



# FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

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## Montana Pheasants Winter Cover Enhancement State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

### Authorization

In 2007 the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) unveiled a new initiative, State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), to improve habitat for high-priority wildlife species.

SAFE allows producers to install practices through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that benefit high priority State wildlife conservation objectives. The cooperative effort is based on locally developed conservation proposals that address the highest priority wildlife objects before the practices may be implemented. The practices must be used to address wildlife habitat that can be enhanced through the restoration of eligible cropland through CRP.

### Overview

Pheasant Winter Cover Enhancement SAFE project is a cooperative effort between the following agencies and organizations in Montana: USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, landowners and Pheasants Forever.

The purpose of the Pheasant Winter Cover Enhancement project is to:

- Provide blocks of grass and/or shrub cover for ring-necked pheasants and other upland birds near existing permanent winter cover;
- Improve habitat for ring-necked pheasants and other upland game birds near

- existing permanent winter cover;
- Expand habitat for ring-necked pheasants and other upland birds by converting eligible croplands to grassy cover;
- Improve water quality and reduce soil erosion within the project area.

### Project Area

In 2009 approximately 10,000 acres of cropland were enrolled in this project area to provide habitat specifically for ring-necked pheasants in Dawson, McCone, Richland, Roosevelt and Valley counties. Daniels County and Sheridan County have been added to this project area along with 3,000 acres. Each Daniels County and Sheridan County will receive a total of 1,500 acres.

### Requirements

Year round habitat requirements of the targeted species must be met. Acres enrolled must:

- Be at least 40 acres in size;
- Be located next to winter cover;
- Have available nest cover within 1.5 miles of winter cover;
- Include an area of at least 10 percent winter cover;
- Be evaluated to determine whether planting native shrub thickets is required if shrubby cover is determined to be a limiting feature in the surrounding landscape or for restoring native riparian habitat;

- Have a developed Wildlife Resource Management System;
- Be included in an approved conservation plan.

### Cropland Eligibility

Eligible cropland is cropland that has been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity during 4 of the 6 crop years from 2002 through 2007.

### Practices

The initial project enrolled 10,000 acres of cropland into introduced and native grasses, forbs and shrubs and restored wetlands. The additional acres in Daniels and Sheridan counties can now be enrolled in one of the SAFE practices listed below. This includes CRP acres in Daniels and Sheridan counties that expire September 30, 2012, or new land that meets the land eligibility requirements. The following specifically developed SAFE practices are eligible for enrollment:

- CP38E-CP1 – Introduced Grasses and Legumes
- CP38E-CP2 – Native Grasses
- CP38E-CP4D – Wildlife Habitat
- CP38E-CP12 – Wildlife Food Plot
- CP38B-CP23 – Wetland Restoration
- CP38B-CP23A – Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain

## **Conservation Plan and Planting Specification Review**

To meet expected goals of SAFE, conservation plans and planting specifications will be designed by, or in consultation with, a wildlife biologist and will require approval by a wildlife biologist.

Conservation plans and planting specifications will meet the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Technical Standards. Planting or sowing of the approved cover shall be completed within 12 months of the effective date of the contract.

### **Contract Duration**

Contracts will be between 10 and 15 years in duration.

### **Continuous Signup**

SAFE applications will be accepted throughout the year. Eligible SAFE applications can be approved by the local FSA County Committee. The contract is effective the first day of the month following the month it is approved by the local FSA County Committee. The effective date may be deferred up to 6 months.

### **Management Activities**

Management activities are site specific and are used to enhance the wildlife habitat and benefits for the site. Management activities must be completed before the end of year 6 for contracts with a 10 year contract length or before the end of year 9 for contracts with a 15 year contract length. Contract participants may receive up to 50 percent cost-share for completing management activities.

### **Project Acreage Limitation**

Producers within the Pheasant Winter Cover Enhancement SAFE area can submit offers to voluntarily enroll cropland in CRP contracts. The Pheasant Winter Cover Enhancement SAFE area now has 1,500 acres available in Daniels County and 1,500 acres available in Sheridan County.

## **Payments**

Participants are eligible for the following types of financial assistance:

- **Annual Rental Payments –**  
The per acre payment rate is calculated by using:
  1. The average of the rental rates for the 3 predominate soils of the eligible acres offered.
- **Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) –**  
Equal to \$10 per acre for each full year (Not to exceed 10 years) of the contract. The SIP payment will be issued after approval of the CRP contract. Re-enrolled acres are not eligible for SIP.
- **Cost-share –**  
Payment will be made up to 50 percent of the eligible cost of establishing a permanent cover and completing management activities.
- **Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) –**  
Equal to 40 percent of the total eligible cost to establish the practice. PIP is authorized for re-enrolled continuous signup practices only if new cost share is approved.

### **Maximum Annual Payment Limitation**

The maximum annual non-cost-share payments that an eligible entity or attributable limit can receive under CRP is \$50,000. Non-cost-share payments include Annual Rental Payments, Signing Incentive Payments (SIP) and Practice Incentive Payments (PIP).

### **Additional Cost-share Assistance –**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks may provide additional cost-share assistance for grass seed and/or shrub seedling costs.

## **Definitions of Terms**

**Nest Cover** – undisturbed grass-legume mixtures, hay fields (undisturbed during the primary nesting season) winter wheat, vegetated roadsides, ditch banks, and rangeland.

**Winter Cover** – Consists of cattail marshes, tall, stiff-stemmed grasses (i.e., basin wild rye, tall wheatgrass), shelterbelts, woody riparian cover, and areas of tall, rank weeds.

### **For More Information**

Additional information may be obtained at local FSA offices or through the Montana FSA Web site at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt>.

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