



# Grassland Protocol V2.1

## Protocol Summary

### Project Definition

The prevention of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 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. Initial project area may be expanded through new easements. Individual grassland projects may be managed and verified together as part of a cooperative. Project activities may include grazing, organic fertilizer use, irrigation, and recreation, but may not include the use of synthetic fertilizers.

### 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 submitting a project to the Reserve, recording a conservation easement with a provision to maintain the grassland as such or the transfer of property ownership to a public or private entity. All projects must be submitted no more than twelve months after the project start date.

**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. The crediting period may be concluded at any time at the Project Owner's discretion.

**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: Projects must demonstrate a minimum percentage of the project area is made up of soils having a Land Capability Classification of I-IV. Project Owners have the option of using a default threshold based on the MLRA of the project, or a site-specific threshold based on local conditions.

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

**Ecosystem Services Payment 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 Owner 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 conversion of project area from grassland to another land use, such as cropland. Project Owner must also 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 Owner, while 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, irrigation and fires. Less frequent monitoring of ecosystem health is also required. Project verification must occur at least every six years during the crediting period. Site visits are not required for successful verification, but projects make an extra contribution to the risk buffer pool until the project site is visited as part of verification.