

Nevada

Key Points

Grassland Reserve Program

May 2009

Overview

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program that helps landowners and operators protect eligible grazing lands, including rangeland, irrigated pasture, and certain other lands using rental contracts or conservation easements. Restoration agreements may be required for some properties where the function and values of the land require improvement.

The program emphasizes support for working grazing operations, enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity, and protection of grasslands under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development, and other activities. Participants with rental contracts are required to suspend existing cropland base and allotment history for the land under another program.

GRP is implemented jointly by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). Program funding comes through the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Eligible Land

Eligible land includes privately owned grasslands; land that contains forbs (including improved rangeland and irrigated pasture for which grazing is the predominant use; or land that is located in an area that historically has been dominated by grassland, forbs, or shrubs that has the potential to serve as wildlife habitat of significant ecological value.

There is no minimum acreage for enrollment. Land is not eligible if it is currently enrolled in another conservation program or is already protected by an existing easement, contract or deed restriction or is owned by a conservation organization.

A grazing management plan is required for all GRP rental contracts and easements. A grazing management

plan addresses resource concerns on land where grazing related activities or practices are planned and applied. This plan will include any restrictions to haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production during the nesting season for grassland birds in the local area that are in significant decline. This plan is required to meet NRCS standards and specifications for implementation and payment.

Adjusted Gross Income

The Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provision of the 2008 Farm Bill impacts eligibility for GRP. Individuals or entities that have an AGI exceeding \$1 million for the three tax years immediately preceding are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 2/3 of the AGI is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations.

Applications

Landowners interested in a GRP rental contract may submit applications under a continuous sign-up. Applications must be submitted by close of business on June 15, 2009 to FSA county offices or NRCS field offices to be considered for FY 2009 funding. NRCS offices will provide the required technical assistance for developing grazing management and restoration plans. GRP easements are not being offered this fiscal year.

Ranking criteria emphasize support for grazing operations, protection of grassland, land that contains forbs and shrubs at the greatest risk from the threat of conversion to uses other than grazing, plant and animal biodiversity, and leveraging of non-Federal funds.

GRP Rental Contracts

To participate in a GRP rental contract, applicants must own or have control of the eligible land under consideration for the intended contract period. Rental contracts are for a minimum of 10 years, but applicants

may also choose a 15-year or a 20-year contract term. The FSA established rental rate for all of Nevada is 75 percent of the grazing value or \$5.00 per acre.

GRP Easements

To participate in a GRP conservation easement, applicants must own the eligible land, and be willing to restrict uses in perpetuity or to the maximum duration allowed under state law. GRP easements may be held by the United States or by an eligible entity.

A conservation easement (sometimes also referred to as a conservation restriction) is a voluntary, legal agreement between a landowner and the US Government or eligible entity that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows you to continue to own and graze your land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs.

An eligible entity is a unit of state or local government, Indian tribe or land trust that demonstrates it has the relevant experience and resources to administer a GRP easement. Its charter or mission describes its long term commitment to conserving rangeland, agricultural land, or grassland for grazing and conservation purposes. NRCS evaluates an entity's capacity to acquire, manage, and enforce easements; its staffing, and the ability of an entity to provide matching funds before entering into a cooperative agreement.

A cooperative agreement is the legal agreement with which the Federal Government establishes partnerships with eligible entities. This agreement provides the terms and conditions for the GRP easement held by an entity.

GRP Restoration Agreements

The NRCS, working through the Conservation Districts and with participants, will determine if a restoration agreement is necessary. The restoration agreement identifies conservation practices and measures necessary to improve the grassland (rangeland and irrigated pasture) functions and values. An array of conservation practices or activities may be cost shared in restoration agreement. These practices and activities will be required to meet NRCS standards and specifications.

Other GRP Requirements

GRP easements and rental contracts prohibit the production of crops, fruit trees, vineyards, or other agricultural commodities and other activities inconsistent with maintaining grazing uses and related conservation values.

GRP easements and rental contracts allow common grazing practices, including those related to forage and seed production. Fire pre-suppression activities, such as building fire breaks and prescribed burning, are allowed as well as grazing related activities, such as fencing and livestock watering facilities.

Both rental contracts and restoration agreements have a \$50,000 annual payment limitation per person per year. Restoration payments are made after practice implementation, at 50 percent of the actual cost.

More Information

If you need more information and updates about the GRP, please contact your local USDA Service Center or State Office. Information is also available on the World Wide Web, for the NRCS at <http://www.nv.nrcs.usda.gov>, and for the Farm Service Agency at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/>.

Note: This document is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of legislation and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check with your local USDA Service Center for updates.