



# Meadowlark Initiative

## A Problem, A Vision, An Opportunity

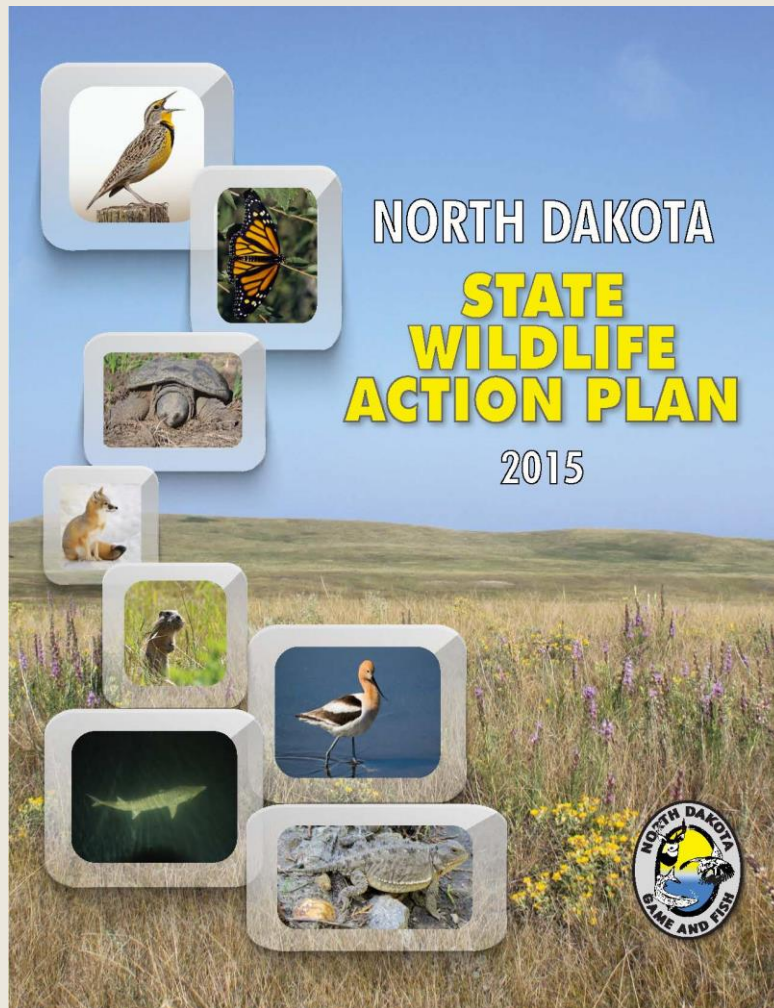
USDA State Tech Committee Mtg.

Oct. 1, 2020





# North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan



- Serve as a blueprint for conserving our state's fish and wildlife and preventing endangered species.
- Three key goals:
  - *Keep common species common*
  - *Prevent further listings under the Endangered Species Act*
  - *Preserve the state's fish and wildlife resources for the foreseeable future*



