

# Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)



## Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, coordination with the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, are partners in implementing a State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) project to convert cropland to sagebrush habitat suitable for greater sage-grouse and other wildlife species associated with sagebrush communities. Sagebrush ecosystems provide habitat for more than 350 species of plants and animals. The purpose of the Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE is to restore big sagebrush and associated native grasses, forbs, and shrubs to meet life history requirements, especially for brood habitat, of greater sage-grouse.

## Background

SAFE is part of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with landowners and agricultural producers to establish and manage vegetative covers that control soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat.

SAFE is a unique type of CRP that offers organizations the opportunity to partner with the USDA to establish habitat for high-priority wildlife species on agricultural land. SAFE sponsors work with the USDA to identify the wildlife species, the vegetative cover that provides habitat for the target species, and the location in the state where the habitat is needed. A partnership is formed between the SAFE sponsor and the USDA, and federal funds are made available to allow for CRP enrollment on eligible land within the SAFE project location.

## Target Wildlife Species

The goal of the Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE project is to provide habitat for the greater sage-grouse and associated sagebrush-obligate species. Greater sage-grouse are an iconic species of sagebrush ecosystems. As sagebrush communities have been lost, fragmented, or declined, greater sage-grouse distribution has contracted. Greater sage-grouse exhibit nearly complete reliance on sagebrush for roosting,

hiding, nesting cover, and food, with greater sage-grouse feeding almost exclusively on big sagebrush leaves during the winter. Greater sage-grouse population viability is dependent on juvenile survival.

## Habitat

Landowners and agricultural producers participating in the Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE are required to develop a conservation plan with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or a technical service provider. The conservation plan will provide details on how to plant, establish, and manage habitat for greater sage-grouse. The cover to be established must include a mix of big sagebrush and a number of native grass and forb species. After the habitat is established, it will need to be maintained and managed by grazing. Proper habitat establishment, maintenance, and management will maximize benefits for greater sage-grouse and other species common to sagebrush ecosystems.



## Project Location

The Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE is widely distributed being located in portions of: Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Fallon, Fergus, Garfield, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Petroleum, Powder River, Rosebud, and Treasure counties.

## Eligible CRP Practices

This SAFE project uses the following CRP practices:

- ◆ CP38E-2 Permanent Native Grasses and Legumes, which includes the establishment of big sagebrush and at least 5 additional species, including 3 native grasses and 1 native forb.
- ◆ CP38E-4D Permanent Wildlife Habitat, which includes the establishment of big sagebrush and at least 4 native grasses and 3 native forbs

## Haying and Grazing

Emergency and non-emergency grazing is allowed. New seedlings are to be protected from grazing and left idle for the first 2–3 years. Grazing is the preferred management activity.

Emergency or non-emergency haying is not authorized. Prescribed burning, haying or clipping as a management activity is prohibited.

## Eligibility Requirements

Because SAFE is part of CRP, certain land and participant eligibility rules apply. To begin with, land must be in the project area and meet cropping history. CRP participant eligibility rules also apply to SAFE.

## Payments and Incentives

In exchange for participation in CRP SAFE, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with annual per acre rental payments, cost-share to assist with habitat establishment expenses, and in some cases additional monetary incentives.

## For More Information

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions or requirements may apply. Consult your local FSA office for details. For more information, contact your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office: [farmers.gov/service-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-locator).



# Montana Sagebrush-Grassland Restoration SAFE Project Map



## Legend

-  FSA County Boundary
-  Montana Sagebrush Grassland Restoration SAFE Project Area