

*Landowners'*  
*Guide*  
TO  
EASTERN  
MONTANA  
WETLANDS AND  
GRASSLANDS

INCENTIVES TO IMPROVE LAND  
FOR LIVESTOCK AND WILDLIFE

## FOREWORD:

TO EASTERN MONTANA LANDOWNERS: This guide encourages conservation, provides information about the value of wetlands and grasslands, describes how some Montana landowners have sustained their agricultural operations in an economically beneficial manner while protecting or restoring these valuable areas, and offers a reference guide for assistance to help you achieve your goals. We invite you to consider the long-term management of your farm or ranch in ways that support the land, water, wildlife, and your agricultural heritage. It is up to you to research the options, make a plan, and initiate action. Persistence will pay off! Landowners who take the first step will find help available from many agency and conservation partners.

**“It comes down to cooperation and wanting it to work. If you are open-minded, it becomes a win-win situation.”**

*—Jim Brady, Petroleum County rancher,  
on working with government agencies*



*Jim Stutzman, USFWS*

# SECTION 1

## IMPORTANCE OF WETLANDS, GRASSLANDS, AND RIPARIAN AREAS

### THE VALUE OF WETLANDS

FOR MANY YEARS, wetlands were considered wastelands because the land was too wet to plant crops, raise livestock, build roads, or construct buildings. The federal government encouraged converting wetlands to dry land by granting subsidies to fill and drain them. About 30% of Montana's wetlands were lost to agriculture and development between the 1880s and 1990s.

Today we know that Montana's remaining wetlands are an important natural resource for maintaining water quality, for flood control, and for waterfowl and other wildlife habitat. Federal, state, and tribal governments, as well as private organizations, provide technical assistance and funding to protect remaining wetlands and restore lost or degraded wetlands.

#### Healthy wetlands:

- Provide improved range and water supply for livestock
- Recharge aquifers to replenish groundwater supplies
- Store and gradually release water throughout the year
- Prevent shoreline erosion
- Slow water to control flooding
- Improve water quality by filtering sediments and toxins
- Purify water by absorbing excess nutrients
- Re-cycle decomposed organic nutrients into the food chain
- Store carbon to help mitigate greenhouse gases
- Provide recreational opportunities for hunters, wildlife watchers, and others
- Provide habitat for migratory birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, insects, and amphibians

# THE VALUE OF GRASSLANDS

GRASSLANDS constitute the largest land cover on America's private lands. They contribute significantly to the economy and play a key role in environmental quality. Grasslands are vital for producing forage for livestock as well as habitat for healthy wildlife populations. Today, U.S. grasslands support an estimated 20 million deer, 500,000 pronghorn antelope, 400,000 elk, and many other wildlife species. Prairie grasslands provide nesting habitat for waterfowl, grassland songbirds, shorebirds, and are home to a variety of small mammals. The Missouri Coteau's prairie pothole region of northeast Montana offers high wildlife habitat value. According to the USDA, 1.1 million acres of Montana grasslands have been converted to other uses since 1982. Fortunately, several state and federal agencies as well as private organizations offer programs and services to assist landowners in maintaining these valuable areas.

## Healthy grasslands:

- Provide forage for livestock
- Resist invasive species and noxious weeds
- Protect land from water and wind erosion
- Protect water quality by catching and filtering precipitation and runoff
- Provide recreational opportunities for hunters, wildlife watchers, and others
- Provide wildlife habitat and important nesting habitat for birds
- Store carbon to help mitigate greenhouse gases
- Improve the aesthetic character of the landscape, providing scenic vistas and open space



MT Natural Heritage Program

## THE VALUE OF RIPARIAN AREAS

RIPARIAN AREAS are green strips of land that border creeks, rivers, or other bodies of water. They represent an extremely important component of the overall landscape, especially for arid-land watersheds of eastern Montana. The woody draws of eastern Montana provide valuable habitat for wildlife and shade for livestock. Landowners can access help to protect these areas through several programs offered by federal, state, local and tribal agencies, and private organizations.

