

GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM FY 2009 EASEMENT RANKING CRITERIA WORKSHEET

Participant's Name:	
County:	Application Date:
Land eligible for enrollment includes grassland and land containing forbs or shrubs for which grazing is the predominant use, provides habitat for animals or plant populations of significant ecological value, contains historical or archeological resources, is incidental land. (See 1415.5 land eligibility). There is no minimum acreage for enrollment. Land must be no closer than one (1) mile of development.	
<u>Type of GRP agreement offered: (Check one)</u> Easement: <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent	
Total acres offered: _____ acres NWSG acres to be established: _____ acres (NWSG = Native warm season grasses. Restored acres must be NWSGs) Estimated restoration costs: \$ _____ (Use FY2009 State Payment Schedule at the 50% rate) Estimated total costs \$ _____ (For easement offers use a per acre estimate of the fair market value for your county x total acres)	
EVALUATION CRITERIA	
A. THREATS TO CONVERSION	
1) Threat of Conversion – Non-Agricultural Uses	
Grassland adjacent within 1 mile, of planned, existing non-ag development, or in city limits (>10 acres) Yes = 15 points No = 0 points	
Grassland more than 1 mile, but within 5 miles, of planned or existing non-ag development (>10 acres) Yes = 10 points No = 0 points	
Grassland greater than 5 miles from planned or existing non-ag development (>10 acres) Yes = 5 points No = 0 points	Score A1
2) Threat of Conversion – Cultivation (Prime farmland or of statewide importance)	
> 75 % of offered acres Yes = 10 points No = 0 points	
51-74 % of offered acres Yes = 5 points No = 0 points	Score A2
3) Threat of Conversion – Trees	
Refer to guidance page for listed county points and score accordingly. Either 10 or 25 points. If your county is not listed, then score 0 points.	Score A3
4) Are you a historically underserved client? Yes = 10 points No = 0 points	Score A4
5) CRP priority enrollment for an easement Yes = 10 points No = 0 points	Score A5
6) For easement only will you accept a single payment upon closing? Yes = 5 points No = 0 points	Score A6
7) Does the offered acreage have gas, oil, earth, or other mineral rights leased or owned? Yes or No There are no points awarded for this question. It is information only.	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION A =	

B. BIODIVERSITY - Plant composition	
Native vegetation and Silvopasture Yes = 15 points	
Tall NWSG (native warm season grass) mixture with forbs &/or native legumes > 25% of total acreage cover Yes = 10 points	
* Single species tall native warm season grass Yes = 8 points	
* Tall NWSG (native warm season grass) mixture with forbs &/or native legumes @ least 10% of total acreage Yes = 5 points	
Combination of introduced and tall native warm season grass (>25% mixture) Yes = 5 points	
Introduced grass – clover stand Yes = 3 points	
Bahia Yes = 2 points	
Mixed introduced grasses or introduced grass monocultures (fescue, bermuda) Yes = 1 point	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION B =	
C. NON-CONVERSION CONSIDERATIONS	
1) Enrollment option selected by applicant. Weight is assigned to the option providing the greatest opportunity to meet the long-term objectives of the program.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Permanent Easement 15 points	
Score C1	
2) Proximity to other protected land	
Grassland adjacent to or within 1 mile of any other agricultural or forest land protected from development through an easement or other deed restriction. (List type of program or easement, example: WRP, FRPP, Heritage Trust Preserves, USFS Lands). <input type="checkbox"/> YES (10 points) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0 points)	
Score C2	
3) Cost effectiveness of GRP funds (for Permanent easements ONLY)	
TAX ASSESSED VALUE is less than \$2999 per Acre – 50 points	
TAX ASSESSED VALUE is \$3000 to \$3999 per Acre – 40 points	
TAX ASSESSED VALUE is \$4000 to \$4999 per Acre – 30 points	
TAX ASSESSED VALUE is greater than \$5000 per Acre – 20 points	
Score C3	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION C =	
D. GRAZING OPERATIONS	
1) Support of Grazing Operations	
75% of acres offered is being grazed 10 points	
< 75% of the acres offered is being grazed..... 5 points	
Not currently being grazed..... 0 points	
Score D1	
2) Grazing Management – A rotational grazing system is being followed that allows for a rest period between grazing events on individual pastures:	
Will the grassland being offered be a part of an existing grazing operation? If YES award 10 points	
Are the grazed acres currently being managed using a grazing management plan? If YES award 25 points	
(A program requirement is to have a grazing management plan in place prior to the closing for the life of the easement and/or the rental contract.)	
(No grazing = 0, grazing on existing operation = 10, grazing rotationally on existing operation = 35)	
Score D2	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION D =	

