

Project 13: Catalyzing North American Grasslands Conservation and Sustainable Use Through Partnerships		Operating Year(s): 2013–2014
Planned Budget for two years: \$400,000 Year 1: \$200,000 Year 2: \$200,000		
Strategic Priority/Objective: Healthy Communities and Ecosystems / Increased Resilience of Shared Ecosystems at Risk, with cross-cutting elements in support of the priority area Greening the Economy in North America		
<p><b>Project Summary</b></p> <p>Diverse pressures on North America’s central grasslands are impacting livestock production and rural communities, and have cascading effects on a number of critical issues such as water, food security, the provision of ecosystem services, and the loss of grassland biodiversity. The livelihoods of many ranchers and, by extension, the sustainability of native grasslands, face a broad range of challenges, from agricultural conversion, the continued decline of grassland-dependent species, oil and gas development, and uncertain economic returns. These challenges are threatening grassland ecosystems and the economies they support. The threats to human livelihoods and environmental integrity are considerable, and the adoption of sustainable management approaches is essential to protect these resources for current and future generations.</p> <p>To sustain the ranching industry and maintain healthy grasslands, this project will implement and promote economic and conservation solutions that address the root causes of grasslands loss. The transfer and uptake of place-based beneficial practices, ranging from grazing, water and fire management to community outreach and partnerships, will support local communities and economies on grasslands of key biodiversity importance in North America. An expanded continental partnership will strengthen collaboration through shared experiences and resources. And the economic, social and ecological values of North America’s grasslands will be communicated to a broad range of audiences.</p> <p>The project will benefit the North American environment through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An inclusive and effective alliance for collaboration on trinational grassland conservation, bridging gaps between stakeholders through improved communication and understanding, to foster grasslands that are more resilient to threats.</li><li>• A network of sites that demonstrate harmonized economic and environmental sustainability, and the contribution of ranchers to biodiversity conservation through improved knowledge of, and support for, activities that derive compatible economic and conservation benefits.</li><li>• Improved understanding, appreciation and engagement for grasslands conservation in the three countries through a coordinated outreach campaign.</li></ul> <p>This project follows from a 2011–2012 CEC project entitled: <i>North American Grasslands: Management Initiatives and Partnerships to Enhance Ecosystem and Community Resilience</i>. The goal of that project was to provide a body of information for livestock producers and their communities, and form lasting partnerships for continual development and adoption of sustainable grassland management practices</p>		

through the establishment of the North American Grasslands Alliance. The Alliance developed a multi-faceted collective approach to support North American grasslands that sustains working landscapes, conserves biodiversity, and promotes vibrant rural communities. In addition, the project supported: 1) a web-based tool to host and disseminate almost 100 beneficial management practices (BMPs) from ranchers, conservation organizations, and government and academic bodies in Canada, the United States and Mexico; 2) several pilot projects with rancher groups, including a beef industry supply chain analysis, a private lands wildlife biologist extension program, and research into market-based incentives for sustainable rangeland management; 3) outreach material including a video to promote BMPs; and 4) comprehensive monitoring data on migratory grassland birds in northern Mexico. This body of successful work represents key building blocks that serve as the foundation for this project.

#### **Short-term Outcomes (at halfway point)**

- Meetings with experts, partners and regional alliances are planned or accomplished, with a focus on economic and conservation solutions for sustainable grasslands management.
- Key management actions for ranchers to improve ecological integrity of grasslands are identified, and beneficial management practices (BMPs) for improved biodiversity and economic returns are being piloted in critical grassland areas in each country.
- Grassland values are compiled and a communications strategy is developed.

#### **Long-term Outcomes (by the end of the project)**

- A sustainable trinational Alliance supports an expanded framework for integrated economic and conservation solutions for sustainable grassland management.
- A network of demonstration sites with private landowners engaged in economically and environmentally sustainable grassland management is established.
- Grassland values are communicated broadly, leading to a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the irreplaceable role of grasslands for the sustainability of biodiversity and ranchers.
- Ecologically and economically sustainable grassland management pilots are captured as BMPs. The web-based BMP tool is expanded to include these and other BMPs.
- BMPs are made available to ranchers and their partners through broad dissemination via Internet, regional nodes and the North American Grasslands Alliance.