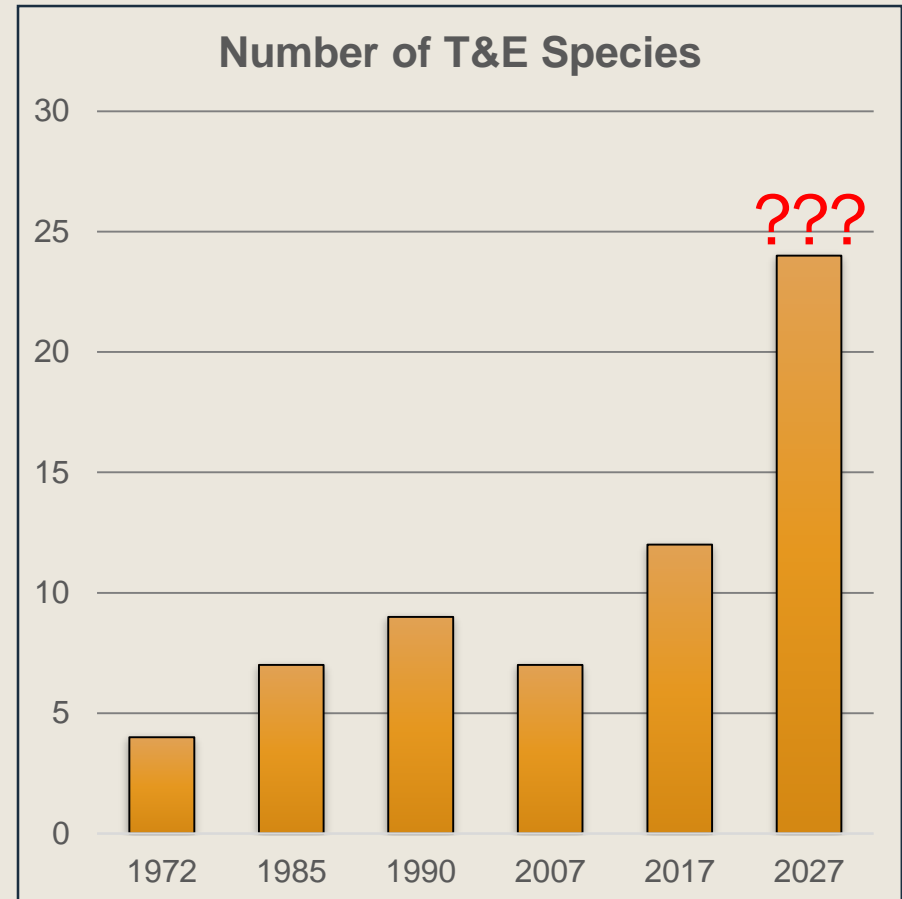
# Species of Conservation Priority

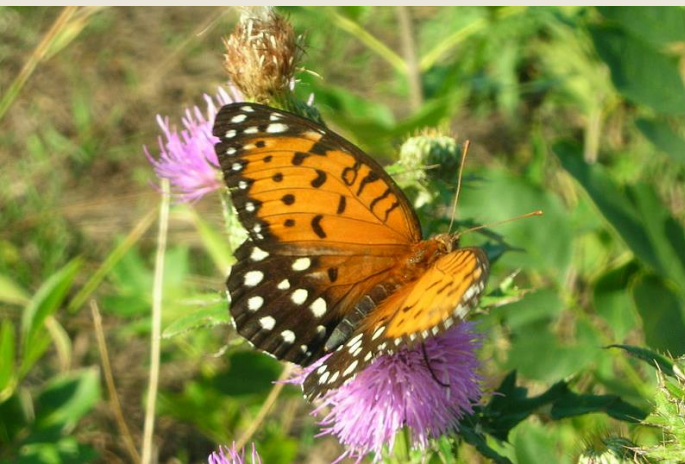
- Rare, declining, or at-risk species
- 115 species
  - 47 birds
  - 2 amphibians
  - 9 reptiles
  - 21 mammals
  - 22 fish
  - 10 mussels
  - 4 insects
    - Monarch, Regal Fritillary, Dakota Skipper, Poweshiek Skipperling



# Endangered Species

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal entity for administering the Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- 12 species currently listed as threatened or endangered in North Dakota
- 11 petitions/species that include ND are under review
- Anticipate more petitions and listings





# ESA Petitioned Species & Species Under Review

- Sturgeon Chub
- Sicklefin Chub
- Western Bumble Bee
- Monarch Butterfly
- Regal Fritillary
- Eastern Spotted Skunk?
- Prairie Gray Fox?
- Little Brown Bat
- Golden-winged Warbler?
- Suckley's Bumble Bee