Healthy riparian areas provide the same valuable functions as wetlands. In addition, riparian areas:

- Provide high forage areas for livestock
- Provide windbreaks and thermal cover for livestock and wildlife
- Provide a reliable water supply
- Provide resistance to invasive species and noxious weeds
- Store carbon to help mitigate greenhouse gases
- Maintain cool water temperatures



*Tom Hinz, Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership*

*Approximately 1% of the state is surface water.*

## THREATS TO WETLANDS, GRASSLANDS, AND RIPARIAN AREAS

HISTORICALLY, the loss of these valuable areas has been greatest when the economic benefits of putting more land into production have been the greatest. As grassland cover decreases, ranching economies can suffer due to a reduced forage base and increasingly limited pasture management options. These impacts are particularly evident in drought-prone areas such as eastern Montana.

Much of the remaining grasslands in eastern Montana are on moderate to highly erodible lands with soils that are poor for growing crops. Montana's farm/ranch economy and many of our wildlife species are dependent on these decreasing landscapes. At current loss rates, approximately one-half of the remaining native grasslands in Montana and the Dakotas will be converted to row crop agriculture in the next 27 years. In 2007 alone, nearly 10,000 acres of Montana native grasslands were converted to row crop agriculture. These losses continue to accelerate due to increasing commodity prices and demands for biofuels.

Declining enrollment in programs such as Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) can also have a profound effect on ranching economies and associated wildlife populations. Of the 2.3 million acres enrolled in CRP in 2007, USDA estimates that 1.1 million acres (48%) will be returned to cropland by 2012. In eastern Montana, converting grasslands, wetlands, and riparian areas to croplands remains the largest threat to wildlife. Other threats include:

- Drought – as wetlands dry out, forage base and livestock water decrease. Windblown erosion increases in dry grasslands.
- Non-native and invasive species that compete with natives.
- Oil and gas exploration.
- Development and urban growth.
- Irresponsible recreational use.



*Ducks Unlimited*

*Turning marginal soils into agricultural production threatens habitat and water quantity and quality.*

## SECTION 2

# ECONOMICS OF CONSERVATION AND AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

THE FARM OR RANCH is the largest single economic asset for many landowners. Implementing conservation practices while maintaining the family's agricultural heritage and improving habitat for wildlife means a landowner can realize additional economic benefits. Examples include increasing the livestock carrying capacity through grazing improvements or wetland restoration, receiving cash payment for a term lease or conservation easement, tax incentives for easement or land donation, and estate tax benefits for permanently protecting land.

The following hypothetical examples demonstrate how conservation practices may provide economic benefits for landowners. Dollar values and programs listed here can

vary widely based on the program involved, the type of land, appraised values, and other factors. We strongly recommend securing the assistance of professional service providers such as accountants and attorneys when evaluating the economic benefits and legal issues surrounding program participation. Conservation program professionals are available to assist you throughout the process.

| Conservation Option  | Landowner A<br>No Conservation<br>Programs | Landowner B<br>Term Lease,<br>Fencing, and<br>Wetland Restoration | Landowner C<br>Perpetual Easement,<br>Fencing, and<br>Wetland Restoration |
|--|--|---|---|
| Income from Livestock  | \$10,000                                   | \$10,000  | \$10,000  |
| Net Increase with Fencing and Rest-Rotation Livestock Mgmt. (10% Increase) |  | \$1,000   | \$1,000   |
| Cross Fencing Infrastructure Value (One Mile of Fence)*                    |  | \$500   | \$500   |
| Wetland Restoration/Water Development*                                     |  | \$1,000   | \$1,000   |
| Term Conservation/Public Access Lease*                                     |  | \$500   |   |
| Perpetual Conservation Easement*   |  |   | \$4,800   |
| Total Gross Annual Income + Infrastructure Improvements                    | \$10,000                                   | \$13,000  | \$17,300  |
| <b>Total Gross Income – 10-Year Period</b>                                 | <b>\$100,000</b>                           | <b>\$130,000</b>  | <b>\$173,000</b>  |
| <i>* Values prorated over 10-year period</i>                               |  |   |   |

Your economic scenario will differ from the above examples based upon your management goals, the unique features of your property, and your desired level of involvement in the conservation or restoration efforts.

## SECTION 3

# LANDOWNERS SHARE THEIR STORIES

THE FOLLOWING STORIES come from people who might be your neighbors. Each illustrates how partnerships can develop between landowners, agencies, and organizations whose common goals are to protect and manage the land in a way that balances landowners' economic realities and environmental considerations.

