



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-182

Proposal Title: Enhancement of Grassland Habitats through Grazing

Project Manager Information

Name: Sabrina Claeys

Organization: Ducks Unlimited Inc

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Increase opportunities for Minnesota's private and public grasslands to be enhanced through the provision of technical expertise and educational awareness of grasslands conservation.

Funds Requested: \$200,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary Category: Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land, Water, and Habitat (F)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): NW

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Region(s): NW

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Native grasslands are in peril. While Minnesota contains a significant portion of the Prairie Pothole Region, which is critical breeding habitat for migrating waterfowl and other wildlife. Minnesota has lost an estimated 99% of our native prairie grasslands according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Although this native prairie grassland loss is significant, some acres have been restored to native and tame grassland through a variety of federal and state conservation programs. Sadly, other native grassland acres were converted to row crop agriculture or development. Grasslands were historically shaped with the use of prescribed fire and grazing of livestock. However, in recent years, we've seen a loss in livestock producers and a dramatic decrease in prescribed fire.

Ducks Unlimited's (DU) grassland conservation and grazing program is in place to provide technical assistance to public entities and private landowners, to conserve grassland habitat for our future wildlife. However, many producers do not know about the technical or financial assistance available. In addition, some producers are unaware of the conservation practices that could improve their operation. With more educational opportunities for the public to attend, the more likely someone will reach out for technical assistance and to adopt conservation practices.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

To better assist our Minnesotans, we are requesting financial support to help landowners continue to conserve and better manage their working lands. To enhance declining grasslands, DU grazing specialists will help incorporate conservation practices such as rotational grazing, prescribed fire, planting prairie grasses and forbs, and other supporting infrastructure through voluntary conservation programs on private and public lands. The utilization of grazing and prescribed fire historically shaped the grasslands and should be used to enhance them now. Landowner accessibility to conservation technical assistance has proven to be a critical component in the adoption and implementation of impactful conservation practices, delivering the environmental goods and services that taxpayers want and that agriculture needs. Minnesota producers are in support of reversing the problems and conserving native grasslands through restoration management. We propose to plan educational events and outreach materials to bring landowners forward that will voluntarily work with a specialist to conserve our native grasslands and address Minnesota's natural resource concerns. DU staff will develop outreach materials, field tours, and educational opportunities for all Minnesotans. Additionally, they will provide technical assistance, write prescribed grazing plans, and help livestock producers improve their operations. This work will enhance wildlife habitat on affected acres.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

This proposal will impact 2,000 grassland acres over the next 3 years, enhancing the wildlife habitat, soil health, and water quality. DU staff will facilitate the delivery of this work through the delivery of technical assistance and supporting private landowners and livestock producers.

With targeted outreach, this project will reach over 5,000 people, increasing their knowledge about Minnesota's natural resources and habitats that need protecting. Outreach may include videos, brochures and handouts, field tours or workshops, and presentations at conferences.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Write prescribed grazing management plans for producers and landowners that will voluntarily implement conservation management, increasing diverse wildlife habitat.

Activity Budget: \$181,000

Activity Description:

Over 75% of Minnesota’s land is privately owned. Of that we will target private livestock producers to conserve soil and water, enhance wildlife habitat, and conserve grasslands, connecting habitat on a landscape level. DU grazing specialists will assist livestock producers with restoring native grasslands using voluntary conservation practices. They will develop grazing plans that meets customer goals, addresses resource concerns, and provide subsequent technical assistance required for both conservation practice installation and grazing system management after practice installation to verify prairie pothole grassland conservation and sustainable land use outcomes result. Additionally, DU grazing specialists will assist private landowners with all working lands conservation program options available through other federal and state agencies, including U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service grassland easements and state Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) conservation easements through the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources.

DU grazing specialists will enhance 2,000 acres of grassland through prescribed conservation grazing standards and prescribed fire, increasing diverse wildlife habitat by the end of fiscal year 2026. By working with these producers and landowners, a positive impact will be made on Minnesota’s natural resources and enhance wildlife habitat.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Positively impact 2,000 acres of grassland through technical assistance	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Create outreach materials and plan events to promote native grassland conservation and increase Minnesotan’s knowledge of natural resources.

Activity Budget: \$19,000

Activity Description:

Not only is it important to educate the public on current natural resource problems and solutions, but also to inspire the next generation to conserve Minnesota’s natural resources. DU grazing biologists will conduct field tours at operations that have implemented conservation management practices that will encourage others to do the same. Demonstrations of success on other operations can encourage others to install the same or similar practices on their property. All outreach materials will focus on various topics of soil health, water quality, habitat improvements, and financial assistance. Promotion of native grasslands and their vulnerability to conversion is something that needs to be discussed. DU grazing biologists will be conducting outreach through social media, workshops/presentations, brochures/handouts, and mailers, which would connect producers with conservation practices and programs increasing the sustainability and resiliency of grazing lands within the state of Minnesota.

