



BIRD SAVER: Conservation Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill

Steven Riley
 Director of Farm Bill Policy
 American Bird Conservancy
 402-433-5078
 SRiley@abcbirds.org

Healthy rangelands provide conservation services, including carbon storage, water filtration, erosion control, and nutrient cycling. They are vital to recovering grassland bird populations.

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) will work with Congress and the Administration to pass a 2023 Bird-Friendly Farm Bill that:

- Encourages broader conservation easements use to protect key habitats for birds.
- Incentivizes rangeland rest in grazing systems to capture carbon, conserve birds, and expand grassland-conserving policies.
- Encourages partnership-driven, incentive-based conservation.
- Increases partner technical assistance capacity.
- Reinforces that wildlife will continue to be a co-equal priority in the Farm Bill, along with soil and water conservation.
- Prioritizes diverse stands of native plants, limits the use of non-native plants, and reinforces the National Seed Strategy.

Top Priorities

Rest-Recover-Recapture — We recommend establishing a new program and scenarios to existing programs to incentivize grazing rest. Periodic rest improves plant species diversity; system heterogeneity, stability, resilience, sustainability, and stored carbon; soil health; and increases forage production.

Approximately 30 percent of the U.S. is rangeland (~770 million acres), mostly in the West. Rangelands are highly diverse, and provide livestock forage and habitat for many wildlife species. Healthy rangelands provide conservation services, including carbon storage, water filtration, erosion control, and nutrient cycling. They are vital to recovering grassland bird populations.

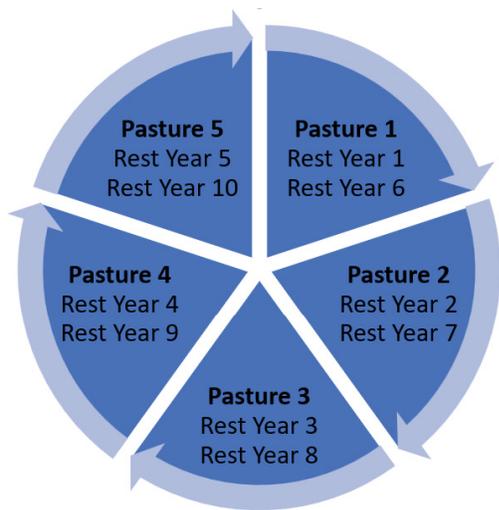
We support two options to provide expanded incentives for conservation that will store carbon while adding substantial habitat quality for grassland birds:

Option A authorizes the use of **Rest-Recover-Recapture scenarios** for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs and mandates short- to intermediate-term contracts to rest specific pastures undergoing conservation improvement to compensate for foregone income.



4301 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 451
 Washington, D.C. 20008
 202-234-7181 • info@abcbirds.org
 abcbirds.org

Option B authorizes the **Rangeland Conservation Program** (RCP) to provide 50 million acres for contracts to annually and sequentially rest pastures in a grazing system.



Example of 10-year contract and cycle for RCP.

Helping Hands — We recommend increasing and stabilizing partner conservation delivery capacity in the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Producers need NGOs and other partners to provide technical assistance, which requires predictable funding. ABC seeks to modify the administrative cap and expand the overall partner Technical Assistance (TA) limit from 25% to 30%.

Strengthening the Conservation Reserve Program — We recommend reauthorizing and increasing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollment to 70 million acres. CRP provides far-reaching benefits. It has improved conditions for ground-nesting birds by increasing nesting and brood-rearing success. The Inflation Reduction Act was unable to grow CRP as it did with other conservation programs, so we recommend a similarly aggressive CRP expansion. We also recommend requiring the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to adjust rental rates annually to encourage more enrollment.

Program Recommendations

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- Reauthorize at the current funding level as a stand-alone program; include Rest-Restore-Recapture options.
- Authorize and mandate NRCS to use a simplified grant process.
- Eliminate the arbitrary administrative cap on partner Technical Assistance (TA) and increase to 30%.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

- Authorize funding for restoration and management activities to maintain taxpayer investment and authorize USDA to hold Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) in certain circumstances.
- Encourage the restoration of native wetland and grassland vegetation and hydrology.

Forest Conservation Easement Program

- Authorize and fund — separate from ACEP — a Forest Conservation Easement Program.
- Include native forest plant community restoration and working forest components.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- Include Rest-Restore-Recapture options.
- Maintain 10% minimum funding for wildlife; ensure that practices achieve State Wildlife Action Plan objectives.

Forestry Title

- Expand the Healthy Forest Reserve Program to encourage landowners to engage in climate friendly management activities to sequester carbon and benefit wildlife.

Grassland Conservation, Sodsaver, and Conservation Compliance

- Establish a federal grant program similar to the North American Wetland Conservation Act to support grassland conservation if that act does not become law.
- Expand the Sodsaver provision nationwide.
- Strengthen disincentives for breaking native sod in all programs and titles.

Crop Insurance

- Create a level playing field for organic and innovative farmers.
- Discourage the preemptive use of insecticides (especially seed coatings).



Lesser Prairie-Chicken by Eleanor Briceotti