### BRADY RANCH

JIM BRADY grew up along the banks of Box Elder Creek near Winnett, where he and his wife, Diana, now ranch over 9,700 acres of private and public lands. In the 1990s they added to their ranch holdings by purchasing a riparian area that had seen heavy grazing that resulted in trampled banks and impacted riparian vegetation, including shrubs and trees. Determined to improve that area, along with the upland native grass pastures, Jim worked with the Bureau

of Land Management (BLM) and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to create some management changes. A three-way partnership ensued that enabled the Bradys to create a rest-rotation program that allowed the land to return to healthier conditions while supporting their livestock operation. Ten years later, the benefits of the work are evident in more robust riparian and pasture habitats. Future improvements will include further development to spread water.

### ACTIONS

- Developed a stock water well away from the riparian zone.



BLM

*Improved riparian vegetation on Box Elder Creek as a result of a restoration grazing program, and the development of off-creek stock water system.*

- Laid about ten miles of pipelines and installed 10 stock water tanks.
- Installed cross fencing for pasture rotation.
- Initiated a two-pasture riparian rest-rotation, and a four-pasture upland deferred program.

## WHO HELPED

- BLM cost-shared for one well, electricity, and materials for 6½ miles of cross fencing.
- Montana FWP cost-shared for 7½ miles of pipelines.

## BENEFITS AND REWARDS

- Improved riparian area includes regrowth of willows and cottonwoods.
- Improved livestock distribution on private and public lands.
- Improved native grass forage for livestock in pastures and riparian areas.

- Improved cover for nesting, brooding, and winter habitat of upland birds.
- Overall habitat improvement for livestock and wildlife.
- Maintained livestock operations while enhancing recreational value of public lands.
- Good working relationship with agency personnel.

## LANDOWNER'S COMMENTS

“Improving habitat for livestock should improve habitat for wildlife. People get the idea they can’t work with government agencies. It comes down to cooperation and wanting it to work. If you are open-minded, it becomes a win-win situation. I have been very pleased with what has been done so far. Now we need more time to see more improvement.”

~ Jim Brady

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Dan Brunkhorst, BLM

Box Elder Creek near Vogel Reservoir.

## COTEAU FARMS

THE JOYES FAMILY manages Coteau Farms in Sheridan County. Brothers Al and Dennis Joyes, along with other family members, are protecting wetland and grassland habitat on over 5,000 acres of land while continuing a successful agricultural operation. Situated in Missouri Coteau country, the land is dotted with wetlands and includes 1,400 acres of cultivated and hay lands as well as plenty of native range—prime habitat for a variety of plants and birds. Moved by a desire to preserve native grassland and improve grazing lands, Dennis and Al investigated alternatives. Looking back, Al understands that deciding what to do is often the hardest part. “You, the landowner, have to take the first step in conservation and management issues, but nine out of ten times the partnerships you build will be beneficial to the landowner and the environment.”

### ACTIONS

- Enrolled 36 acres of marginal farmland into Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- Donated an initial easement on 280 acres of their best native range, including one permanent lake, to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for perpetual protection from development. The amount of protected land has increased to about 900 acres.

- Seeded cropland back to grass on over 100 acres of owned and leased land.
- Partnered with TNC in a land purchase/swap to secure a key piece of rangeland for the grazing system, and to protect it through easement.
- Implemented rest-rotation grazing that included drilling wells, installing pipelines, and building cross fences.
- Participated in USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for startup of a no-till system.
- Entered into a “Grazing Management Agreement” with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) for financial and technical aid in the start-up of the grazing system.
- Enhanced habitat for piping plovers (a federally threatened species). Added gravel on Coteau Farms' property along the shores of Salt Lake to create additional nesting habitat.
- Created a waterfowl nesting island on another permanent lake.

### WHO HELPED

- Farm Service Agency (FSA) administered CRP, with technical support from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- NRCS provided technical support and cost-share for the grazing system improvements.



- TNC tailored conservation easements to protect and improve the areas while allowing private property rights.
- Ducks Unlimited (DU) provided technical support and funding for construction of a waterfowl nesting island.
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided technical support to develop the grazing system, and funding to construct a waterfowl nesting island.
- USFWS's Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) completed permit applications, provided funding for gravel, and supervised construction of the piping plover habitat enhancement project.
- Montana FWP provided planning and financial assistance through its Migratory Bird Stamp Program.

