

GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP) EVALUATION CRITERIA WORKSHEET

Participant: _____ Application No.: _____

Summary of offered land (Land types other than rangeland, pastureland and grazed forest are not eligible to be offered or enrolled): Refer to additional instructions on incidental lands and restoration in guidance. Enter nearest whole acre

Acres of native cover w/no restoration needed _____ ac.

Acres of introduced cover w/no restoration needed _____ ac.

Acres of incidental lands (not more than 10% of offer) _____ ac.

Acres with restoration needed. (Do not include acres in previous entries) _____ ac.

Total acres offered. (Sum of all acres entered) _____ ac.

Cost of Acquisition: Enter to nearest whole dollar

Estimated cost of restoration practices, if cost-share is being requested \$ _____

Estimated total cost of rental contract or easement \$ _____

(Annual GRP rental rate x total acres x length of contract) or (GARC for GRP x total acres in easement)

GRP EVALUATION CRITERIA – Check each item that is applicable. Potential points are in (RED) . <i>Instructions for each item are found on following pages</i>		
A. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS	Points	
Type of GRP application (check one): Rental Contract Length or Easement <input type="checkbox"/> 10-year (5) <input type="checkbox"/> 15-year (15) <input type="checkbox"/> 20-year (25) <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent Easement (50)		
Priority Enrollment for expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres: The land being offered is currently enrolled in an active CRP contract that is within one year of the scheduled expiration date and the GRP application is for a 20 year rental contract or permanent easement offer. <input type="checkbox"/> No (0) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (50)		
Application is from a landowner working with an <u>entity</u> who has submitted an application to the NRCS State Conservationist to enter a cooperative agreement with NRCS for the acquisition of this GRP easement. <input type="checkbox"/> No (0) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (100)		
Is restoration needed on the offered acres: <input type="checkbox"/> No (50) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, at the expense of applicant (25) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, cost share requested (0)		
A. TOTAL POINTS – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS		
B. SUPPORT FOR GRAZING OPERATIONS	PTS	
Does at least 90% of the offered acres contribute directly to the forage base of the grazing operation? <i>(This includes expiring CRP if it will contribute to the grazing operation.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES (25) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0)	
C. PROTECTION FROM THREATS TO CONVERSION		
1) Threat to conversion – Urban / Commercial development and fragmentation - <u>The offered land must be located within one of the identified counties on Map#1.</u> Are the offered acres located within one of the designated counties, <u>and at least 51% of the offered acres are within 3 miles of known / visible expanding developments (i.e. areas adjacent to city limits or major corridors where there is evidence of parcels being sold for housing, commercial development and expansion that is an imminent threat to the adjacent grasslands)</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES (25) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0)	
2) Threat to conversion – cultivation: Percent of offered grassland suitable for cultivation. Percent of acres offered with soils suitable for cultivation - Land Capability Classes I - III.	<input type="checkbox"/> >75% (25) <input type="checkbox"/> 50-74% (15) <input type="checkbox"/> <49% (0)	
3) Threat to conversion – Wind Harvesting Areas: Acres offered are located within areas designated as good to excellent for potential wind development (Map #2) <u>and</u> no wind power will be developed during the life of the agreement.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES (25) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0)	
4) Threat from <u>offsite</u> invasive species: What percent of the fields located immediately adjacent to and bordering the offered acres is infested with invasive species at a level >10% infestation? <i>(Invasive Species considered: sericea lespedeza, juniper, salt cedar, mesquite, and musk thistle)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> >50% (25) <input type="checkbox"/> 25-50% (15) <input type="checkbox"/> <25% (0)	
C. TOTAL POINTS – PROTECTION FROM THREATS TO CONVERSION		