# Grassland Birds

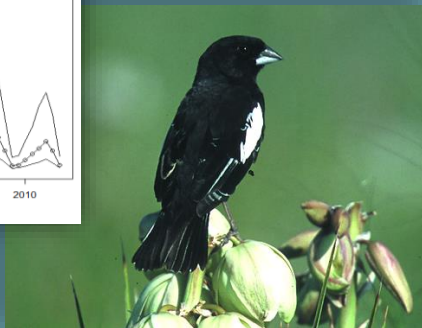
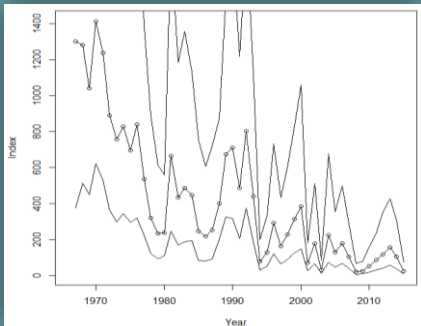
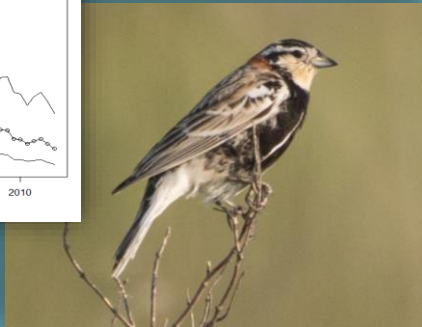
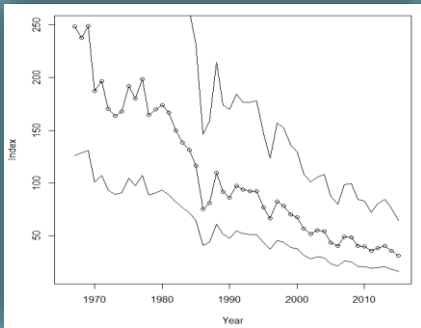
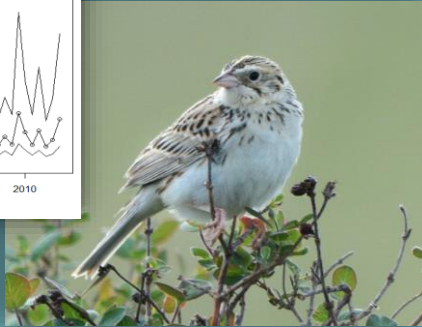
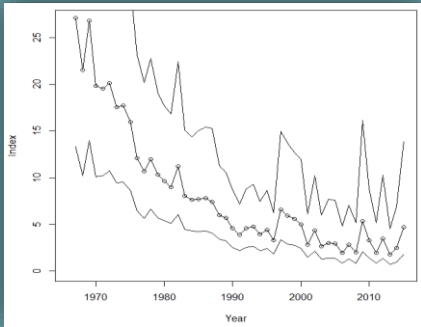
- Western Meadowlark
  - 1966-2015 trend: **-1.25**
  - *The State Bird is now rare in eastern 1/3 of the state.*

- Baird's Sparrow
  - 1966-2015 trend: -3.59
- Chestnut-collared Longspur
  - 1966-2015 trend: -4.24
- Lark Bunting
  - 1966-2015 trend: -8.03



