

# Management of Grasslands and Meadows in Connecticut through NRCS



## Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

### What are Grasslands and Meadows?

Grasslands and meadows are areas where the plant community is composed of herbaceous plants and some shrubs. These open areas lack trees; therefore, they support different plant and animal species than forested areas. The plants in early grasslands and meadows are usually native or naturalized grasses and shrubs with great value to wildlife as food and cover. Ground nesting birds and other wildlife depend on these open fields for reproduction and other parts of their life cycles.

### Why Should We Manage Grasslands and Meadows?

Historically, many grasslands and meadows were created and maintained by natural land disturbances such as wildfires and flooding. Land cleared for farming during colonial and pre-industrial times also provided valuable wildlife habitat. In densely populated areas like Connecticut, wildfires and flooding have been prevented and controlled in order to protect lives and property. The reduction in the number of farms in Connecticut and the adoption of more industrious farming methods has also contributed to the decrease in the quantity and quality of these types of habitats.

Without management, most grasslands and meadows would change to forest. In addition, non-native invasive plants (such as Multiflora rose and Autumn Olive) often overtake open areas, displacing native plants. As a result, the amount and quality of these habitat areas have declined over the years. These changes are of concern because as grasslands and meadows disappear from the landscape, so do the plants, birds, and other wildlife that depend on these open areas.

Birds have been significantly impacted by the loss of grasslands and meadows. Grassland nesting birds such as the upland sandpiper, the vesper sparrow, and the grasshopper sparrow are classified as threatened or endangered in many New England states.

(more)

In addition to grassland birds, many butterflies, snakes, and turtles also rely on these open fields for parts of their life cycle. There are also native wildflowers of open areas that are becoming increasingly rare.

**Who is NRCS?**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that promotes conservation of natural resources on private lands.

**What is WHIP?**

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) offers technical and financial assistance to protect, enhance, restore, and develop fish and wildlife habitat. Contracts are typically 5-10 years, although in some cases, 15-year contracts can be developed. WHIP provides property owners and land managers with advice on managing or restoring important types of wildlife habitat in Connecticut. Grasslands and meadows are two of those habitat types.

**Who Can Participate in this Program?**

Private landowners, land trusts, and other land preservation organizations, fishing and hunting organizations, scout troops and other non-government organizations, and tribal organizations may apply for WHIP.

**How Do I Get More Information?**

For information about WHIP or other NRCS programs, visit our website at [www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/programs), or contact your local USDA Service Center.

*NRCS accepts applications for the WHIP Program year round.*

**Connecticut USDA Service Centers**

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Brooklyn Service Center  
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