

The Nature Conservancy Supports Grasslands Conservation Fund

Lander-- The Wyoming Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust announce the creation of the Grasslands Conservation Fund, a new partnership to conserve eastern Wyoming's native grasslands.

The Nature Conservancy has agreed to invest a quarter of a million dollars in matching funds to Wyoming's Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust. All funds will support conservation projects in Wyoming's Shirley Basin and Thunder Basin areas, regions of high biological significance and a priority for the Conservancy's efforts over the next decade.

"Creating this fund was a major step forward for Wyoming, a real commitment to maintaining the wildlife and habitat we have now for future generations to enjoy," says Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal. "My thanks go to The Nature Conservancy for being willing to step forward and set an example by joining with the state in this important effort."

The new Grasslands Conservation Fund will fuel significant match and challenge opportunities for the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, including federal, state and private funding. It will be up to the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Board to select projects that are eligible for matching funds from The Nature Conservancy.

"This is really exciting and a huge help to the board," says Delaine Roberts, chairman of the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust's Board of Trustees. "It also allows us to work in some areas where we would like to see more applications."

The fund's focus on grasslands acknowledges that these lands provide an array of services, including food, economic opportunities from tourism, forage for domestic livestock, and protection of freshwater resources. Wyoming's grasslands also offer rich habitat for multitudes of plants and animals, including migratory birds, sage grouse, mule deer, swift fox and other species.

The newly-created fund will support landowners' important stewardship of this critical habitat type. Conservation practices help farmers, ranchers, and other landowners continue their tradition of conserving the natural resources and habitats that are vital for lasting and productive agricultural yields.

The Grasslands Conservation Fund comes at a time when grasslands are considered among the most threatened habitat types on Earth. Conversion of grasslands, invasion by noxious and non-native plants, and loss of naturally-occurring patterns such as fire, all affect the viability of Wyoming's native grasslands.

Compared to many of the highly impacted regions of the Great Plains, however, grasslands in Wyoming are relatively healthy throughout much of their historic range. Wyoming's large tracts of native grasslands exist because of the presence of large, untilled tracts of private land and the stewardship of landowners.

“The Conservancy recognizes that Wyoming is fortunate to have the opportunity to conserve its grasslands while they still exist across relatively large, intact landscapes,” says Dick Davis, outgoing chairman of the Conservancy’s Wyoming Chapter board of trustees. “It’s much more effective and less costly to conserve these areas now than to attempt to recreate them in the future.”