## BENEFITS AND REWARDS

- Improved grazing patterns, land use, and rangeland conditions.
- Increased amount of fall grazing after "turn-out"
- Increased carrying capacity and livestock numbers.
- Enhanced habitat for Sprague's pipits, Baird's sparrows, other upland birds, and wildlife.
- Good agency contacts; built a team that works together.



Bill Martin, TNC

*Lonetree Lake with native range provides habitat for livestock, waterfowl, and other wildlife.*

- Neighboring farmers and ranchers are restoring marginal cropland to native grasslands and developing grazing systems.
- TNC easement allows landowner the freedom to control hunting.

## LANDOWNER'S COMMENTS

"It is important to work to hammer out differences while watching out for your own interests. We learned to figure out a way to make money and at the same time demonstrate that we can keep some of the land native. Neighbors are building partnerships with government agencies and conservation groups. Maybe this is the most gratifying aspect, and most beneficial for conservation in the long run."

~ Al Joyes

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## CHERRY CREEK RANCH

### THIRD-GENERATION RANCHER

Lon Reukauf, owner of Cherry Creek Ranch, manages the 1,100 acres purchased by his parents in 1958, as well as 7,900 acres of deeded plus 16,000 acres of leased land purchased through the years. The ranch is located in the eastern rolling plains and badlands of Prairie County, west of Terry. Native grassland comprises the majority of this cattle ranch where Lon acquired his enjoyment of wildlife from his father, an avid birder, angler, and hunter. This prairie region is cut through with intermittent streams and cottonwood and ash draws. Riparian areas make up only about 7-8% of the land. Lon's management goal has been to increase the productivity of the summer-grazed range through one six-pasture rest-rotation grazing system, and two three-pasture deferred-rotation grazing systems, non-summer-only use of some riparian areas, and wise water management. The plan has paid off, the result of years of hard work and of taking advantage of management programs offered by several agencies.

### ACTIONS

- Developed a grazing system that included fencing pastures for rotation and spreading of water supply.
- Developed the water resource with use of windmills, storage tanks, and pipelines to draw cattle away from riparian areas.
- Hand planted cottonwood, ash, buffaloberry, chokecherry, and plum trees along Cherry Creek and assorted tributaries.
- Entered 25,000 acres into the Block Management Hunting Access Program.
- Enrolled 8,000 acres into the Conservation Security Program (CSP).
- Supported 200 acres of alfalfa through water spreading and diking. Systems utilize water from spring runoff and summer flooding.

### WHO HELPED

- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) cost-shared water development for off-riparian water storage and improvements, gravity-fed pipelines, 13 windmills, water spreading through series of dikes, and a rotation grazing program.

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) provided financial incentive for healthy wildlife habitat through Block Management Program.
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) purchased materials for cross fencing and one mile of pipeline.
- MSU Professors Don Ryerson, Jack Taylor, and Bob Ross provided information about grazing management practices.
- Gus Hormay, the originator of Rest Rotation Grazing ideas.
- 90 years of family diaries and stories chronicling their experiences ranching and farming in eastern Montana.

## BENEFITS AND REWARDS

- Improved wildlife habitat, increased hunting revenue from Montana FWP.
- Greater riparian forage.
- 10–15% increase in total carrying capacity.
- Greater diversity of mammal and bird species.
- Increased nesting cover resulting in increase of songbirds, wild turkeys, nesting geese and game birds.

- Improved habitat for birds and other insect predators helps control grasshopper populations.
- Higher percentage of cows bred in a shorter time span.

## LANDOWNER'S COMMENTS

“Resting a pasture for twelve to eighteen continuous months every few years is magical. Non-summer use of riparian areas is wonderful. Search out and be aware of the options open to you. I have found NRCS to be easy to work with and most helpful.”

~ *Lon Reukauf*  
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*Vicki Reufauf*

*Non-summer use of riparian areas results in improved wildlife habitat and riparian forage.*

BROTHERS Vance, Myron, and Kim Meyer are second-generation landowners who manage a ranching and farming operation on over 2,700 acres on the Missouri Coteau in Sheridan County. Approximately one third of the property is rangeland and two thirds have been farmed at one time. Many wetlands on the property had been drained and farmed, as was normal practice in the 1950s and '60s when farmers were paid to drain the sloughs to put more grassland into production. By the 1980s, when drier years brought evidence of erosion problems on the areas that were strip farmed, the Meyers turned to the Soil Conservation Service (now Natural Resources Conservation Service) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for help in putting this land into the Conservation Reserve Program. (CRP) The next step was to restore the many drained wetlands. With help from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)'s Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program the drained wetlands were restored to hold water, help recharge the groundwater, and provide wildlife habitat. The Meyers have placed most of the rangeland and associated wetlands into USFWS easements, assuring

this important grassland/wetland complex is perpetually protected, while still retaining the right to graze, and grow and harvest hay on the land.