#### **Longer-term, environmental outcome (post project)**

- The North American Grasslands Alliance functions independent of CEC funding, cooperatively delivering on strategies to support grassland conservation.
- BMPs are more widely employed by landowners and managers across the continental grassland ecoregion, leading to improved habitat quality and quantity, concurrent with increased economic benefits for ranchers.
- The general public demonstrates broad support for public and private measures in support of grassland conservation.

**Tasks necessary to reach the environmental outcome:**

- 1) Strengthen the capacity of the North American Grasslands Alliance to work collaboratively on grasslands conservation at the continental scale, resulting in grasslands that are more resilient to threats.
- 2) Implement and promote ranch-level beneficial management practices (BMPs) that improve environmental sustainability of livestock production on ranches and bring concurrent economic and biodiversity benefits.
- 3) Increase society's understanding and appreciation of the values of grasslands using messaging centered on the ecological and economic benefits of maintaining grasslands and costs associated with their loss, and branding of ecologically sustainable ranching as a grassland-friendly land use.

**Task 1) Strengthen the capacity of the North American Grasslands Alliance to work collaboratively on grasslands conservation at the continental scale, resulting in grasslands that are more resilient to threats**

<b>Subtask</b>	<b>Project outputs</b>	<b>How does the subtask/output move the project towards the environmental outcome</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Budget (activities)</b>
1.1 Support the North American Grasslands Alliance to deliver effective cooperation in the grasslands through experts and partnership meetings	Strategies for cooperation and long term support related to grassland conservation within and among country members of the trinational Alliance are refined, prioritized and implemented	Concerted trilateral efforts converge on continental-scale issues such as tracking the rate and extent of native grassland loss and developing statistics on the economic and social values of ranching	Year 1–Year 2	Year 1: \$40,000 Year 2: \$30,000
1.2 Build synergies with complementary partners and regional alliances for grassland conservation	Regional partners and initiatives for grassland conservation (including ranchers groups, bird initiatives, multi-disciplinary experts, etc.) contribute to a strong trinational Alliance	Ranching, science and policy communities effect positive change at the regional level, driving broader social, ecological and policy change at the national and trinational levels.	Year 1–Year 2	Year 1: \$30,000 Year 2: \$30,000

<b>Task 2) Implement and promote ranch-level beneficial management practices (BMPs) that improve environmental sustainability of livestock production on ranches and bring concurrent economic and biodiversity benefits</b>				
<b>Subtask</b>	<b>Project outputs</b>	<b>How does the subtask/output move the project towards the environmental outcome</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Budget (activities)</b>
2.1 Establish on-the-ground pilots to demonstrate positive linkages between environmental sustainability of livestock production and environmental benefits, including such approaches as fire management and identifying the key ecological parameters affecting ecological sustainability of grasslands	Pilot BMPs (focused on ecological parameters for management, market-based mechanisms and diversification) are developed and delivered in all three countries, in order to provide environmental, wildlife and forage quality improvements at ranches	A portfolio of strategies leads to the adoption of conservation-friendly management practices that support the ranching industry as an economically viable alternative to other land uses	Year 1–Year 2	Year 1: \$100,000 Year 2: \$120,000
<b>Task 3) Increase society's understanding and appreciation of the values of grasslands using messaging centered on the ecological and economic benefits of maintaining grasslands and costs associated with their loss, and branding of ecologically sustainable ranching as a grassland-friendly land use</b>				
<b>Subtask</b>	<b>Project outputs</b>	<b>How does the subtask/output move the project towards the environmental outcome</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Budget (activities)</b>
3.1 Develop and disseminate a sustainable grasslands social marketing package by compiling data and developing communications and social marketing tools that support the design of regional social marketing campaigns that	Information and preliminary tools in support of a communication and social marketing campaign are developed, including baseline information on continental grasslands and the livestock industry	Data, information and tools focused on the ecological, social and economic benefits of grasslands, and costs associated with grasslands loss, are compiled and disseminated for	Year 1–Year 2	Year 1: \$30,000 Year 2: \$20,000

