

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Wyoming State Plan

The State Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Plan addresses implementation and the administration of the program and serves as a basis for allocating WHIP funds in Wyoming. The objectives and priorities identified in this plan help facilitate the creation, restoration and enhancement efforts of key wildlife habitats and targeted species in the state. The plan places emphasis on species and wildlife habitats of national, state, and local importance. Collaboration between local, state, and federal wildlife partners assisted in the development of this plan and in identifying wildlife habitat concerns throughout Wyoming. The Wyoming State WHIP Plan is published as part of the Wyoming NRCS website, in lieu of a hard-copy document.

State objectives

The purpose of WHIP is to develop wildlife and fish habitat, with an emphasis on habitats of national and state significance and/or habitats experiencing decline or reduced populations.

Program priorities are based on recommendations from the Wyoming State Technical Committee. The State Technical Committee is made up of representatives from various producer groups, conservation organizations, agribusinesses, and federal, state, and tribal government agencies. The Wyoming Game and Fish are a very strong partner with NRCS in Wyoming.

The objective of WHIP is to enhance and restore aquatic and upland wildlife habitats that are of greatest concern. Specific objectives for WHIP in Wyoming are:

- Focus enhancement and restoration efforts in areas that will address critical habitat needs for wildlife in riparian areas, streams, wetlands, and uplands/grasslands with sagebrush, aspen, and mountain shrub communities.
- Emphasize wildlife habitat restoration and management that will directly benefit federally listed threatened and endangered species and state species of concern.
- Partnering with local, state, and federal wildlife organizations to improve the diversity of wildlife habitats and the restore these habitats where economically feasible.

National and State wildlife habitat priorities

The restoration and enhancement of native plant communities is the cornerstone of achieving diverse wildlife habitat. Special emphasis will be placed on wildlife habitats that serve multiple species and are critical to federally listed threatened and endangered species and state species of concern.

Riparian areas, streams, and wetlands

Funding will be directed toward projects that improve the quality of riparian habitats,

restore the woody component and increase standing residues, or provide stream restoration.

These projects benefit rare and declining species or species of concern, many species of neotropical birds, Willow flycatcher, Yellow-billed cuckoo, Trumpeter swan, several species of bats, Bald eagle, waterfowl, shorebirds, amphibians, as well as moose, deer, and elk. Fish species include, but are not limited to Yellowstone and Colorado River cutthroat trout, Roundtail chub, and Plains topminnow.

Practices will focus on: fencing with livestock management and off-site water developments, stream restoration, removal of barriers to fish movement, herbaceous or woody plantings, creation or enhancement of shallow water areas for wetland-dependent wildlife. Projects will focus on generating heterogeneity through these practices.

Upland habitat – Grasslands, Sagebrush, Aspen, Mountain shrub

Funding will be directed toward projects that restore and enhance the health and vigor of native grasslands, sagebrush, aspen, and mountain shrub communities through vegetation manipulation and grazing management.

These projects will benefit rare and declining species or species of concern, including but not limited to: Sage grouse, Pygmy rabbit, Brewer's sparrow, Sage thrasher, Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse, Ferruginous hawk, Mountain plover, McCowin's longspur, Long-billed curlew, Chestnut-colored longspur, Sprague's pipit, Baird's sparrow, Cassin's sparrow, Lark bunting, Sage sparrow, many species of bats and reptiles. Other target species benefiting are antelope, mule deer and elk.

Practices to be applied may include: shrub thickets, grass or legume seedings, water facilities such as guzzlers, brush management, aspen stand regeneration, fencing and livestock management, migration corridor restoration, water developments, and prescribed burnings. Because uniformity can be detrimental to grassland birds and other wildlife, projects will focus on generating diversity through these practices.

Partnership Involvement

The following partners are key to the cooperative conservation effort of WHIP in Wyoming:

Wyoming Game and Fish Department – Serve on State Technical Committee and Wildlife Subcommittee, help in developing some plans and cost sharing some projects. NRCS Wyoming currently has three Extension Habitat Biologists through a cooperative agreement with Wyoming Game and Fish. These positions are located in NRCS field offices where the biologists assist with planning and design of wildlife projects. US Fish and Wildlife Service – serve on State Technical Committee and Wildlife Subcommittee, help with outreach, and cooperate on some projects through the USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program.

Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust – (A trust fund established by the state which will provide grants to protect and restore wildlife and fish habitat in Wyoming) The Executive Director serves on State Technical Committee; we expect to cooperate on some projects.

Soil & Water Conservation Districts – reviewing WHIP plans, serve on Local Work Groups

Various wildlife groups serve on the State Technical Committee: Pheasants Forever, Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Trout Unlimited, and Environmental Defense.

State application ranking process and criteria.

The Wyoming WHIP Ranking Worksheet is posted on the Wyoming NRCS website (www.wy.nrcs.usda.gov).

The ranking criteria focus on the project objectives, practices to be applied, existing condition or need for improvement, conservation benefits, and the species targeted or benefited.

Criteria for measuring program success, performance goals, etc.

Performance will be measured through acres of 644 and 645 managed for systems and component practices installed for restoration and management of declining habitats, and for stream habitat, improvement and management.

The goal item for WHIP is: “Non-federal land managed for protection and enhancement of habitat for species with declining habitats.”

Program success will be determined through annual evaluation with our partners of projects funded and implemented. With the help of partners, success may also be measured by the extent of improvement for the target species, numbers of animals, and change in plant community.

The program is delivered through the NRCS field offices with review by the local work group. The allocation and selection process is managed at the state level.