

May 2008



Upland Sandpiper

(Photo courtesy of Jerry Longcore, USFWS)

Overview

In January 2008 the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the new continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) conservation practice titled State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), also known as CP38. The program is authorized to enroll and manage up to 500,000 acres nationwide. Over 420,000 acres for sign-up have been allocated for the 2008 sign-up to benefit species whose populations are in decline, and are identified as state or regional species of greatest conservation need.

Maine is one of 33 states selected to receive funding for CP38 in 2008. Local state and federal partners will assist NRCS with outreach and program delivery.

CP38E Objectives in Maine

The CRP-SAFE CP38E project area in northern Maine (see Fig 1) is a voluntary program established for the purpose of quality grassland habitat to primarily benefit grassland birds, such as upland sandpiper (State threatened), northern harrier,

bobolink, horned lark, and savannah sparrow. Other grassland dependent wildlife will benefit as well. Long term population studies indicate many of these species are suffering serious regional or range-wide population declines.

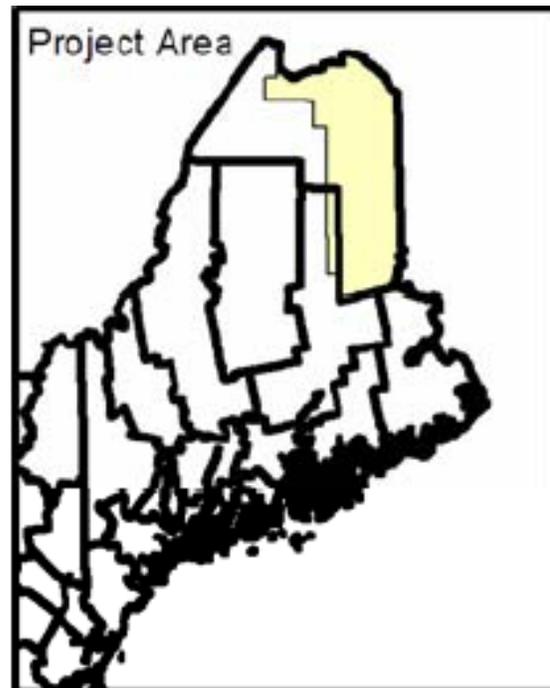


Fig.1. CP38E enrollment area is in yellow

Some species are area sensitive (i.e., upland sandpiper) and are adapted to and require large contiguous tracts of grassland (≥ 150 acres) or smaller grasslands (≥ 75 acres) within an open agricultural landscape to attract and maintain breeding populations. Other species (i.e., bobolink, savannah sparrow) are less area sensitive. Large contiguous grassland will reduce nest destruction from predators or brood parasitism from brown-headed cowbirds that is common near field edges.

For these reasons, landowners who enroll contiguous fields (e.g., those not bisected by paved roads, hedgerows, windbreaks, or within field woodlots) greater than 20 acres for CP38E will provide greater benefit for the conservation of grassland birds. Especially important is enrollment of land close to clusters of existing large contiguous blocks of grass.

Benefits

Frequently grasslands are under-represented in the landscape relative to the recent past, or are managed in such a way that they do not maximize soil and water quality or wildlife benefits.

Planting grass species having slightly different structural and growth characteristics and site adaptations is important toward achieving a mosaic of tall, medium, and short grasses that have varying densities of standing biomass and ground litter. The timing and manner of management also affects stand diversity, structure, ecological function and wildlife use. Rest-rotational management will be used to enhance structural complexity, and be timed to avoid the primary reproductive season of grassland using wildlife.

Needless to say, and equally important, are expected improvements to soil and water quality, and reduced erosion from conversion of cropland to perennial herbaceous cover.

Enrollment Overview

FSA state and/or local offices will conduct sign-up on a continuous (ongoing) basis. Through continuous CRP sign-up, USDA accepts year-round producer offers, provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements. Producers can offer land for enrollment in SAFE and other CRP programs at their local FSA service center.

Producers within a SAFE area can submit offers to voluntarily enroll acres in CRP contracts for 15 years (the contract length depends on the SAFE proposal authorized for the area). In exchange, producers receive annual CRP rental payments, incentives and cost-share assistance to establish habitat-enhancing natural covers on eligible land. Producers enrolling in CRP enter into contracts with USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). FSA administers CRP on behalf of CCC.

Eligibility

Eligible land is cropland: according to 2-CRP, paragraph 97. Generally eligible land is both:

- planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity during 4 of 6 crop years from 1996 through 2001,
- physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity, as determined by the County Committee.

Marginal pastureland is **not** eligible. More detail about eligibility criteria can be obtained from the sources below.

For More Information

Additional information concerning the Conservation Reserve Program's CP38E sign-up can be obtained by:

- visiting <http://www.FSA.usda.gov>,
- visiting or contacting the USDA Fort Kent, Presque Isle or Houlton Service Service Centers, <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>
- visiting or contacting Candace Weymouth, FSA Program Specialist, 967 Illinois Ave., Bangor, ME 04401, (207) 990-9140.