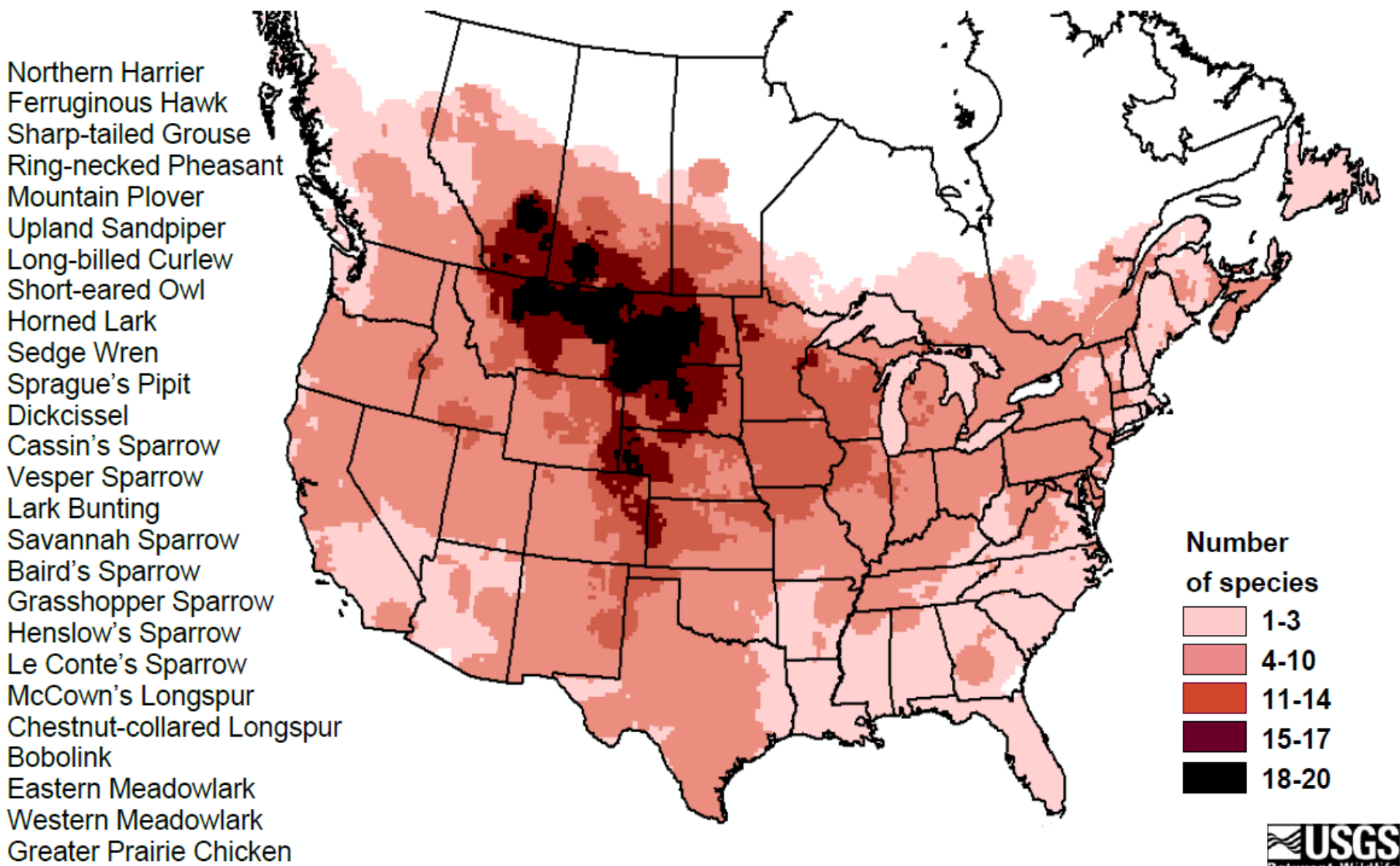


# Grassland Birds



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# NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS HAS HIGHEST RICHNESS OF GRASSLAND BIRDS IN NORTH AMERICA





