

Species of Benefit

Wildlife that benefit from grassland habitat include:

- The dickcissel and grasshopper sparrow in the Coastal Plain;
- The bobolink, dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow, and savannah sparrow in the Piedmont;
- The bobolink, grasshopper sparrow, and savannah sparrow in the Ridge and Valley and Allegheny Plateau;
- Henslow's sparrow in Allegany and Garrett Counties; and
- Other grassland species that may benefit from this practice include the eastern meadowlark, upland sandpiper, and vesper sparrow.



Photo credit: Greg Lasley/VIREO

The Bobolink is the only American bird that is black underneath and white on the back. Early mowing of hay fields leads to loss of nests.



Photo credit: Rick and Nora Bowers/VIREO

The grasshopper sparrow is a small songbird that lives in open grasslands and prairies with patches of bare ground.

Managed native grasslands provide important habitat for songbird nesting. These habitats are a declining resource throughout Maryland, but particularly in the upper Coastal Plain counties and in the major valleys of Frederick and Washington Counties. The reasons for these declines are related to the loss of habitat to development, the decline of the dairy industry and its associated hayfields and the increase of intensive row crop agriculture.

In general, grassland birds prefer large blocks of undisturbed grassland to fulfill most courtship, nesting, brood-rearing, feeding, escape, and loafing cover requirements during the nesting season. For many bird species, these habitats provide winter and migration cover as well.

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to farmers to restore and manage grassland bird habitat in Maryland through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

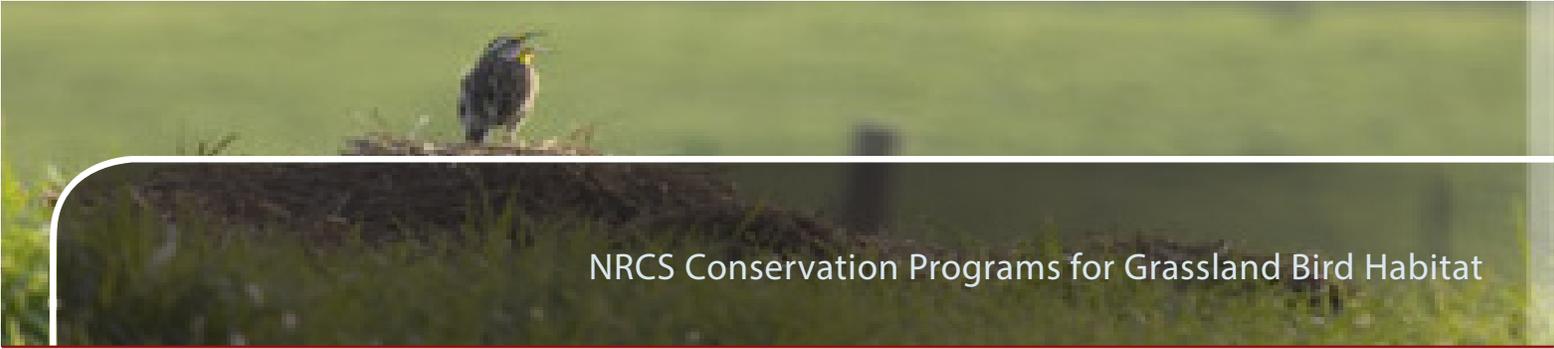
What will EQIP pay for?

EQIP provides payments to restore and manage grassland bird habitat through activities such as:

- Establishing native grassland habitat on crop fields, non-native pasture, and abandoned mine fields.
- Managing existing grasslands to maintain or enhance the vegetative community.
- Removal and control of invasive species to maintain or facilitate establishment of native vegetative communities.
- Deferment of haying or grazing to allow for successful breeding.

Restoration Requirements

- The size of the grassland must meet or exceed the minimum required by the target species, which varies by region.
- Only native species and mixes should be used for grassland establishment.
- Mowing may be used when necessary to control woody vegetation.
- Mowing and management activities should be conducted on not more than 1/2 of the grassland in any one year.
- Mowing and management activities should be deferred as late as possible into the winter, but conducted no earlier than (November 15).



NRCS Conservation Programs for Grassland Bird Habitat

About NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with farmers, ranchers, and partners to ensure a sustainable, nutritious and abundant food supply, as well as ensure clean water and healthy soil for generations to come.

For over 75 years, NRCS has provided agricultural producers and private landowners with locally-led assistance to help them implement voluntary conservation practices that protect our state's natural resources while maintaining production and economic opportunities.

Contact your local USDA service center for more information and assistance.

Allegany: 301-777-1494
Anne Arundel: 410-571-6757
Baltimore County: 410-527-5920
Calvert: 410-535-1521
Caroline: 410-479-1202
Carroll: 410-848-6696
Cecil: 410-398-4411
Charles: 301-934-9588
Dorchester: 410-228-5640
District of Columbia: 202-535-2242
Frederick: 301-695-2803
Garrett: 301-334-6950
Harford: 410-838-6181
Howard: 410-489-7987
Kent: 410-778-5353
Montgomery: 301-590-2855
Prince George's: 301-574-5162
Queen Anne's: 410-758-1671
St. Mary's: 301-475-8402
Somerset: 410-651-0370
Talbot: 410-822-1577
Washington: 301-797-0500
Wicomico: 410-546-4777
Worcester: 410-632-5439

Helping People Help the Land

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP helps promote farm and forest production by enhancing the environmental quality of soil, water, air, plants and animals.

Farmers can apply for financial and technical assistance for over 100 conservation practices to benefit their land and operations through EQIP.

Conservation Practices for Grassland Bird Habitat Restoration and Management

Conservation Practice:	Purpose:
Access Control	Restrict or control livestock access to wildlife habitat
Brush Management	Remove woody species using herbicides, mechanical methods, or grazing animals
Conservation Cover	Establish diverse native plantings of grasses, forbs, and legumes
Deep Tillage	Site preparation on abandoned mines for cover establishment
Fence	Exclusion of livestock from wildlife habitat and sensitive areas
Firebreak	Temporary or permanent firebreak installed to conduct prescribed burns
Herbaceous Weed Control	Mechanical or herbicidal treatment of invasive or undesirable herbaceous species, or treatment using grazing animals
Prescribed Burning	Maintain early successional habitat or site preparation for tree and shrub establishment
Prescribed Grazing	Maintain early successional habitat using grazing animals, or defer grazing on pastures to facilitate successful breeding
Restoration and Management of Rare and Declining Habitats	Install and maintain wildlife structures (usually nest boxes)
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	Install and maintain wildlife structures or control herbaceous or woody species that require successive yearly treatments

The purpose of habitat restoration and management is to maintain or re-establish the attractiveness and productivity of healthy wildlife systems. Effective wildlife management can add value to outdoor recreational activities and the aesthetics of your property, as well as ecological importance. Though no one acre or one area can be all things to all wildlife, through careful planning and discussion you can make the best management choices for species with declining populations.