



USDA Migratory Big Game Initiative



For generations, wildlife biologists, ranchers, and Tribal Nations have known that many large ungulate populations throughout the West migrate to optimize forage quality and decrease seasonal risks associated with certain habitats. Migratory herds possess a special ecological, cultural and economic importance to surrounding communities. Over the course of their annual migrations, many animals depend on private and tribally owned working lands for forage and for shelter from deep snow. USDA plays a unique role in conserving migratory big game habitats where they intersect with working lands.

USDA is expanding a Wyoming big game pilot program into a national landscape initiative in 2024, to include Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. In this initiative, USDA uses existing Farm Bill programs and Inflation Reduction Act funding, with the goal to further conserve seasonal ranges of migratory big game where they intersect working lands through voluntary conservation on private lands.

Success in Wyoming

During the pilot, USDA worked with Wyoming and its partners to improve program delivery through scientific research, evaluate practices and monitor outcomes for migratory big game.

The pilot program resulted in 307,713 acres conserved through \$11 million in EQIP investments, with practices like fence modification and weed control. Additionally, \$10 million in ACEP investments secured 17 conservation easements over 11,830 acres of working lands, maintaining open space for migratory wildlife perpetually.

USDA increased staff for the big game program and witnessed a 30% increase in Grassland CRP participation in Wyoming, with 25% in the big game corridor priority area. Cost-share opportunities for grazing infrastructure is available, and participants within the priority area receive a higher rental rate of \$18/acre/year, compared to \$13 for those outside the area.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) allocated \$300,000 to the University of Wyoming for technical and scientific support, directed to NRCS Wyoming, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), and other partners.

Through a \$500,000 grant, USDA's Farm Service Agency partnered with the University of Wyoming's Haub School of Natural Resources and Environment to explore the potential for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program to help conserve ungulate migration corridors in the West. An additional \$100,000 has been provided to assess wildlife-friendly fencing effectiveness at the University of Wyoming, led by Dr. Derek Scasta.

To ensure the latest science is integrated, NRCS's West National Technology Support Center (WNTSC) is creating a technical note on wildlife-friendly fencing for release in 2024.

Conservation Programs

USDA supports this initiative through Farm Bill programs.

- [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#)
- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#),
- [Grassland Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\)](#).

These programs, along with new [Inflation Reduction Act](#) funding, work in synergy to bolster big game conservation in areas identified as priorities by state and Tribal Nation leaders.

In addition, USDA has expanded the list of [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activities](#) that qualify for Inflation Reduction Act funding. Several of these newly added activities support grasslands conservation, including brush management, prescribed burning, and herbaceous weed treatment.



How do I apply?

For more information, you can visit the [USDA Migratory Big Game Initiative](#) website and contact your local USDA Service Center. Here you will be able to learn about program details, deadlines, application requirements, priority areas and how to apply. To contact your local [USDA Service Center](#), see farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator.