the approval of those  
8           grasslands conservation projects and the order of  
9           priority for funding those grasslands conservation  
10          projects;

11          (4) a list and description of the grasslands con-  
12          servation projects that the Council recommended, in  
13          order of priority, that the Commission approved for  
14          funding under the Program; and

15          (5) a justification for any rejection or reor-  
16          dering of the priority of grasslands conservation  
17          projects recommended by the Council that was based  
18          on factors other than the considerations described in  
19          subsection (a)(2).

20 **SEC. 10. NATIVE SEED CROP SYSTEMS RESEARCH.**

21          The Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture shall  
22          jointly coordinate and implement the National Seed Strat-  
23          egy for Rehabilitation and Restoration developed by the  
24          Plant Conservation Alliance and chaired by the Director

1 of the Bureau of Land Management, with an emphasis  
2 on—

3 (1) research relating to native seed crop sys-  
4 tems, including—

5 (A) agronomic research to improve the un-  
6 derstanding of native plants as seed crops for  
7 native rangeland revegetation, with an emphasis  
8 on enhancing natural plant establishment in the  
9 environment;

10 (B) research on plant seed physiology to  
11 improve seed quality, storage, and seeding suc-  
12 cess in the landscape;

13 (C) the development and technology trans-  
14 fer of best management practices and tech-  
15 nologies for seed production, seed collection,  
16 seed storage, and reseeding success in the envi-  
17 ronment;

18 (D) research on soil chemistry and biome  
19 composition and how soil chemistry and biome  
20 composition affect native seed establishment;  
21 and

22 (E) identification of scenarios and pre-  
23 ferred species for the incorporation of nonnative  
24 seed, with the goal of the overall successful res-  
25 toration of functional groups of species;

1           (2) the extension of research described in para-  
2           graph (1) to seed producers and land managers re-  
3           sponsible for restoration efforts; and

4           (3) the production, storage, distribution, and  
5           planting of native seed crops in grasslands areas for  
6           restoration.

7 **SEC. 11. REGENERATIVE GRAZING DATA COLLECTION.**

8           (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

9           (1) FEDERAL LAND.—The term “Federal land”  
10          means—

11                   (A) public lands; and

12                   (B) land of the National Forest System.

13          (2) NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM.—The term  
14          “National Forest System” has the meaning given  
15          the term in section 11(a) of the Forest and Range-  
16          land Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (16  
17          U.S.C. 1609(a)).

18          (3) PILOT PROGRAM.—The term “pilot pro-  
19          gram” means the pilot program established under  
20          subsection (b)(1).

21          (4) PUBLIC LANDS.—The term “public lands”  
22          has the meaning given the term in section 103 of the  
23          Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976  
24          (43 U.S.C. 1702).

1           (5) SECRETARIES.—The term “Secretaries”  
2 means the—

3           (A) Secretary of Agriculture, acting  
4 through the Chief of the Forest Service; and

5           (B) Secretary of the Interior, acting  
6 through the Director of the Bureau of Land  
7 Management;  
8 acting jointly.

9           (b) PILOT PROGRAM FOR USE OF REGENERATIVE  
10 GRAZING ON FEDERAL LAND TO MITIGATE EFFECTS OF  
11 CLIMATE CHANGE.—

12           (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 1 year  
13 after the date of the enactment of this section, the  
14 Secretaries shall establish a pilot program to study  
15 the effectiveness of using grazing on Federal land to  
16 mitigate the effects of climate change.

17           (2) REQUIREMENTS.—In carrying out the pilot  
18 program, the Secretaries shall—

19           (A) identify—

20           (i) a standard set of practices to  
21 study, such as carbon beneficial practices,  
22 that support conservation and grazing  
23 goals, including—

24           (I) ecologically appropriate  
25 silvopasture;

- 1 (II) practices that provide wild-  
2 life habitat benefits;
- 3 (III) practices that consider flexi-  
4 bility in season of use;
- 5 (IV) forage and biomass manage-  
6 ment;
- 7 (V) planned grazing; and
- 8 (VI) range monitoring; and
- 9 (ii) sufficient grazing allotments on a  
10 diverse mixture of ecosystems to identify  
11 whether, and the extent to which, grazing  
12 is an effective tool to mitigate the effects  
13 of climate change, including the ability—
- 14 (I) to improve soil health;
- 15 (II) to increase carbon sequestra-  
16 tion;
- 17 (III) to reduce wildfire risk; and
- 18 (IV) to improve watershed resil-  
19 ience and biodiversity; and
- 20 (B) in developing, implementing, and mon-  
21 itoring the pilot program, consult with—
- 22 (i) the Chief of the Forest Service;
- 23 (ii) the Director of the Bureau of  
24 Land Management;