GRP EVALUATION CRITERIA (cont) – Check each item that is applicable. Potential points are in (RED)		
<i>Instructions for each item are found on following pages</i>		
D. SUPPORT FOR PLANT AND ANIMAL DIVERSITY		
1) Biodiversity – Plant Community - What type of plant community is being offered? Are the acres offered comprised of native rangelands and prairies or introduced pastures? (select 1):		
Native rangelands and prairies – Lands managed as multi-species native plant communities with multiple benefits to both livestock and wildlife; managed without inputs (fertilizer); May be expiring CRP with Natives. Percentage of native grasslands in the offered acres.	<input type="checkbox"/> >65% (50)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 10-65% (25)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> <10% (0)	
2) Biodiversity –Essential habitat for declining wildlife species Area offered is known habitat for the identified declining species and benefits to the species will occur through the development of a conservation plan that addresses the habitat requirements for the identified species. <input type="checkbox"/> Lesser Prairie Chicken <input type="checkbox"/> Greater Prairie Chicken	<input type="checkbox"/> YES (25)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> NO (0)	
3) Biodiversity – Threats to plants and animals from invasive species: What level of infestation is reflected in the plant composition on the offered acres? (Invasive Species considered: sericea lespedeza, juniper, mesquite, salt cedar, musk thistle)	<input type="checkbox"/> <10% (25)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> >10% (0)	
4) Location significance – Proximity of area offered to other protected areas such as refuges, and wildlife management areas, national forests, natural areas, or permanent conservation easements [Protected areas must be 2,500 ac. Or greater in size.] Area offered is within 1 mile of a 2,500 acre protected area?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES (25)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> NO (0)	
5) Support for Biodiversity - Maintaining contiguous blocks of grasslands: Size of offered area plus any contiguous grassland acres.		
Contiguous area with >40 acres of grassland	(10)	
Contiguous area with >160 acres of grassland	(20)	
Contiguous area with >1,000 acres of grassland	(30)	
Contiguous area with >2,500 acres of grassland	(40)	
D. TOTAL POINTS FOR PLANT AND ANIMAL DIVERSITY ISSUES		
A. TOTAL POINTS – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS (Total of Category A)		
B. SUPPORT FOR GRAZING OPERATIONS		
C. TOTAL POINTS – PROTECTION FROM THREATS TO CONVERSION (Total of Category C)		
D. TOTAL POINTS FOR PLANT AND ANIMAL DIVERSITY (Total of Category D)		
TOTAL POINT VALUE FOR APPLICATION [Add (A) + (B) + (C) + (D)]		

Evaluation Completed by: (signatures)

Designated Conservationist	Date	Applicant	Date
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GUIDANCE FOR EVALUATION AND RANKING OF GRP APPLICATIONS

The following guidance is effective beginning October 1, 2010, and will be used for evaluating all GRP applications for funding in fiscal year 2011. Resources needed to complete parts of the form on cost estimates for enrollment, acquisition and restoration can be found on the Oklahoma NRCS programs website for GRP at <http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grp/index.html>.

SUMMARY OF OFFERED LANDS

Include the acres of each identified land type. Calculate the estimated dollars of GRP funding required for the application.

Incidental lands: These lands may be an allowable inclusion in the offer. They are small areas that do not specifically meet eligibility requirements, but as part of the land unit may contribute to the overall grassland function and values and related conservation values or its inclusion will increase the efficiency of the land survey, easement management and monitoring by reducing irregular boundaries. These areas must be a part of a field being offered (intermingled within its boundaries, cannot be separate fields or blocks of land, and cannot exceed 10% of the field acres).

Restoration - Restoration is the work determined necessary to restore the grassland functions and values. Restoration does not include reclaiming lands infested with brush (has lost grazing significance and value).

EVALUATION CRITERIA

A. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Type of application: These items take into account the **length of time** of the rental contract or easement. The points are weighted to the enrollment options providing the greatest long-term protection of the grassland resource given to those willing to offer lands in easements.

CRP: GRP regulations stipulate land enrolled in CRP that is within 1 year of scheduled expiration shall receive priority when the land is offered in GRP under an easement or a 20 year rental contract. **Applications from entities:** GRP regulations provide opportunity for NRCS to enter cooperative agreements with entities for acquisition of GRP easements. The entity will submit their application to the State Conservationist for specific parcels. The landowners of the parcels will submit application for program participation in the same manner as all other applicants. The application needs to be identified with its connection to an **entity** application which shall receive emphasis in ranking. An entity for GRP means an agency of State or local government, and Indian Tribe, or a non-governmental organization that has a charter that describes a commitment to conserving lands for conservation purposes; has the resources necessary to effectuate the charter; and has the relevant experience, resources, staff and funding necessary to administer an easement.

Restoration – If restoration was identified as needed on acres in the summary of offered land; indicate if GRP dollars will be involved in the restoration.

B. SUPPORT FOR GRAZING OPERATIONS: At least 90% of offered acres must provide direct support to the grazing operation. These are acres that produce forages needed to meet livestock demand of the grazing operation. They can be areas grazed as part of the grazing system or areas used for hay production to support livestock during periods of low availability. This may include expiring CRP if it will be used to contribute to the grazing operation. If offered acres do not currently provide this direct support (i.e. abandoned cropland that does not contain forage value and therefore not relied on for livestock use), do not give points. Acres that don't have herbaceous vegetation (i.e. wooded acres) are not considered to provide direct support. For wooded areas, the woody species should be less than 25% canopy, which provides the best opportunity for producing understory forages that can be considered supportive of a grazing operation. Regardless, if the understory forages are not present, the acres are not considered to support the operation.

C. THREATS TO CONVERSION – The GRP regulations require priority consideration be given to grasslands under the various threats of conversion. The identified threats include urbanization (parceling of grasslands), wind harvesting areas, cultivation, and loss of plant and animal biodiversity.

