



Grassland Reserve Program



Liz Crane-Wexler Barbara Eggers



Grassland Reserve Program

- For FY 2003 through 2007, over 2800 ranches have been enrolled in GRP, encompassing 720,000 acres.
- GRP is administered jointly by NRCS and FSA – NRCS has lead responsibility for conservation planning and easement administration.
- FSA has lead responsibility for making programs payments and rental contract administration.





Changes to GRP in 2008 Farm Bill

- Permanent Easements (or maximum duration allowed by state law)
- Requires grazing mgt. plan
- Rental Contracts
 - 10 year, 15 year, 20 year
- 1,220,00 acre cap
- Eligible entities may write, own and enforce GRP easements





Protect Grazing Use and related Conservation Values



Permissible Activities

- Grazing (with Management Plan)
- Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production
- Fire pre-suppression
- Grazing related activities (fencing, livestock watering...)





Other GRP Changes

- 60% of funds for Easements; 40% for rental contracts
- Rental Contracts
 - \$50,000 payment limitation
- CRP Priority
 - Not to exceed 10% of acres enrolled per year



Adjusted Gross Income Limitation

For conservation programs, persons or legal entities are eligible if—

- ✓ *The average non-farm AGI is less than \$1,000,000, or*
- ✓ *2/3 of the average total AGI is from farming, ranching, or forestry*
- ✓ *The limitation may be waived on a case-by-case basis if:*
 - *Environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected*



GRP Easements

Two Options

- Held by the United States
- Held by Eligible Entity per Cooperative Agreement





GRP Cooperative Agreements

- **Eligible Entities**
 - State, Tribal and local governments and non-governmental organizations may submit parcels for consideration
 - Own, write and enforce GRP easement
 - Entity pays administrative costs
 - Purchase Price = Fair Market Value
 - USDA pays up to 50%; at least 25% from entity
 - Includes Contingent Right of Enforcement





Music Meadows Ranch San Isabel Land Protection Trust

- First GRP Cooperative Agreement
- 1,200 acre Conservation Easement
- Total Protected Area 3,670 acres
- Benefits: exceptional habitat for wildlife





Easement purchase
was funded 50%
With GRP dollars

December 2010



Glenn & Barbara Walker Family
GRP Easement (1,929 acres)
Brookville, KS



“USDA is taking bold steps to ensure the enhancement and preservation of sage-grouse habitat and the sustainability of working ranches in the Western United States.”
-USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack



Sage Grouse



Lesser Prairie Chicken



Grassland Reserve Program Funding History

- FY 2009 \$48 million
- FY2010 \$100 million
- FY2011 \$74 million



Grassland Reserve Program

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP/>

Program Information
[GRP Departmental Manual](#)

[GRP Final Rule](#)



The Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT) is an alliance of ranching land trusts that leverages resources for the promotion and expansion of voluntary working lands conservation.



Together, PORT's member
rangeland trusts have
conserved over
1.7 million acres of
working rangeland
throughout California,
Colorado, Kansas,
Montana, Oregon, Texas
and Wyoming.

PORT members

- **California Rangeland Trust**
- **Colorado Cattlemen's
Agricultural Land Trust**
- **Ranchland Trust of Kansas**
- **Montana Land Reliance**
- **Oregon Rangeland Trust**
- **Texas Agricultural Land
Trust**
- **Wyoming Stock Growers
Agricultural Land Trust**



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Origin of GRP

Program first proposed in 2001 by
The Nature Conservancy
& National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Objective....*create a federal program to assist landowners, on a voluntary basis, to keep large grassland landscapes intact.*



Initial Federal Legislation (2001)

Grassland Reserve Act

S. 1153 & H.R. 1689

Provided for NRCS authority to fund the purchase of permanent or 30-year conservation easements and 30-year rental agreements



Farm Security & Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill)

Created the **Grassland Reserve Program**, with objectives to:

- a) Emphasize preservation of native and naturalized grasslands, and
- b) Protect grasslands and shrublands from the threat of conversion, and
- c) Support grazing operations, and
- d) Maintain and improve plant and animal biodiversity.



Farm Security & Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill)

Authorized up to 2 million acres, with funding from CCC

Provided options for:

- Permanent or 30-year easements, to be held and administered by NRCS, and
- 10, 15, 20, or 30-year rental agreements, to be administered by FSA.

(Easement and rental agreement lands made eligible for GRP funded “restoration”).



Congress amended GRP statute in 2004 to:

Authorize Secretary of USDA to transfer title, administration, and ownership of GRP easements to private conservation organizations or land trusts.



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Considerable interest by landowners...

- USDA/NRCS allotted \$254 million, starting in 2003.
- GRP appropriation used up by 2005.
- By September 2007 over 141,283 GRP conservation easements enrolled.
- When Congress started consideration of 2008 Farm Bill GRP had a backlog of 7,500 applications on 5 million acres.



GRP reauthorized in 2008 Farm Bill

(with several changes)



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Future of GRP?

GRP does not have a “baseline” for funding...will Congress reauthorize and fund GRP in 2012 Farm Bill?

It's been suggested that GRP be merged with other USDA/NRCS easement programs, such as:

- Emergency Watershed Protection Program (Floodplain Easements)
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
- Grassland Reserve Program
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program

Should GRP continue to have an option for “rental contracts” as well as easements?

Currently landowners may sell and assign a GRP conservation easement directly to USDA/NRCS. Should GRP be more like FRPP, where only a qualified entity would submit the application and hold and administer such easements?

PORT's suggestions for GRP as the 112th Congress acts on Conservation Title of the 2012 Farm Bill:

- 1. GRP should be reauthorized and appropriately funded**
- 2. Eliminate the requirement that eligible entities (NGOs'), in their role as grantees, must provide a minimum 25% cash match when accessing GRP funds for purchasing conservation easements.**



PORT's suggestions for GRP as the 112th Congress acts on Conservation Title of the 2012 Farm Bill:

- 3. Repeal or modify GRP requirement for perpetual grazing or conservation plan.**
- 4. Allow GRP funds for transaction costs, when eligible entities serve as grantee.**
- 5. Refine appraisal/valuation process for GRP, to more closely align with FRPP.**

(Pursuant to section 170(h) of the Internal Revenue Code, in lieu of “fair market value, less the grazing value” and/or market analysis determination)



Please stay in touch.

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Thank you.

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www.txaglandtrust.org