will be deployed through NAGA partners and their regional partnerships in the form of “train the trainer” activities (see Task 1)	A sustainable grasslands social marketing package including research findings, materials and messaging for tailoring communications and social marketing campaigns to regional audiences	communications and branding of ranching as a grassland-friendly land-use within the three countries  Regional nodes are empowered and supported to design and deliver communications and social marketing campaigns to garner broad public support for natural grasslands as a unique capital asset for society and a foundation of ranching culture		
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**Explain how this project meets the selection criteria adopted by Council in the Strategic Plan (See below)**

*The goal of all projects funded by the CEC will be to support the efforts of the Parties to conserve, protect and/or enhance the North American environment. The following criteria will guide the Secretariat, Working Groups, Committees, and other appropriate officials of the Parties in considering cooperative activities for Council approval under operational plans. These selection criteria do not apply for activities to be funded through the NAPECA grant program.*

- **How does the project contribute to achieving Council’s strategic objectives as described within the current Strategic Plan, or as related to other priorities subsequently confirmed by Council?**

This project addresses the CEC priority area Healthy Communities and Ecosystems—Increased Resilience of Shared Ecosystems at Risk. It focuses on improving ecosystem health and resilience of North American grasslands, the only continentally-shared terrestrial ecosystem, and strengthening institutional and individual capacity for the essential stewardship of these lands. Areas of specific focus for the project are Grassland Priority Conservation Areas in North America identified by the CEC.

The project has cross-cutting elements in support of the priority area Greening the Economy in North America. The project has a strong focus on the key relationship of sustainable and profitable ranching activity to healthy grasslands. The project will explore how grasslands beneficial management practices and diversified ranch income can be successfully integrated into ranching operations in order to improve profitability, provide value-added products for North American consumers, and result in sustainable stewardship of grassland ecosystems.

- **Are the proposed objectives North American in scope? In other words, how are the proposed results relevant to protecting the environment in North America? (For example, what would Council members announce to the press at the successful completion of this project?)**

The tall- and short-grass central grassland ecoregions of North America are the most threatened terrestrial ecosystems on the continent and are of significant economic, ecological, and cultural importance to Canada, Mexico and the United States. Grassland birds, perhaps one of the best indicators of the rapid loss of grassland ecosystems, have declined more than any other group of North American birds and their survival is dependent on inter-connected habitats in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

To sustain the ranching industry and maintain healthy grasslands, this project will implement and promote economic and conservation solutions that address the root causes of grasslands loss.

The project will benefit the North American environment through:

1. An inclusive and effective alliance for collaboration on trinational grassland conservation, bridging gaps between stakeholders through improved communication and understanding, to foster grasslands that are more resilient to threats.
  2. A network of sites that demonstrate harmonized economic and environmental sustainability, and the contribution of ranchers to biodiversity conservation through improved knowledge of, and support for, activities that derive compatible economic and conservation benefits.
  3. Improved understanding, appreciation and engagement for grasslands conservation in the three countries through a coordinated outreach campaign.
- **What are the specific, clear and tangible results that will be achieved and how will progress toward each result be measured over time? Identify performance measures to be used to indicate success at reaching all outcomes and/or performance.**

Progress over time will be measured by the number of meetings, their geographic range (for regional meetings) and the number and diversity of participants; the finalization and implementation of the North American Grasslands Alliance framework; the number of BMPs developed and piloted in the three countries; the number of outreach activities to disseminate BMPs and the increase in BMP uptake by ranchers and their partners in the three countries; the completion of a report on continental grassland baseline information and a sustainable grasslands social marketing package; and the number of social marketing packages disseminated to regional partners.