# UNBROKEN GRASSLANDS: NATIVE PRAIRIE

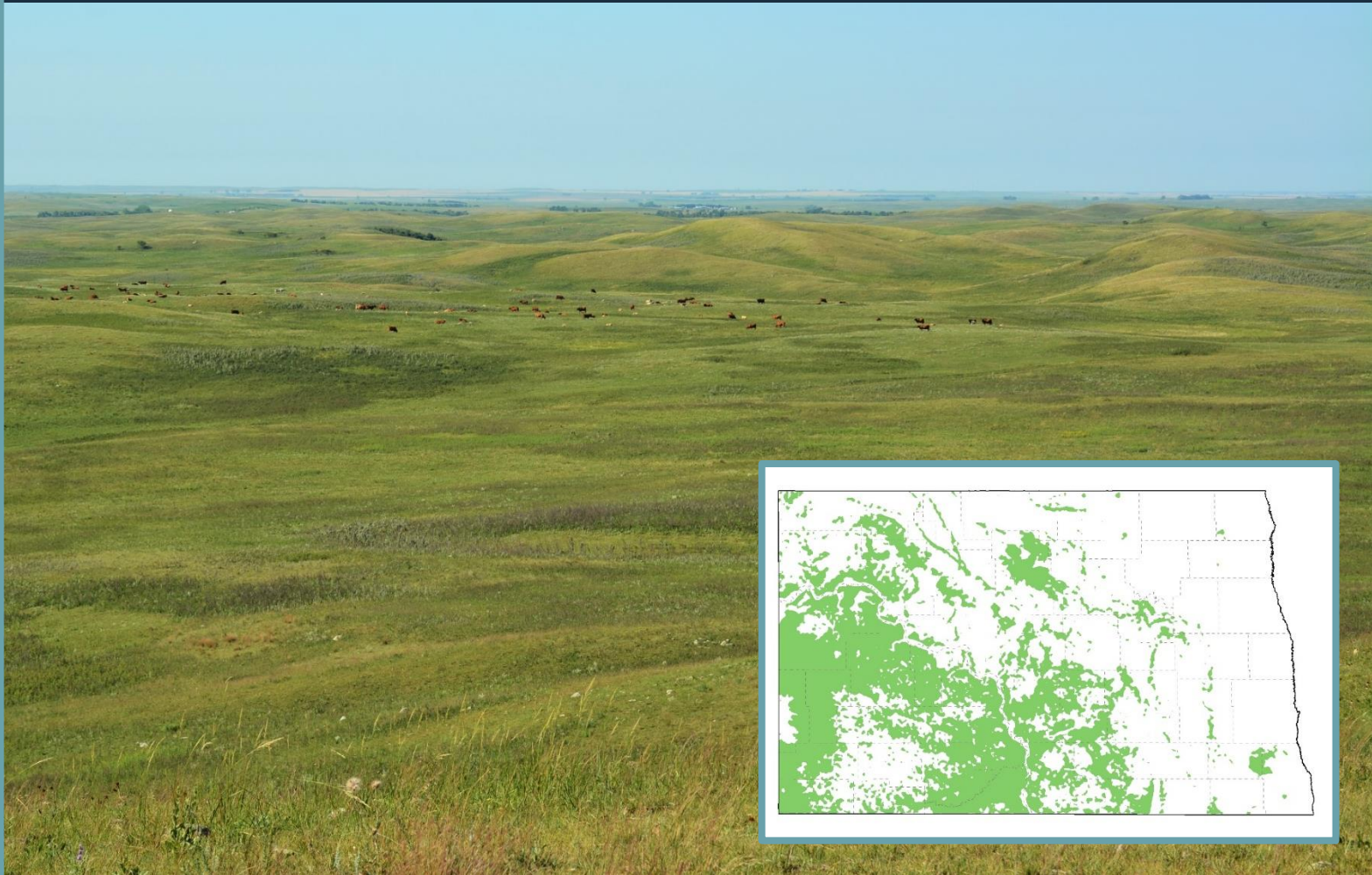
## GRASSLAND (48)

American Kestrel  
Baird's Sparrow  
Bobolink  
Brewer's Sparrow  
Burrowing Owl  
Chestnut-collared Longspur  
Dickcissel  
Ferruginous Hawk  
Golden Eagle  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Greater Prairie Chicken  
Greater Sage-grouse  
Lark Bunting  
Le Conte's Sparrow  
Loggerhead Shrike  
Long-billed Curlew  
Marbled Godwit  
McCown's Longspur  
Nelson's Sparrow  
Northern Harrier  
Peregrine Falcon  
Prairie Falcon  
Sharp-tailed Grouse  
Short-eared Owl  
Sprague's Pipit  
Swainson's Hawk  
Upland Sandpiper  
Western Meadowlark  
Willet  
Wilson's Phalarope

Northern Prairie Skink  
Plains Hog-nosed Snake  
Sagebrush Lizard  
Short-horned Lizard  
Smooth Green Snake

Black-footed Ferret  
Black-tailed Prairie Dog  
Hispid Pocket Mouse  
Merriam's Shrew  
Plains Pocket Mouse  
Pygmy Shrew  
Richardson's Ground Squirrel  
Sagebrush Vole  
Swift Fox