1) Threat to conversion – urban / commercial development and fragmentation

The identified counties are provided on **Map #1** and include areas of Oklahoma experiencing fragmented corridor development, expansion of residential areas and areas being fragmented by small ranchettes. Lands predominantly (>51%) located within a 3 mile radius of known existing and planned development will be assigned additional points due to the higher potential for these areas to be converted. Example: An area in county A has been expanding with new housing developments, subdivisions, or commercial development. This expansion is known to be continuing to grow. Offered acres are currently in the same section of land and the threat for further expansion exists.

Counties on Map #1 include: Atoka, Bryan, Canadian, Carter, Cleveland, Comanche, Craig, Creek, Garvin, Grady, Kingfisher, Lincoln, Logan, Love, Mayes, McClain, Muskogee, Nowata, Okmulgee, Payne, Pittsburg, Pottawatomie, Rogers, Wagoner, and Washington

2) Threat to conversion – cultivation

Assign points under this category based on the percent of the offered acres with soil map units having desirable classification for conversion to cropland. Cropland is not eligible for enrollment in the GRP. However, there are many acres of grassland, native and introduced, that could be converted to cropland with minimal land treatment costs by the land holders. The soil map units with the greatest potential for cropland conversion have a non-irrigated cropland capability classification of class I, II or III. These classifications are recorded in Section 2 of the Field Office Technical Guide, Cropland Interpretations, Land Capability and Yields per Acre of Crops Report.

3) Threat to conversion – Wind harvesting areas

Current GRP Regulations stipulate that the development of wind power facilities for off-farm power generation is prohibited. Some areas of the state have high potential for development of wind harvesting farms. Points are provided for this item based on the location of the offered acres in proximity to areas identified as having good to excellent potential for wind development and where the offer will not be providing for wind generation. (See **Map #2**). Counties on Map #2 include: Beaver, Beckham, Blaine, Caddo, Cimarron, Comanche, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Harper, Kiowa, Osage, Roger Mills, Texas, Washita, Woods, Woodward

4) Threat to conversion – Offsite invasive plants

Points are assigned based on the percent of each field that is located immediately adjacent to and bordering the offered land that is infested at a level greater than 10% and is an imminent threat to the offered acres. This is determined through observation of only the fields that actually border the offered acres. % infestation is what percent of the fields has an infestation level >10%. For example: 3 fields border a 100 acre offered tract of land. 2 fields have 30% of their acres greater than 10% infestation levels and the third has none. Therefore, the percent of adjacent property with infestation >10% would be 60%. The higher the level of infestation and acres surrounding the offered land, the higher the threat for the offered acres to eventually lose its grazing value due to invasion from offsite sources. Targeted species for this evaluation include junipers, salt cedar (*Tamarix spp.*), mesquite, musk thistle, and sericea lespedeza

D. SUPPORT FOR PLANT AND ANIMAL BIODIVERSITY - The criteria in this section will be used to further evaluate applications that provide the greatest support for biodiversity and enhance the biodiversity through protection of the grassland resource.

1) Biodiversity – Plant Community

Evaluation and points will be based on the predominant plant community on the offered acres. Based on enrolled acres, determine the percentage of the plant community made up of native rangelands and prairies on the offered acres. The points are assigned based on the existing biodiversity with native rangelands and prairies receiving a higher point value.

2) Biodiversity – Essential habitat for declining species

Assign points only when the selected declining wildlife specie(s), Lesser and/or Greater prairie chicken, are known to be present on the offered acres. Conservation practices will be installed and maintained to the habitat needs of the specie(s). We can never be sure that the targeted species will utilize habitats maintained or enhanced by conservation practices, but we can insure that the practices will provide all or part of the habitat requirements of the species. Be sure that the wildlife habitat improvement plan will provide habitat that is suitable for use by the targeted species before assigning points under this category.

3) Biodiversity – On-site threats from invasive species

Assign points under this category based on the current percent of infestation on the offered acres. Targeted species for this evaluation include junipers, salt cedar (*Tamarix spp.*), mesquite, musk thistle, and sericea lespedeza. Restoration cost-share may be available for the initial treatment within two years of enrollment in the GRP. All participants will be required to maintain the level of infestation of invasive species at or below a 10% plant composition for the field in which they are present for the life of the contract.

4) Location Significance

Proximity to other protected areas will be as measured from the closest point on the edge of the offered acreage. Protected area must be at least 2,500 acres in size to allow points in this category. Protected areas shall include refuges, wildlife management areas, national forests, natural areas, and permanent conservation easements. Areas within existing GRP, FRPP, and WRP easements can be considered as protected areas for this category, provided they are 2,500 acres in size.

5) Support for Biodiversity - Maintaining contiguous blocks of grasslands

Points are provided for those applications where the offered acres consist of or are contiguous to a block of land at least 40 acres in size. Maintaining and protecting contiguous acres of grasslands supports more biodiversity and habitat. Acres are considered contiguous when they are not separated by other land uses. Roads that dissect the areas are acceptable as long as if the road was not there, the acres would be contiguous.