### ACTIONS

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- Enrolled 1,335 acres of marginal farmland in the CRP in 1988. Re-enrolled the land in 1998.
- Restored 48 drained wetlands totaling over 140 surface acres.
- Perpetually protected 705 rangeland acres and 68 wetland acres in 54 basins with USFWS easements.

### WHO HELPED

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- FSA paid the owners for placing land into CRP and for re-enrolling in the program ten years later.
- NRCS guided the range restoration process and provided seed mix for twice reseeding the marginal land into more productive grasses.
- USFWS designed and paid for wetland restoration work, and purchased perpetual grassland and wetland easements.

## BENEFITS AND REWARDS

- Monetary benefits through the CRP payments and USFWS purchase of land easements.
- Erosion control due to planted grasslands (grasses are holding more water, resulting in less runoff).
- Building the value of the land over time because of an improved soil profile.
- Improved water table and water quality from the restored wetlands.
- Improved habitat for birds and other wildlife.

## LANDOWNER'S COMMENTS

"I hate to see all the land broken up. Some of this fragile land is not made for farming so it is good for future generations if we restore the land. It is a long-term deal. Breaking the ground for crops is short lived."

~ Vance Meyer

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USFWS

*Native mixed grass prairie in northeastern Montana.*



Ducks Unlimited

*Prairie potholes of northeastern Montana.*

## 66 RANCH

BIM AND JANAS STRAUER of northern Hill County have done more than just talk about their interest in improving the wetland/grassland habitat for wildlife—they have created partnerships to improve their land and to create a paradise for area wildlife. The Strausers have permanently protected approximately 3,200 upland and wetland acres on their 66 Ranch. Previous owners had established a conservation easement on the land. Following that lead, the Strausers worked with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Ducks Unlimited (DU) by accepting the perpetual easement that came with the purchase of the land, developing wildlife habitat on the property. Their restoration work that was accomplished on wetlands at Wild Horse Lake has corrected previous alterations to the natural water flow that depleted the wetland. The restoration, completed in 2005, has already proven to have positive effects on a diverse mix of upland and wetland wildlife. Additionally, the hydrology of the area has responded well. A secondary

benefit of the partnership efforts has been the development of a successful rotational grazing system that retains some of the economic viability for traditional ranching activities while meeting the intent of the Wetlands Reserve Program conservation easement.

### ACTIONS

- Restored 514 wetland acres through rehabilitated and new dikes, 5 water-control structures, and 10 shallow-water impoundments.
- Established 901 acres of native upland vegetation.
- Established a rotational grazing system to improve wildlife cover through the use of livestock grazing. Grazing adjustments are made following annual monitoring.



*Matt Walker, NRCS*

*Improved wetlands attract waterfowl and wildlife.*

## WHO HELPED

- NRCS paid easement cost, provided wetland identification, planned restoration, and paid restoration costs.
- DU provided the design and delivery of the wetland restoration.

## BENEFITS AND REWARDS

- NRCS paid all costs of the wetland restoration work through the perpetual conservation easement.
- Increase in all types of birds: ducks, geese, shorebirds, songbirds, upland game birds.
- Increase in deer and pronghorn antelope in the area.
- Improved wildlife in all of the surrounding area.

## LANDOWNER'S COMMENTS

"It's been very exciting watching the project develop, the wildlife increase, and we are pleased with the project. We would also like to thank NRCS and Ducks Unlimited for their assistance with getting this project lined out and working."

~ *Bim Strauser*

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*Matt Walker, NRCS*

*Water control structure in place in rehabilitated wetland.*

## PERMITS/PERMITTING REVIEW

Each situation is unique in terms of site location, conditions, and the scope of work. Prior to initiating a restoration project it is important to know which federal, tribal, state, or local permits may be required. The agencies or entities that you are working with can help you acquire the necessary permits for your project.