E. PLANNED WILDLIFE CONSIDERATIONS	
1) Essential habitat for wildlife 25% of offered area will be developed to NWSG mixture beneficial to at-risk species with habitat requirements met by grasslands. Benefits to the species will occur through development of a conservation plan that addresses habitat requirements for the identified animal or plant. Conservation plan will include Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) addressing essential habitat needs of identified species such as Bobwhite quail and other associated grassland birds. Yes = 10 points No = 0 points	
10% of offered area will be developed to NWSG mixture beneficial to at-risk species with habitat requirements met by grasslands. Benefits to species will occur through development of a conservation plan that addresses habitat requirements for the identified plant or animal. Conservation plan will include Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) addressing essential habitat needs of identified species such as Bobwhite quail and other associated grassland birds. Yes = 5 points No = 0 points	
0% of offered area will be developed to NWSG. No = 0 points	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION E	
F. COST-SHARE REQUIREMENTS	
1) Cost-share required for easement (restoration and enhancement practices, such as establishment of native warm season grass) No restoration cost share 15 points 50% cost share for restoration 0 points	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION F	
G. IS THE APPLICANT’S LAND IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING COUNTIES: Yes = 50 points No = 0 points Abbeville, Aiken, Anderson, Cherokee, Chester, Chesterfield, Edgefield, Fairfield, Greenville, Greenwood, Lancaster, Laurens, Lexington, McCormick, Newberry, Oconee, Pickens, Richland, Saluda, Spartanburg, Union, York	
TOTAL POINTS FOR SECTION G	
GRAND TOTAL OF POINTS (A+B+C+D+E+F=G) =	

This ranking criterion will enable the State Conservationist to prioritize proposals and easement offers and parcels that merit GRP enrollment. However, such ranking does not vest any right or entitlement to funding an applicant. All ranking worksheets will be field verified by State Office staff and points may be adjusted accordingly. The more documentation provided the faster the processing of applications.

Evaluation completed by:

District Conservationist’s Signature

Date

Applicant’s Signature

Date

State Office Technical Review

Date

GUIDANCE FOR RANKING FY 2009 GRP APPLICATIONS

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The use of the term *grassland* in this worksheet refers to land on which the vegetation is dominated by grasses, grass-like plants and/or forbs.

A. THREATS TO CONVERSION – The identified threats include non-agricultural uses, cultivation, and conversion to trees. If land is protected from conversion under a conservation easement or a Federal or State regulation, then points cannot be given for the affected acres.

1) *Threat to Conversion – Non-Agricultural Use*

Assign points in this category for land which is at risk of conversion due to its proximity to planned or existing non-ag development. The termed *planned* indicates tangible evidence of future conversion to a non-agricultural use. An example of this is a site zoned other than agricultural-forest uses.

2) *Threat to Conversion – Cultivation*

Assign points under this category based on the percent of the offered acres with soil map units designated as Prime farmland or of state wide importance. Cropland is not eligible for enrollment in the GRP. However, there are many acres of grassland that could be converted to cropland with minimal land treatment costs by the landholders.

3) *Threat to Conversion – Trees*

Assign points to offered acres that are located in counties that have been heavily impacted by the conversion of grasslands and other open areas to pine plantations. The incentive is to encourage the protection of grasslands for its biodiversity.

Award 25 points for the following counties: Abbeville, Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Berkeley, Chester, Chesterfield, Colleton, Dorchester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Georgetown, Hampton, Jasper, Kershaw, Lancaster, Laurens, McCormick, Marion, Marlboro, Newberry, Oconee, Pickens, and Union.

Award 10 points for the following counties: Beaufort, Calhoun, Charleston, Cherokee, Clarendon, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Greenwood, Lee, Orangeburg, Saluda, Sumter, Williamsburg, and York.

B. BIODIVERSITY – The criteria in this section will be used to further evaluate applications that enhance the biodiversity through protection of the grassland resource.

1) *Plant Composition*

Assign points in this category based on the existing plant community. The points are weighted in favor of the native herbaceous plant communities providing the greatest plant diversity. Tall Native Warm Season Grasses for GRP Purposes include but are not limited to Bluestems, Switchgrass, Indiangrass, etc

C. NON-CONVERSION EVALUATION CONSIDERATIONS - The criteria in this section will be used to further evaluate applications that provide the greatest support to existing grazing operations and enhance the biodiversity through protection of the grassland resource.

1) *Enrollment options selected by the applicant*

Assign points in this category based on the enrollment option selected by the participant. The points are weighted to the enrollment options providing the greatest long-term protection of the grassland resource.

2) *Proximity to other protected lands.*

Area enrolled in close proximity to other protected lands will be assigned points supporting efforts to prevent landscape fragmentation. This does not include utility, highway, or other rights of way, or restrictions required for development purposes.

3) *Cost effectiveness of GRP funds*

The Secretary determined that USDA can preserve far greater grassland resources if GRP focuses on non-urban lands. This determination was made based on concerns primarily resulting from the high costs of easements in urban areas.

D. GRAZING OPERATIONS

1) *Support of Grazing Operations*

CCC is required by statute to emphasize support of grazing operations. Assign points for acres offered that are currently being grazed. If the acreage is not currently supporting a grazing operation no points will be assigned.

2) *Grazing Management*

Livestock must be rotated a minimum of every 14 days to be considered “the rest period” and must be during the growing season of the predominate pasture specie. Points for the system are given based on all pastures in the system. Only pastures consisting of acres offered for GRP will be counted.

E. PLANNED WILDLIFE CONSIDERATIONS

1) *Essential habitat for wildlife*

Assign points when acres offered will be converted from an introduced forage species to a mixture of NWSG. Conservation plan will include facilitating and management practices supporting the needs of the grazing operation that will increase the value and function of the grassland for the targeted specie. Mowing and /or haying will be prohibited **June 15 through August 15** annually to protect ground nesting birds. This does not apply to introduced species such as fescue and the bermudas.

F. COST SHARE REQUIREMENTS

1) *Cost share required for easement*

Assign points for contracts based on the % of cost share requested at offer for all requests. Easements can include cost share for practices that restore, protect, or enhance the viability of the grassland.