Within the 3 years, we plan to reach 1,000 people through 30 outreach events. 30 of outreach materials will be completed by the end of 2026. Examples are brochures, videos, social media posts, handouts, etc. Finally, we will conduct one mass mailing to livestock producers connecting them with local grazing biologists and financial assistance opportunities.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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Conduct 30 outreach events in conjunction with other organizations (field tours, workshops, presentations, etc)	June 30, 2026
Develop 30 educational conservation outreach materials (flyers, videos, social media posts, etc)	June 30, 2026
Produce 1 mass mailing to local producers encouraging them to sign up for voluntary conservation	June 30, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Tanner Bruse	Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Inc.	Pheasants Forever will 1) provide professional leadership and assistance to staff, 2) collaborate on habitat restoration and conservation planning, 3) assist DU in acquiring future grants and, 4) provide training to staff.	No
Ryan Galbreath	Natural Resource Conservation Service	NRCS will 1) provide access to federal program tools and delivery, 2) access to training and, 3) staff with appropriate technical leadership to guide DU staff.	No

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

If funded, this work will greatly impact and protect grasslands, as well as benefit livestock producers looking for assistance. Livestock producers, new and old, will receive guidance to improve their operation and health of the animals. In the long term, more Minnesotan's can enjoy the natural resources the state has to offer. Management installed will reduce soil and water erosion, increase wildlife habitat, and help feed more of America. Additionally, more Minnesotan's will gain knowledge about their natural resources and farming culture.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sabrina Claeys

Job Title: Grazing Biologist

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

B.S. Wildlife Ecology Research and Management – University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI. 2019
 Sabrina has experience working directly with private landowners through partnerships with NRCS since 2020. Previously, she worked for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Inc, in Louisiana as a Farm Bill Biologist, writing management plans and delivering habitat management through voluntary conservation programs. She started working as a Grazing Biologist for Ducks Unlimited in November of 2022. With her previous experience, she is equipped to write grazing management plans and provide technical assistance to livestock producers in Minnesota. Sabrina will manage this grant under the supervision of Chris McLeland. Sabrina lives in Thief River Falls with her black lab, Liberty. She enjoys traveling, woodworking, hunting, and fishing.

Christopher McLeland - B.S. Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences – University of Missouri – Columbia, MO 2007

Chris currently resides in Hallsville, Missouri with his wife and two daughters. Prior to joining Ducks Unlimited, Chris served as the Vice President of Conservation Delivery for Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever (PF & QF), where he was engaged in working directly with partners on local, regional and landscape level initiatives as well as supporting all conservation delivery efforts for PF & QF across the country. Chris also served 13 years with the Missouri Department of Conservation with much of that time spent within the Private Land Services Division. During his time with MDC, Chris served in varying capacities, working both as a private land's biologist, state programs biologist, working in the NRCS State Office and regional supervisor. Chris has developed a vast network of relationships and partnerships with staff from all over the Midwest and within a wide range of agencies.

Organization: Ducks Unlimited Inc

Organization Description:

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is a 501c3 non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the restoration and management of wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. The ecological goods and services that these habitats provide also provide immense benefit for other wildlife and as well as people. Waterfowl conservation is facing important challenges as wetlands and other habitats continue to decline across the continent. Ducks Unlimited has a vision to reverse this trend. DU's vision is wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever. DU's goal is to achieve our shared vision through diverse public and private partnerships to address these challenges on a landscape level. DU's vision is to work in partnership with farmers, ranchers, landowners, cooperatives and commodity groups, financial institutions, corporations, municipalities, and policy makers to achieve sustainable agricultural landscapes that provide economic prosperity and healthy communities for people while growing our conservation impact in the highest priority landscapes for North America's waterfowl. DU has collaborated with multiple partners within the grazing space to support and assist in the delivery of conservation programs and initiatives that support practices that provide benefit to grasslands and grazing operations.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Grazing Biologist		Delivery of technical assistance to private landowners within priority landscapes			20%	2		\$166,000
Ducks Unlimited Project Coordinator		Supervision and coordination of staff and grant management			20%	2	X	\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$181,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Outreach and promotional video production completed by a professional videographer team to promote programs and restoration to private landowners in Minnesota.				0		\$12,000
							Sub Total	\$12,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Meals during work travel per commissioner's plan.	Meals during work travel (meetings, trainings, conferences) outside the typical work territory.					\$2,000

	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Lodging for overnight stays per commissioner's plan.	Lodging for work travel (meetings, trainings, conferences) outside typical work territory.					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Lodging and meals rate per commissioner's plan.	Meals and lodging expenses associated with travel out of state for conferences presentations.	X				\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing and copying expenses of outreach materials	Printing of outreach materials, which will be distributed to private landowners and producers.					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$200,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Personnel - Ducks Unlimited Project Coordinator		Supervision and coordination of staff and grant management	Classified : This proposal is a new part of this position. Coordinating this grant will be above and beyond the job responsibilities associated with this classified position.
Travel Outside Minnesota	Miles/Meals/Lodging	Lodging and meals rate per commissioner's plan.	Traveling out of state to present grassland enhancement work at conferences.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [4056b69c-e4a.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Here is an example of a completed outreach handout, which describes the Grazing Biologist capabilities and how they can best support producers and landowners. The map included shows the work area of the Grazing Biologist, as well as the priority landscape they will be working in....

Financial Capacity

File: [806a526f-01a.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Director of Operations Authorization	12d95466-c5c.pdf
Board Members and Officers 2022-2023	8c294da7-399.pdf
DU Corporate Resolution	308c3885-3a2.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services, as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7?

No