Dakota Skipper  
Poweshiek Skipperling  
Monarch Butterfly  
Regal Fritillary

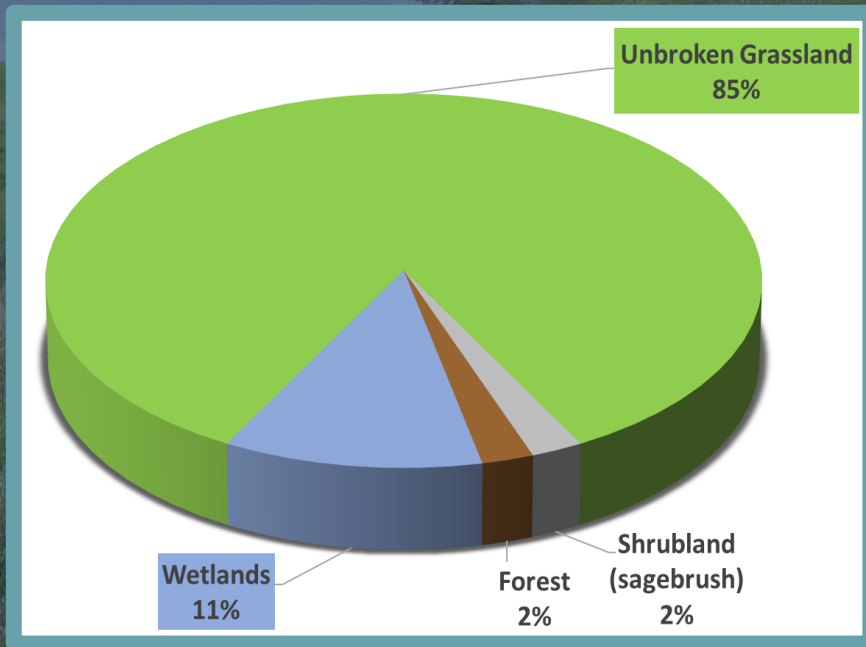


Support 48 Species of Conservation Priority

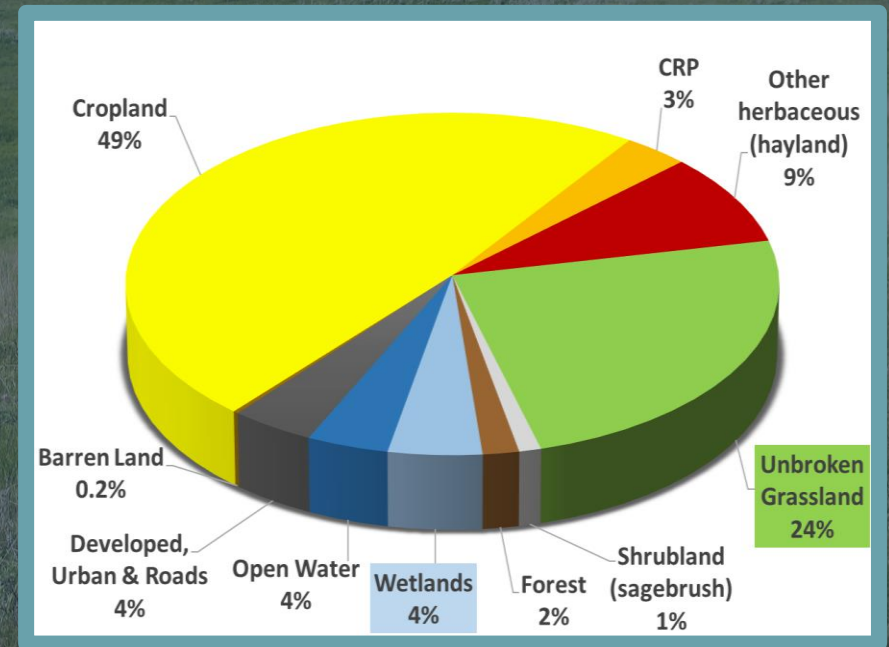


# State of the State

200 years ago



Today



**Wetlands: Loss of approx. 60%**  
**Native Prairie: Loss of approx. 72%**  
**Woodlands/Shrubs: Loss of approx. 25%**



# Many Factors Contribute to Grassland Loss

## Idle Grassland and Invasive Species





Reactive

Proactive

“Our analysis indicates that **84%** of the species listed under the (Endangered Species) Act are conservation reliant. **These species will require continuing, long-term management investments.**”

Scott et al., 2010





# Meadowlark Initiative Vision

- We believe the quality of life of our state's citizens and rural communities includes vibrant and profitable working lands; healthy, diverse populations of bird, pollinators, and other wildlife; and clean rivers and wetlands to support aquifers, animals, and humans. Therefore, we are seeking ***to create healthy, thriving grasslands which will continue to provide biodiversity and prosperity for our wildlife, pollinators, ranching operations, and rural communities.***





# **THE MEADOWLARK INITIATIVE**

## **RECOVERING GRASSLANDS IN NORTH DAKOTA**

### **Element 1.**

Revitalize, reconnect, and sustain existing working grasslands & ranches.







# **THE MEADOWLARK INITIATIVE**

## **RECOVERING GRASSLANDS IN NORTH DAKOTA**

### **Element 2.**

Reinvent a statewide grassland reconstruction program.







# **THE MEADOWLARK INITIATIVE**

## **RECOVERING GRASSLANDS IN NORTH DAKOTA**

### **Element 3.**

Offset impacts to grassland habitat function and value as development advances.







# **THE MEADOWLARK INITIATIVE**

## **RECOVERING GRASSLANDS IN NORTH DAKOTA**

### **Element 4.**

Meadowlarks for human well-being...  
healthy grasslands=vibrant communities







# **THE MEADOWLARK INITIATIVE**

## **RECOVERING GRASSLANDS IN NORTH DAKOTA**

### **Element 5.**

Advance awareness and understanding of the ecosystem services grasslands provide.





# USDA RCPP – An Opportunity

- Promotes coordination of conservation activities with partners, producers, and landowners
- Pools partner resources
- Offers value-added contributions to expand capabilities
- Addresses regional natural resource concerns
- Provides measurable improvements and outcomes



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

## Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Natural Resources Conservation Service



*USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill programs that benefit both agricultural producers and the environment.*

### Overview

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.

### Benefits

RCPP makes available a variety of NRCS conservation activities to help partners, ag producers, and private landowners address local and regional natural resource challenges.

### How It Works

Partners apply to NRCS for RCPP project awards. Once projects are selected, NRCS works with partners to set aside a certain pool of funding for an awarded project. Producers, landowners, and partners then enter into producer contracts and supplemental agreements with NRCS to carry out agreed-to conservation activities.

### Who is Eligible?

Only eligible organizations interested in partnering with NRCS on conservation projects can develop applications for the RCPP competition. The lead partner for an RCPP

project is the entity that submits an application, and if selected for an award is ultimately responsible for collaborating with NRCS to successfully complete an RCPP project.

See the RCPP funding announcement for details about what types of organizations are eligible to apply.

RCPP projects must be carried out on agricultural or nonindustrial private forest land or associated land on which NRCS determines an eligible activity would help achieve conservation benefits.

### Conservation Activities

RCPP projects may include any combination of authorized, on-the-ground conservation activities implemented by farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. These activities include:

- Land management/land improvement/restoration practices
- Land rentals
- Entity-held easements
- United States-held easements
- Public works/watersheds.

### How to Apply

Interested partners must apply through the RCPP portal ([nrcs.my.salesforce.com](https://nrcs.my.salesforce.com)). Applications are being accepted through December 3, 2019.

Once RCPP projects are selected, producers and landowners can apply to participate in projects that cover their geographic area. Interested producers should visit their local USDA Service Center to see if their land is included in the scope of any existing RCPP projects.

### What's New in the 2018 Farm Bill

RCPP is now a standalone program with its own funding—\$300 million annually.

NRCS may award up to 15 Alternative Funding Arrangement projects, which are more grant-like and rely more on partner capacity to implement conservation activities.

RCPP now has two funding pools—Critical Conservation Areas and a State/Multistate pool.

RCPP partners must develop and report on environmental outcomes.

### More Information

For more information, visit [nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill](https://nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill) or [farmers.gov](https://nrcs.usda.gov/farmers).

Find your local USDA Service Center at [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

July 2019 [nrcs.usda.gov](https://nrcs.usda.gov)

# Native Grassland RCPP Goals

The overarching goal of the initiative is: *to revitalize, reconnect, and sustain existing working grasslands and ranches for the recovery of rare and declining grassland species.*

We've proposed the following five goals to stepdown this main goal:

