

USDA-Wyoming Big Game Conservation Partnership



USDA is now accepting applications from Wyoming agricultural producers for assistance through the new Big Game Conservation Partnership. Signups are open for opportunities through the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** and **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**. Through this partnership with the State of Wyoming, USDA is investing additional, dedicated funds in Wyoming for big game conservation, adding additional staffing and streamlining processes for producers.

This year, NRCS is investing \$6 million in additional EQIP assistance and \$10 million through ACEP in Wyoming for big game conservation. EQIP focuses on integrating

practices on working lands, such as prescribed grazing systems and cheatgrass control. ACEP assists producers who want to protect sensitive landscapes and prime farmlands from conversion to non-compatible land uses such as residential subdivision through establishment of long-term conservation easements. Producers will also be able to sign up for a habitat lease through the Grassland CRP program in early 2023.

The pilot is open to producers in Wyoming statewide, but there are several priority areas where big game migrations are known to be prevalent, especially in Carbon, Hot Springs, Lincoln, Park, Sublette, Sweetwater, Fremont, and Teton counties.

How to Apply

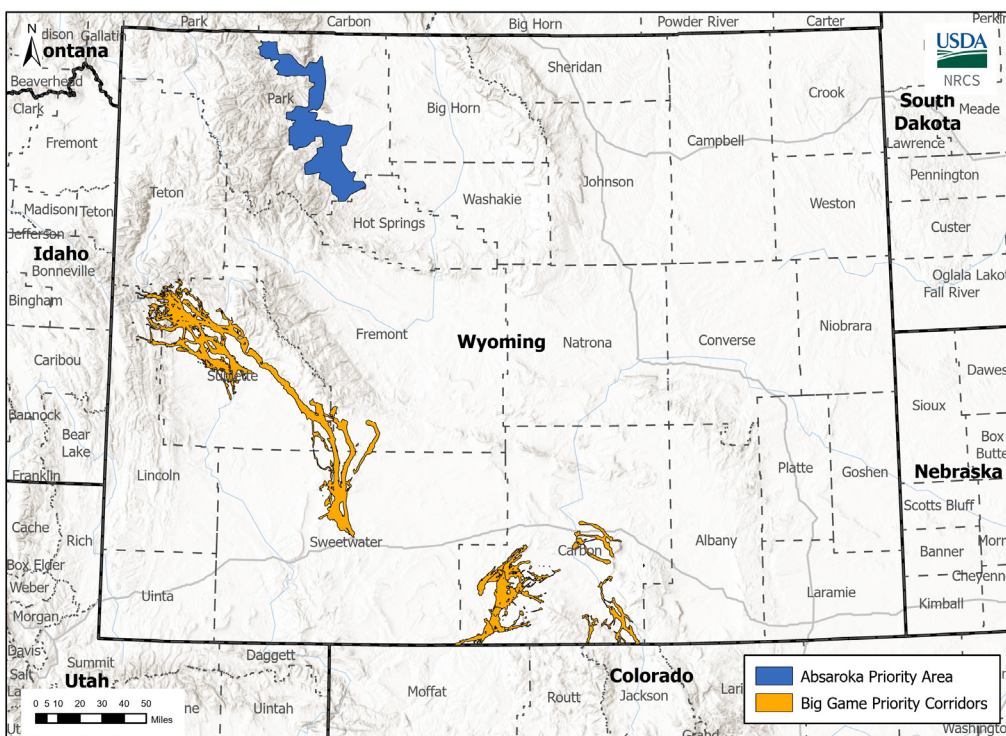
While NRCS accepts applications for programs on an ongoing basis, to be considered for the next funding cycles, producers should submit EQIP applications by:

EQIP
November 23, 2022

ACEP
November 23, 2022
and
January 18, 2023

To apply or learn more, producers should contact NRCS at their **local USDA Service Center** or see farmers.gov/conservation/wildlife/migration-pilot

Wyoming Big Game Habitat Priority Areas 2022





USDA is focusing on using voluntary and incentive-based programs to target assistance on the following:

- ♦ **Agricultural Land Protection:** NRCS is investing an additional \$10 million dollars in ACEP funding to use towards permanent conservation easements on important habitats within migration corridors.
- ♦ **Restoration, Enhancement, and Management:** NRCS is investing an additional \$6 million dollars in EQIP funding to prioritize practices that restore and manage habitats migrating big game need. Some examples include fence conversion, invasive species treatments, aspen regeneration, and wet meadow restoration.
- ♦ **Habitat Leases:** USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will utilize the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (G-CRP) to provide up to 15 years of development protection for other properties while still allowing other compatible uses.

Habitat Leasing through the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program

Following the EQIP and ACEP signups, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will offer a Habitat Lease through the FY23 Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup, which will provide another option for Wyoming ranchers and producers. FSA will announce signup dates soon. Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping producers and landowners to protect grassland over a 10- to 15-year contract while enabling haying and grazing activities to continue.

As part of this Habitat Lease pilot, USDA has developed special guidance that allows better compatibility between USDA programs, enabling producers to stack different Farm Bill program benefits in ways that fit their specific requirements.

Background

For decades, wildlife biologists have known that many large ungulate populations in Wyoming and throughout the West migrate from summer to winter range to optimize forage quality and decrease seasonal risks associated with certain habitats. In general, these big game migrations are from high-elevation summer habitats to lower elevation winter habitats. However, more recent GPS collar technology has allowed biologists to better understand the spatial and temporal extent of such migrations while also highlighting the risks that animals face during such migrations. It is now known that some species migrate seasonally up to 200 miles! The primary risks that have been identified for migratory big-game are: residential and industrial development, invasive species, fences unfriendly to wildlife passage, and roads/vehicle collisions.

