



Grassland Project Protocol V1.0

Protocol Summary

CLIMATE
ACTION
RESERVE

Project Definition

The prevention of emissions of GHGs to the atmosphere due to land conversion and crop cultivation through perpetual conservation of an eligible grassland project area. Grassland is defined as an area of land dominated by native or introduced grass species with little to no tree canopy. Eligible areas include privately owned or certain non-federal publicly owned land. A single project may include multiple legal parcels if the area is held under ownership by a single landowner and covered by a single easement. Individual grassland projects may be managed and verified together as part of a cooperative. Project activities may include grazing, organic fertilizer use, or recreation, but may not include irrigation or use of synthetic fertilizer.

Project Eligibility Requirements

Location: Conterminous United States and U.S. tribal lands. Must be located on land whose particular combination(s) of Major Land Resource Area (MLRA), soil texture, and prior land use history would result in emissions of belowground organic carbon in the baseline scenario, as determined by the default baseline emission factors.

Start Date: The date on which the project area is committed to the continued management and protection of grassland either by recording a conservation easement, or by transferring ownership to a public or private entity with a provision to maintain the grassland as such. Projects entering into a cooperative may have some additional flexibility. All projects must be submitted no more than six months after the project start date, unless the project is submitted for listing prior to July 22, 2016. Until that date, projects with start dates as early as July 22, 2013 are eligible if they meet all other start date requirements.

Crediting Period: Maximum of fifty years. In the case of cooperatives, project crediting periods will be tied to each individual grassland project within the cooperative and their respective start dates.

Performance Standard Test: Projects must meet a two-part performance standard test:

- Financial threshold: Rental rate for cropland must be at least 40% greater than the rental rate for pastureland in the project county. Discount for uncertainty is applied for counties where rental rate difference is not at least 100%. Annual rental rate table is published by the Reserve.
- Suitability threshold: At least 75% of the soils in the project area must be identified as having a Land Capability Classification of I-IV. Up to 25% of the project soils may be classified as V or VI.

Legal Requirement Test: No legal barriers to converting land to cropland and no legal requirements to keep grassland as such.

Ecosystem Services Payment Stacking and Credit Stacking: Payment stacking and credit stacking for ecosystem services are permissible under certain circumstances, subject to the Legal Requirement Test and requirements for concurrent legally binding agreements. The Project Developer must disclose any payments or participation in such programs.

Permanence Requirement: Carbon must be stored for at least 100 years after the issuance of CRTs. Unless ownership of the land is transferred to the federal government, a Qualified Conservation Easement (QCE) must be recorded to ensure permanence. A QCE prohibits the conversion of the project area from grassland to another land use, such as cropland. Additionally, the Project Developer must enter into a Project Implementation Agreement with the Reserve. Monitoring and reporting must continue for at least 100 years after the last issuance of credits. Avoidable reversals are mitigated by the Project Developer, unavoidable reversals are insured against through a shared risk buffer pool.

Regulatory Compliance: Projects must be in compliance with all relevant federal, state, and local regulations.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification Schedule: Annual monitoring includes prior land use, grazing activities, fertilizer application, and fires. Project verification must occur at least every six years during a project's crediting period. Site visits are not required for successful verification, but projects shall make an extra contribution to the risk buffer pool until the project site is visited for the purposes of verification.

Project is Ineligible if:

- Located on land contained in strata with either no data for modeling, or with no baseline emission reductions from belowground organic carbon in the first 10-year emission factor period
- Located on lands designated as wetlands and/or owned by the Federal Government
- Documentation from at least the past ten years are unavailable to determine eligibility

This is a summary of the protocol. Please read the full protocol for a complete description of project requirements.