## SECTION 4

# PARTNERS AND OPTIONS

LANDOWNERS make new management decisions about their properties for a variety of reasons. People drawing close to retirement often envision the future of the property; some wish it to remain as it was while they lived and worked on the land. These landowners can carefully consider ensuring the long-term future of the property by putting some land into conservation status as a legacy. The choices are more challenging when there are no family members to continue the work. In some cases financial need predominates and the land is simply sold with no parameters on land use. When no decisions are made for the future some of these lands may become developed; open space, the rural nature, and aesthetics of the property may be altered forever.

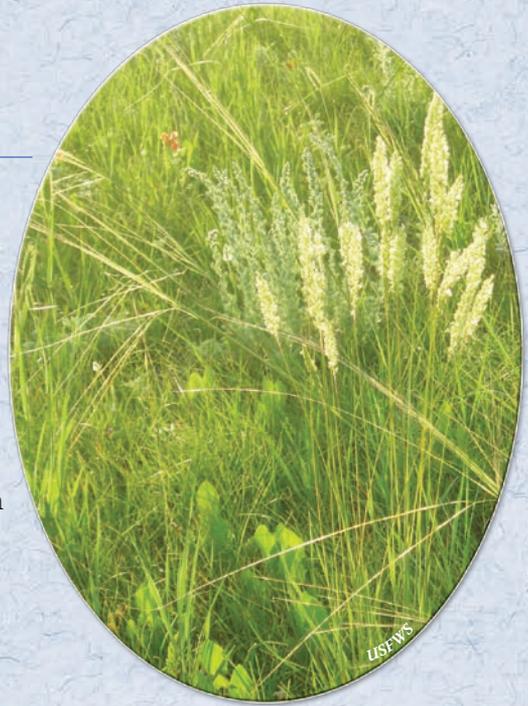
As illustrated by the stories in Section 3, some Montana landowners make a change in order to increase the productivity of the land, simultaneously recognizing that the value of protection of the natural landscape may outweigh economic gain. Eastern Montana farmers and ranchers feel responsible for maintaining the agricultural sustainability of the land as they pass the land to the next generation. Increasingly, landowners realize that new partnerships and opportunities are available to help provide income for their operations and ensure the conservation of Montana's agricultural traditions.

## WHERE DO I START?

NO MATTER what factors motivate you to change management practices, or to restore or conserve your wetlands, grasslands, and riparian areas, the next step is to examine options for moving ahead. Some landowners undertake projects at their own expense; other landowners participate in voluntary programs administered by public agencies and private organizations.

The best place to start learning about your conservation options may be where you have already established a relationship with local personnel from the FSA, NRCS, USFWS, Montana FWP, local Conservation District office, tribal government, or conservation organizations. Ask questions such as:

- How can I manage my land for conservation?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of entering into a particular type of project?
- What do I need to consider before starting a restoration or other conservation project?
- How can I pay for it?



Learn about programs from a variety of sources. Your property may qualify for assistance from several agencies and organizations. Another possibility is to contact the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership, which works with landowners and land managers to conserve wetlands, riparian areas, and associated uplands. Legacy Partners are excellent sources for ideas, programs, and resources that may help landowners conserve their farm and ranch lands. Whatever route you take, learn as much as possible about your options by continuing to make contacts and asking questions.

## SOME LANDOWNER OPTIONS

LANDOWNERS CAN CHOOSE from a wide range of options to restore and/or conserve wetlands, grasslands, and riparian areas.

### ***1. Retain ownership and guide future use of the property, choosing one or a combination of options:***

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION are the first steps to determine what, if any, options you will pursue. It may be best to start with an agency or organization you are familiar with, or contact Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership. The Reference Guide on pages 22–23 offers suggestions for assistance.

COST-SHARE/MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS are tailored to fit each individual restoration and conservation project. These agreements are worked out between the landowner, conservation organizations, and agencies. Landowners may enter into several cost-share/management agreements with several conservation entities for the same property.

TERM LEASES are agreements by a landowner to rent land to a private conservation organization or agency for a specified period of time. The landowner receives periodic payments for the leased

property while some aspects of use of the property are controlled by the leasing agency or organization. In all cases, leased land remains the property of the original owner throughout the period of the lease.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS allow the property owner to retain ownership of the property while potentially receiving income and estate tax reductions. Conservation easements may be either term or perpetual; they run with the property's deed for the length of the easement.