- **Explain why the CEC is the most effective vehicle for the Parties to undertake the project, considering:**
  - **The value-added of doing it under the CEC cooperative program**

The CEC is uniquely positioned to support the Parties in achieving their goal of maintaining resilient ecosystems across North America. Accelerated conservation actions in grassland regions, as facilitated through this project, is needed to slow the highest rate of natural habitat conversion of any other terrestrial ecological region in North America, help address the current levels of water stress, and allow options for species survival under changing climatic regimes. The CEC has also been a leader in supporting the identification of grassland priority conservation areas, developing a North American protected area database, and continental land cover map; products that support an accurate and comprehensive understanding of land use, carbon storage potential and conservation priorities for the grasslands.

- **Any other public, private or social organizations that work on such activities**

Through the North American Grasslands Alliance, this project will build synergies with existing organizations and individuals that work on elements of grassland conservation at local, regional and continental scales and within public and private sectors. Examples include environmental and agricultural agencies, industry associations, environmental not-for-profit organizations, and private landowners. However, work under this project will not duplicate existing efforts, but will amalgamate existing efforts in order to catalyze grassland conservation at multiple scales in North America.

- **Opportunities to cooperate and/or leverage resources with such organizations**

This project aims to coordinate and enhance work underway by using the cooperative mechanism and common goals of the North American Grasslands Alliance and existing regional alliances to capitalize on the established trust between alliances and their constituencies to achieve greater access and uptake of beneficial management practices. Alliance members each have unique abilities to access funding from a number of sources, and to leverage CEC funding to advance the conservation objectives of this partnership.

- **Does the project propose a clear timeline for implementation of the activities, including a target end date for CEC's involvement? Where applicable, describe how the work will continue after CEC involvement ends.**

The proposed project builds on the CEC-supported grassland project from 2011–2012. This proposed project is scheduled to occur during the CEC Operational Plan 2013–2104. Over the course of the project, a strategy will be developed and implemented by the North American Grasslands Alliance to become a self-sufficient entity that continues to deliver on long-term project goals beyond the life of this project.

- **Where applicable, identify with reasonable specificity:**
  - **Linkages with other relevant CEC projects, past or present, in order to create synergies, capitalize on experience, or avoid duplication**

This project builds on a number of previous CEC projects and thereby provides value-added to work already supported by the CEC. Included are the CEC's 2003 Grasslands Conservation Strategy, the Priority Conservation Areas identified in the grasslands (2005 and updated in 2010), as well as the continentally important projects and monitoring capacity resulting from the CEC-initiated North American Bird Conservation Initiative and North American Conservation Action Plans. It also builds on work done for species of common conservation concern (SCCC) and the CEC Cooperative work program projects for 2009–2010 to support grassland conservation in northern Mexico. Most recently, this project follows and builds upon the currently-supported CEC project *North American Grasslands: Management Initiatives and Partnerships to Enhance Ecosystem and Community Resilience* (2011–2012).

- **The target audience, as well as its receptivity and capacity to use the information that may be produced as a result of the project**

The project largely targets grassland-focused conservation organizations/institutions as well as practitioners on the landscape with an emphasis on ranchers. These target audiences have been well represented in the preliminary work to establish the North American Grasslands Alliance and are receptive to future engagement in delivering on the Alliance's work.

- **The relevant stakeholders, with particular attention to communities, academia, NGOs and industry, and their involvement and contribution to a successful outcome**

Stakeholders involved in this project include government environment and agriculture agencies (e.g., Semarnat, Conabio, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Agricultural Department, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Environment Canada, Agriculture Canada); cattlemen's associations; National Audubon Society; Pronatura; Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory; Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; universities; bird conservation joint ventures; Landscape Conservation Cooperatives; and regional alliances (e.g., Regional Alliance for Conservation of the Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands, Ranchers Stewardship Alliance). The success of the North American Grasslands Alliance and its vision depends on the commitment of such a diverse group of stakeholders. The project has been structured to ensure that this diversity is captured within the membership and activities of the Alliance, in order to deliver successful outcomes.