- 1 (iii) the Administrator of the Agricul-  
2 tural Research Service;
- 3 (iv) the Chief of the Natural Re-  
4 sources Conservation Service;
- 5 (v) the Director of the United States  
6 Geological Survey;
- 7 (vi) representatives designated by In-  
8 dian Tribes;
- 9 (vii) ranchers and representatives of  
10 the ranching industry;
- 11 (viii) representatives from grazing dis-  
12 tricts, associations, boards, or councils;
- 13 (ix) environmental and conservation  
14 nongovernmental organizations;
- 15 (x) institutions of higher education;
- 16 and
- 17 (xi) any other Federal or State agen-  
18 cy, academic institution, or organization  
19 that the Secretaries determine to be appro-  
20 priate.

21 (3) USE OF FUNDS.—Funds made available to  
22 carry out the pilot program may be used—

- 23 (A) to conduct research activities;
- 24 (B) to provide technical assistance to per-  
25 mittees; or



1 (C) to construct the infrastructure nec-  
2 essary to implement and analyze regenerative  
3 grazing.

4 (4) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than  
5 180 days after the date on which the Secretaries de-  
6 termine that a sufficient quantity of data has been  
7 collected under the pilot program, the Secretaries  
8 shall submit to the Committee on Energy and Nat-  
9 ural Resources and the Committee on Agriculture,  
10 Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate and the Com-  
11 mittee on Natural Resources and the Committee on  
12 Agriculture of the House of Representatives, and  
13 make publicly available on the websites of the De-  
14 partment of Agriculture and the Department of the  
15 Interior, a report regarding the findings and data  
16 derived from the pilot program, including whether  
17 and the extent to which the use of regenerative graz-  
18 ing improved the ability to mitigate the impacts of  
19 climate change.

20 **SEC. 12. REPORT TO CONGRESS.**

21 The Director shall biennially submit to Congress, and  
22 make publicly available, a report regarding the implemen-  
23 tation of this Act, which shall include an assessment of  
24 the status of grasslands conservation projects during the

1 preceding 2 years, including an accounting of expenditures  
2 by Federal, State, and other entities.

3 **SEC. 13. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—There are authorized to be appro-  
5 priated, to remain available until expended—

6 (1) to carry out section 7, \$5,000,000;

7 (2) beginning on the date the Conservation  
8 Strategy is first publicly posted under section 7(d),  
9 to carry out the Program—

10 (A) \$60,000,000 for fiscal year 2025;

11 (B) \$67,500,000 for fiscal year 2026;

12 (C) \$75,000,000 for fiscal year 2027;

13 (D) \$82,500,000 for fiscal year 2028; and

14 (E) \$90,000,000 for fiscal year 2029;

15 (3) to Partners for Fish and Wildlife to work  
16 with ranchers, landowners, Tribes, and eligible enti-  
17 ties to carry out activities under the Program,  
18 \$1,500,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through  
19 2029;

20 (4) to the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out  
21 section 10, \$1,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2024  
22 through 2027; and

23 (5) to carry out section 11, \$10,000,000 for  
24 each of fiscal years 2024 through 2026.

1 (b) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS FOR THE PROGRAM.—  
2 Of the amounts made available under subsection (a)(3),  
3 not more than 10 percent may be used for administrative  
4 costs relating to the Council, Regional Grasslands Con-  
5 servation Councils, and the Program.

6 (c) LIMITATION.—None of the funds made available  
7 under this section may be—

8 (1) used for species or habitat mitigation under  
9 any Federal law; or

10 (2) applied in a manner that requires nonvol-  
11 untary changes in agricultural or domestic livestock  
12 production, permitted forestry practices, access to  
13 valid existing rights, or compatible energy develop-  
14 ment and mining.

15 **SEC. 14. RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.**

16 Nothing in this Act may be construed—

17 (1) to enlarge or diminish the authority, juris-  
18 diction, or responsibility of a State to manage, con-  
19 trol, or regulate fish and wildlife under the law and  
20 regulations of the State on lands and waters within  
21 the State, including on Federal lands and waters;

22 (2) as modifying or abrogating a treaty with  
23 any Indian Tribe, or as enlarging or diminishing the  
24 authority, jurisdiction, or responsibility of an Indian

1 Tribe to manage, control, or regulate wildlife on  
2 Tribal land;

3 (3) to impact the private property or privacy  
4 rights of landowners without the express written  
5 consent of such landowners; or

6 (4) to authorize restrictions or reductions to  
7 public access for hunting, angling, recreational  
8 shooting, or other compatible types of outdoor recre-  
9 ation.

○