### ***2. Sell the property***

You can sell land to a conservation organization at full market value or as a bargain sale (a price below full market value), which could result in tax benefits. Other sales options are installment sales, or selling with a right of first refusal.

### ***3. Donate the land***

If you donate land (transfer of title without compensation) to a conservation organization (land trust), you ensure that the property will be totally protected, maintained and enhanced. This may entitle you to a reduction in income and/or estate taxes.

## WORKING LANDSCAPES, WORKING TO SUCCEED

WE CLOSE THIS GUIDE with an inspiring story of ranch families in southern Phillips County. In 2003, about 30 ranching families came together to spearhead stewardship of rich biodiversity through sustaining their strong ranching heritage and family values. Since then, the group—the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance (RSA)—has improved communication and relationships with government agencies and conservation groups while protecting ranching traditions. The RSA is dedicated to building a sustainable future for wildlife and people in this working landscape. They recognize the need to be strong financially, with the management flexibility to meet changing conditions of ranch families, the weather, economics, and sociopolitical agendas while sustaining the biodiversity and integrity of America's northern mixed grass prairie.

An open, ongoing dialogue between ranchers and other stakeholders has been one key to reaching these goals. Another key is to find ways to make conservation affordable and, ideally, profit-positive for ranchers.

The RSA is working to accomplish this through one or more of the following programs:

- Beginning Rancher program
- Community grassbank
- Community-held conservation easements
- Private conservation investors
- Individual ranch planning
- Value-added programs
- Entrepreneurial collaborations for the purchase and management of ranchlands that incorporate livestock and wildlife-derived income with low- or no-interest loan programs from conservation nonprofits

For more information, visit their website: <http://www.RanchersStewardshipAlliance.org/>

| Agency /Organization Name                      |   | Financial Assistance                            |                           | Technical Assistance        |            |            |             |
|--|---|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|  |   | Conservation Easements<br>(Purchase / Donation) | Restoration / Enhancement | Determination / Delineation | Monitoring | Permitting | Restoration |
| FEDERAL AGENCIES                               | <b>U.S. Department of Agriculture</b>   | cost share & annual rental and farm loans       |                           |                             |            |            |             |
|  | Farm Service Agency   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
|  | Natural Resources Conservation Service  | X   | X                         | X                           |            |            | X           |
|  | <b>U.S. Department of Interior</b>  |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
|  | Bureau of Land Management   |   |                           |                             | X          |            | X           |
|  | Montana Interagency Riparian Cadre  |   |                           |                             |            |            | X           |
| STATE AGENCIES                                 | <b>U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service</b>   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
|  | Partners for Fish & Wildlife  |   | X                         | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
|  | Realty  | X   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
|  | <b>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers</b>   |   |                           |                             |            | X          |             |
|  | <b>Montana Assoc. of Conservation Dist.</b><br>(or contact local Conservation District) |   |                           |                             |            | X          |             |
|  | <b>Montana Fish, Wildlife &amp; Parks</b>   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS                             | Habitat Programs  | X   | X                         |                             | X          |            | X           |
|  | Migratory Bird Stamp Program  |   | X                         |                             |            | X          | X           |
|  | Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership   | X   | X                         | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
|  | <b>Blackfeet Reservation</b>  |   |                           |                             | X          | X          |             |
| PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS/ OTHERS                  | <b>Crow Reservation</b>   |   |                           | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
|  | <b>Fort Belknap Reservation</b>   |   |                           |                             | X          | X          | X           |
|  | <b>Fort Peck Reservation</b>  |   |                           | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
|  | <b>Northern Cheyenne Reservation</b>  |   |                           | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
|  | <b>Rocky Boy's Reservation</b>  |   |                           | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
|  | <b>Ducks Unlimited</b>  | X   | X                         | X                           | X          | X          | X           |
| <b>Mid-Yellowstone Land Trust</b>              |   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| <b>Montana Audubon</b>                         |   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| <b>Montana Land Reliance</b>                   |   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| <b>Montana State University -</b><br>Extension |   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| N. Rocky Mountain Science Ctr                  |   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| <b>Pheasants Forever</b>                       |   | X   |                           |                             |            | X          |             |
| <b>Ranchers Stewardship Alliance</b>           | X   | X   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| <b>The Nature Conservancy</b>                  | X   |   |                           |                             |            |            |             |
| <b>Trust for Public Land</b>                   | X   | X   |                           |                             |            |            |             |