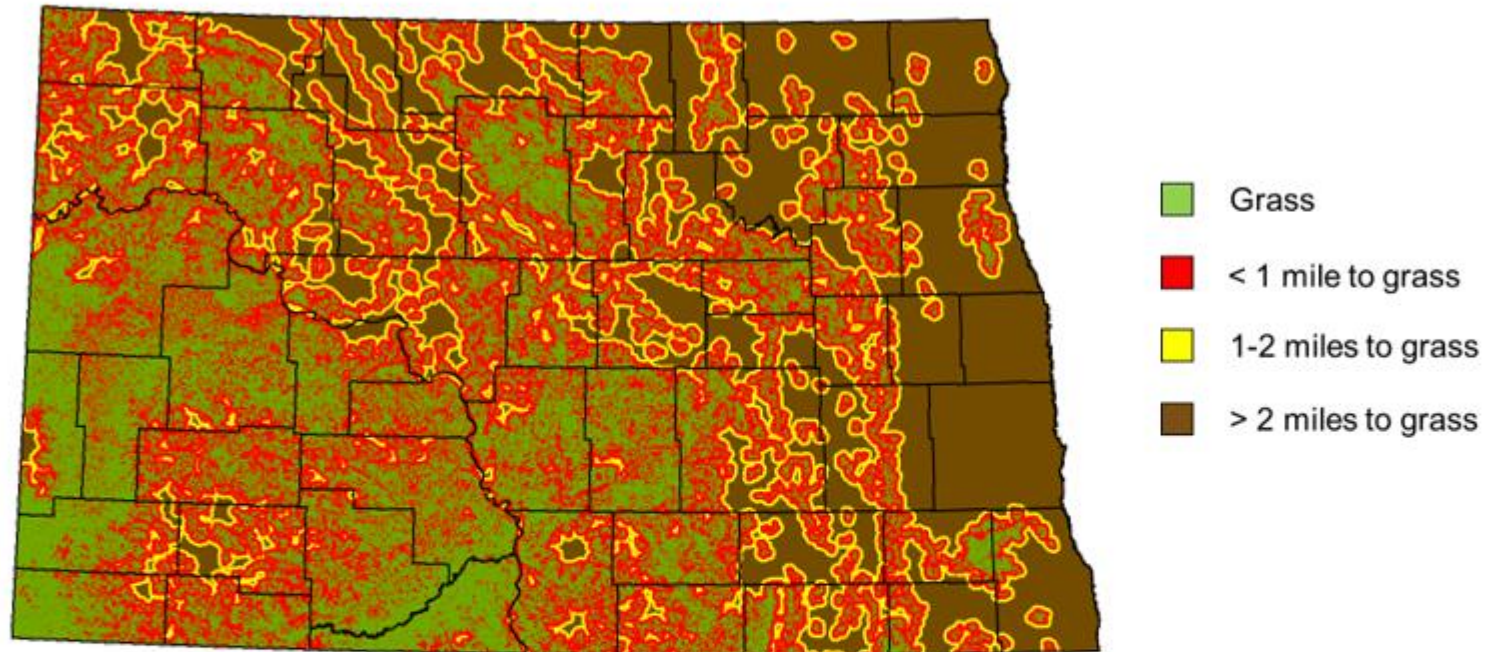
- Maintain, improve, and increase wildlife habitat
- Buffer, complement, and connect existing native grasslands.
- Sustain and recover rare and declining species identified in the North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan
- Support the sustainability of new and existing livestock ranches
- Improve water quality and soil health



# Native Grassland RCPP Objectives

- **RE-CREATE** XX acres of cropland to diverse permanent native vegetation
- **REVITALIZE & ENHANCE** XX acres of existing and reconstructed native grasslands)
- **PROTECT** XX acres of existing and reconstructed native grassland (rentals/easements)
- **RESTORE** XX wetlands within reconstructed grassland complexes

# Targeting



*Figure 1. Spatial model showing landscape characteristics used to identify potential conservation treatments and guide prioritization of conservation actions. Green indicates blocks of grass  $\geq 2$  square miles that serve as anchors for management of grassland landscapes and where grassland enhancement can be implemented. Red and yellow indicate areas within 1 or 2 miles, respectively, of anchor grasslands; areas within these zones can be targeted for enhancement of existing grasslands or re-creation of grasslands to increase patch size and connectivity. Areas in brown are also suitable for enhancement and re-creation, but given their distance from anchor grasslands, are lower priorities.*



# Next Steps

- Goals/Outcomes survey
- Stakeholders meetings
- Science, monitoring, & evaluation meeting
- RCPP proposal deadline – Nov. 4th

Questions?????