

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program

Minnesota

Partnership Receives a \$6,542 Conservation Grant.

On May 3, 2004, as authorized under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Act), Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting on behalf of Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, approved \$6,542 in funding for the Grassland Songbird Use of Conservation Buffers in Southwestern Minnesota Project in Brown, Cottonwood, Jackson, Nobles, and Watonwan Counties in Congressional District 1. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to conserve neotropical migratory birds and their habitats. Certain activities defined by the Act are eligible for funding, and partnerships must match grant requests 3:1. Contributions from U.S. federal partners do not qualify as match.

Grassland was once the most prominent type of habitat in North America, but human alteration of grassland landscapes over the past 200 years has made it one of the most endangered ecosystems on the continent today. Habitat loss, primarily due to conversion to agricultural uses, is most pronounced in the Northern Tallgrass Prairie region, which includes portions of Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and the Province of Manitoba. As grassland habitat decreases, so do populations of grassland-dependent bird species such as sedge wrens, bobolinks, and dickcissels—all designated as species of conservation priority in this region by Partners in Flight.

Under the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), state and local partnerships help private landowners to

protect, restore, and manage grasslands. Establishing buffers called "filter strips," which are 30- to 120-foot-wide bands of grass or grass mixtures along waterways, is one of the more popular CREP conservation practices among participating farmers and holds much potential for benefiting breeding grassland songbirds.

Project partners will evaluate grassland-dependent songbirds' use of CREP filter strips in southwestern Minnesota. Their research, now in its second field season, will assess species richness and abundance as well as nest density and nest success in relation to filter strip width, vegetative structure and composition, and surrounding landscape features. Their results will facilitate a better understanding of how filter strips can be optimized for the benefit of songbirds. This project is located within the Central Tall Grasslands Ecoregion and Bird Conservation Region 11 (Prairie Potholes).

Partners are contributing a total of \$112,277 to the project. They include the USDA/NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute, Iowa State University, Iowa Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit, NRCS-Minnesota, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Region 3, and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.



Bobolink

Steve Maslowski/USFWS

For more information, contact William Hohman, USDA/NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute, (515) 294-8591, whohman@iastate.edu, or Doug Ryan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (703) 358-1784, douglas_ryan@fws.gov.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Division of Bird Habitat Conservation
<http://birdhabitat.fws.gov>

May 2004