## E TO ASSISTANCE

|   | Assistance |                                   | Contact                                   | E-mail or Website   |
|---|------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
|   | Research   | Other                             |   |   |
|   | Education  | Conservation Easements (Holding)* |   |   |
|   |            |                                   |   | Local FSA Office <a href="http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA">http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA</a><br><a href="http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app">http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app</a> |
|   | x          | x                                 | Local NRCS Office                         |   |
|   | x          |                                   | (406) 895-5041                            | <a href="mailto:mphilbin@blm.gov">mphilbin@blm.gov</a>  |
|   | x          |                                   | (406) 895-5041                            | <a href="mailto:mphilbin@blm.gov">mphilbin@blm.gov</a>  |
|   | x          |                                   | (406) 727-7400 x224                       | <a href="mailto:jim_stutzman@fws.gov">jim_stutzman@fws.gov</a>  |
|   |            | x                                 | (406) 727-7400 x225                       | <a href="mailto:gary_l_sullivan@fws.gov">gary_l_sullivan@fws.gov</a>  |
|   |            |                                   | (406) 441-1375                            | <a href="http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/odmt/mthome.htm">http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/odmt/mthome.htm</a>   |
|   | x          |                                   | (406) 443-5711<br>(or contact local C.D.) | <a href="mailto:mail@macdnet.org">mail@macdnet.org</a>  |
| x | x          | x                                 | Local FWP Office                          | <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/habitat/landowner.asp">http://fwp.mt.gov/habitat/landowner.asp</a>   |
|   |            | x                                 | (406) 994-7889                            | <a href="mailto:thinz@mt.gov">thinz@mt.gov</a>  |
| x | x          | x                                 | (406) 994-7889                            | <a href="http://www.wetlandslegacy.org">http://www.wetlandslegacy.org</a>   |
|   |            |                                   | (406) 388-7421                            | <a href="mailto:mweatherwax@3rivers.net">mweatherwax@3rivers.net</a>  |
|   |            |                                   | (406) 638-3748                            | <a href="mailto:robertas@crownsations.net">robertas@crownsations.net</a>  |
|   | x          |                                   | (406) 353-8412                            | <a href="mailto:dlongknife@ftbelknap.msn.gov">dlongknife@ftbelknap.msn.gov</a>  |
| x |            |                                   | (406) 768-5155 x325                       | <a href="mailto:2horses@nemontel.net">2horses@nemontel.net</a>  |
| x |            |                                   | (406) 477-6503 x102                       | <a href="mailto:yulberton@yahoo.com">yulberton@yahoo.com</a>  |
| x |            |                                   | (406) 395-4225                            | (ask for Wetland Coordinator)   |
| x | x          | x                                 | (406) 492-2002                            | <a href="mailto:rsanders@ducks.org">rsanders@ducks.org</a>  |
|   |            | x                                 | (406) 252-2606                            | <a href="mailto:c-cumin@hotmail.com">c-cumin@hotmail.com</a>  |
| x | x          |                                   | (406) 443-3949                            | <a href="mailto:mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org">mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org</a>  |
|   |            | x                                 | (406) 259-1328                            | <a href="mailto:info@mtlandreliance.org">info@mtlandreliance.org</a>  |
| x | x          |                                   | (406) 994-1750                            | <a href="http://extn.msu.montana.edu/">http://extn.msu.montana.edu/</a>   |
| x | x          |                                   | (406) 994-7544                            | <a href="http://nrmsc.usgs.gov/about">http://nrmsc.usgs.gov/about</a>   |
|   | x          |                                   | (406) 465- 8126                           | <a href="mailto:dhare@pheasantsforever.org">dhare@pheasantsforever.org</a>  |
| x | x          | x                                 | (406) 658-2504                            | <a href="mailto:info@ranchersstewardshipalliance.org">info@ranchersstewardshipalliance.org</a>  |
|   |            | x                                 | (406) 443-0303                            | <a href="mailto:bee_hall@tnc.org">bee_hall@tnc.org</a>  |
| x | x          |                                   | (406) 522-7450                            | <a href="http://www.tpl.org">www.tpl.org</a>  |

\* Holders of conservation easements sometimes do not purchase an easement from a landowner, but they do have the legal right and responsibility to enforce the restrictions of the easement in order to ensure protection of the land's conservation values.

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See also "A Landowners' Guide  
to Montana Wetlands," available  
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