

Developing a Grassland Habitat Management Plan

Once you have committed to managing your grassland for grassland bird habitat and you have signed the ***Grassland Habitat Stewardship Pledge***, staff at the Greene Land Trust will work with you to develop a Habitat Management Plan for your property. A Habitat Management Plan (HMP) is a written plan developed in partnership with the Greene Land Trust and the landowner to establish grassland management practices that you can voluntarily follow to maintain and/or improve your property's suitability for grassland bird habitat.

The HMP is site-specific and will most often require a site visit by Greene Land Trust staff. While walking the property and talking with you, the Greene Land Trust will identify grassland bird habitat conservation goals and recommended management practices with a suggested management schedule. As part of the HMP, an aerial photo and/or a map of the property will be provided as well, to help illustrate current conditions and management recommendations.

Every HMP will be unique and appropriate to the specific land use, as well as the goals and needs of the landowner. For example, some HMPs for smaller fields that are not actively used will be brief and focus on recommendations for bi-annual mowing and the need for no disturbance during the nesting season. HMPs developed for pastureland or actively farmed properties might involve more details such as a breakdown of mowing schedules for several separate fields on the property and suggestions for alternative farming techniques such as conservation tillage or field edge conservation. HMPs for properties that include wet meadows or other wetland areas will also include wetland management practices for the landowner to consider.

Although there is potential for wide variety, the format for the HMPs will generally be the same. The following is an example HMP for a landowner with an old field. It illustrates just one of many various types of Grassland Habitat Stewards that we hope to involve in the ***Community Grassland Stewardship Project***.

Example Grassland Habitat Management Plan

Community Grassland Stewardship Project Greene Land Trust

Grassland Habitat Management Plan

HMP # 32

Owner/Grassland Habitat Stewards: John and Jane Smith

Address/Phone/email: 333 Grassland Lane, Athens, NY

Date enrolled as Grassland Habitat Steward: August 10, 2010

Grassland acres under stewardship: 47

Purpose: The purpose of this grassland Habitat Management Plan is to provide the landowners named above recommendations for maintaining habitat suitable for populations of grassland birds on their property. The sections below provide a description of the grasslands on the property, a list of grassland birds that may use the property, and a description of actions recommended to provide habitat characteristics suitable for sustaining breeding populations of grassland birds that can be followed voluntarily by the landowner over time.

Current site description: The 47 acres of grassland owned by John and Jane Smith is predominately former farmland (pasture) with two patches of fairly uniform vegetation, separated by a treed hedgerow. The grasslands are currently providing suitable habitat for breeding grassland birds and winter habitat, but does contain some early shrub and sapling growth. No invasive upland grassland species have been found. The property includes a 4 acre wet meadow area on the southwest portion of the site dominated by purple loosestrife, which is an invasive plant that degrades habitat.

Current and planned land use: The landowners plan to continue using the grasslands for passive recreation purposes and do not foresee conflicts with their desired land use and the conservation goals for grassland birds. The landowners would like to consider converting much of their 5-acre lawn into grassland bird habitat to increase the acres in conservation and decrease their landscaping costs. The landowners have two dogs and a house cat.

Grassland birds: Grassland bird species that may be breeding on the property include Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Savannah Sparrow, and Eastern Bluebird. Additional species that may be breeding in the vicinity of the property, and may use the property for some habitat needs, include Northern Harrier, and Grasshopper Sparrow (standing water in the wet meadow area will be particularly attractive to the Northern Harrier).

Grassland Bird Habitat Conservation Goals: The overall management goals for this grassland property are:

- maintain the open, grassy conditions necessary for successful breeding by the grassland bird species mentioned above; and,
- leave the grassland area as undisturbed as possible during the breeding season (early May through late July) so as to encourage breeding success of grassland birds; and,
- enhance the grassland bird habitat where possible and practical.

Recommended habitat improvements: In order to maintain the grasslands in their current grassy state, remove small shrubs or saplings, and discourage the continued growth of woody shrubs and saplings, mowing the first year (after August 1st) and then again every 2-3 years will be necessary maintenance for grassland bird habitat. Attributes of the site that can be improved to further increase the suitability for grassland birds include the removal of the treed hedgerow between the two grassland areas and the control of invasive purple loosestrife in the wet meadow area. The landowners are also considering converting about 4 acres of turf lawn near their house into natural grasslands, which would further increase suitable habitat area. Additional habitat enhancements, such as keeping the family pets away from breeding areas, are suggested in the table below.

Commitment of the Grassland Habitat Steward landowner: As a Greene Land Trust “Grassland Habitat Steward”, the landowner pledges to voluntarily conserve and manage grasslands on his/her property to provide suitable habitat for grassland birds and other wildlife; keep disturbance of grasslands on his/her property to a minimum, when practical, especially during grassland bird nesting season (early May through late July); work in partnership with the GREENE LAND TRUST to develop a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for grasslands on his/her property and follow the HMP to the best of his/her ability; and to seek conservation assistance if needed. The landowner will also consider renewing his/her Stewardship Pledge with GREENE LAND TRUST once every five years.

Commitment of the Greene Land Trust: The staff of the Greene Land Trust are committed to supporting and assisting the Grassland Habitat Steward by providing helpful resources and assistance through the *Community Grassland Stewardship Project* and the landowner’s site-specific Habitat Management Plan. When resources allow, the Greene Land Trust will also provide assistance to the landowner with certain grassland management practices as designated in the table below.

Example Recommended Management Practices and Schedule

Schedule	Recommended management practice	Necessary for grassland bird habitat	Helpful to enhance habitat	GLT assist?
Year 1, then every 2-3 years	After August 1 st (to avoid the breeding season from early May to late July), mow or brush-hog grasslands the first year and then every 2-3 subsequent years to prevent establishment of woody vegetation.	X		X
Year 1	Post Grassland Habitat Steward property signs on property.		X	
Year 1, then every 2-3 years	Mow from center of field in a circular motion out toward the edge; birds and other wildlife will be more likely to flush away from the mower toward the safer outer edges.		X	X
Year 1	Consider removing hedgerows between fields to enlarge the visible habitat area for breeding birds. Treed hedgerows often are seen as “walls” by birds that cannot see beyond them to adjacent habitat and also provide corridors for nest predators.		X	X
Year 1	Install 4 bluebird nesting boxes (in pairs) scattered within grasslands.		X	X
Each year	Monitor grasslands for grassland birds and breeding behaviors and submit information to GLT (www.greenelandtrust.org).		X	
Each year	Keep house cat indoors. Consider putting a bell on cat’s collar in case it does go outdoors.	X		
Each year	Keep grassland area as undisturbed as possible during the nesting season (early May through late July). Quiet activities such as hiking or bird watching are ok, but loud, disruptive activities such as ATV use will be harmful to nesting birds.	X		
Year 2	For the control of Purple loosestrife in wet meadow area, consult with GLT or			X

	other environmental professional for control and treatment options. Reseed with wetland plants once treated.			
Year 2	For the lawn area to be converted to grasslands, allow conventional turf grass (lawn) to revert to grasslands by introducing a recommended seed mixture (see Guidebook, Appendix 6). The removal of turf may be necessary in some cases to establish desired grass mix.		X	
Year 2	To create a more “ordered” aesthetic around grasslands near the home, consider attractive, wildlife-friendly fencing and signage to communicate conservation purposes.		X	
Year 2	Consider electric fencing for dogs in order to keep them out of conservation areas when unsupervised.	X		
When desired	Keep in touch with GLT on your progress and success! We’d love to hear your Grassland Habitat Steward Story and see photos of birds and grasslands.			