



## Project Fact Sheet

# Community Grassland Stewardship Project

[www.greenelandtrust.org](http://www.greenelandtrust.org)



Grasslands, which include open fields, pasture and farmland, are rapidly being lost in Greene County due to development pressures and other factors. These open spaces that define the pastoral beauty of our communities, and provide habitat for at-risk grassland birds, are predominately in private ownership. The Greene Land Trust, through a grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program, has developed a **Community Grassland Stewardship Project** to engage and support the community and private landowners in conserving their open spaces as grasslands.

**Project area:** The project will build on the success of establishing the Cocksackie Creek Grassland Preserve (CCGP) and focus on conserving key grassland habitat in the corridor between Catskill and New Baltimore in eastern Greene County. With over 300 acres of grassland already preserved at the CCGP, the goal of this project is to expand suitable acres of grassland habitat by supporting the voluntary stewardship of over 500 additional acres in this area.

**Project approach:** The GLT will employ a two-pronged approach to promote and support community-based grassland conservation.

### ***I. Community Education and Involvement will include:***

- Community participation events such as Winter Owl Hikes and a Live Grassland Bird Show and Hike at the CCGP in the fall
- Presentations to municipal officials and planning boards
- Working with schools and summer programs to involve students
- News articles in the local press
- Interpretive signs about grasslands to be posted at accessible locations near grasslands around the community
- Grasslands Stewardship brochure and website

### ***II. Grassland Landowner Stewardship will include:***

- Developing "Conserving Greene County Grassland Habitat: A Landowner's Guide" to provide landowners with grasslands information, recommended management practices and resources.
- "Grassland Stewards" program: after signing a voluntary "Grassland Stewardship Pledge", eligible landowners will receive various incentives and support from GLT such as property signage, property-specific grasslands Habitat Management Plan, and management assistance.



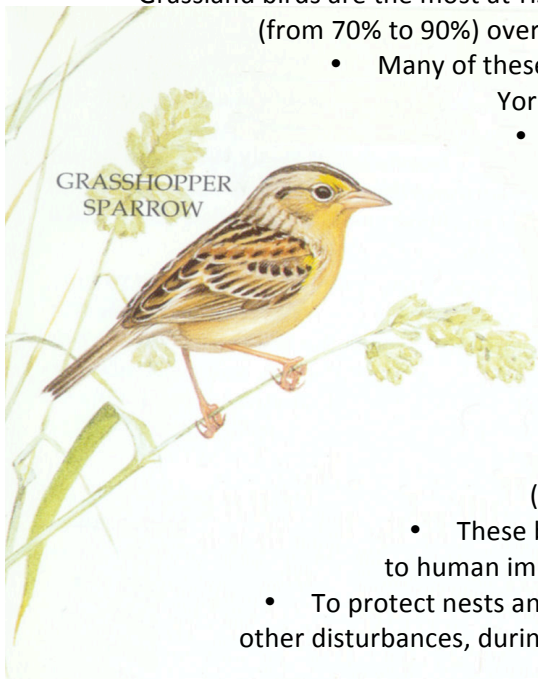
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**Grassland Facts:** Most landowners are familiar with common natural areas such as forests, marshes or meadows, but what exactly is a “grassland”?

- A grassland is a natural area dominated by grassy vegetation with almost no shrubs or trees.
- Grasslands can be found in a variety of landscapes including old fields, hayfields, pasture, or farmland; open fields can often be restored to grasslands.
- Because a grassland in the northeast would naturally become a forest over time if left alone, it requires periodic management such as mowing or light grazing to regularly discourage the natural growth of woody plants and weeds.
- Grassland birds need grasslands to remain in this “early successional” state in order to successfully complete their breeding cycles, rear young and carry out most of their life cycle functions.

**Grassland birds at-risk:** In addition to conserving grasslands as open space in our communities, GLT’s Community Grassland Stewardship Project aims to protect a suite of grassland-dependent birds that use grasslands for some or all of their life-cycle needs.

- Grassland birds are the most at-risk group of birds in the United States, experiencing significant declines (from 70% to 90%) over the past 40 years.
  - Many of these birds are listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern in New York State.
  - Eastern Greene County is one of the few places in the Hudson Valley where viable grasslands still remain.



**Unique Habitat Needs of Grassland Birds:** Habitat includes all of the life cycle needs for a living thing to survive, including food, water, shelter or refuge. Grassland birds have specific and unique habitat needs:

- They are considered habitat “specialists” and can only live in environments dominated by grasses.
- Many species of grassland birds are “area-sensitive”, meaning that they require large expanses of connected grasslands to survive (the Short-eared Owl needs 100-250 acres of habitat).
- These birds nest on the ground, not in trees, making their nests very vulnerable to human impacts.
- To protect nests and young, landowners should refrain from mowing grasslands, or creating other disturbances, during the nesting season (early May through late July).

#### At-risk Grassland Birds of Greene County :

Northern Harrier (threatened)  
Upland Sandpiper (threatened)  
Short-eared Owl (endangered)  
Grasshopper Sparrow (special concern)  
Bobolink  
Horned Lark (special concern)  
Eastern Meadowlark  
Savannah Sparrow  
American Kestrel  
Snow bunting  
Lapland longspur  
American Pipit  
Eastern Bluebird

**This project is a cooperative effort of many partners:**



NYSDEC Region Four  
Division of Wildlife



NYSDEC Hudson River  
Estuary Program



Greene County Soil & Water  
Habitat Advisory Committee



Greene County Industrial  
Development Agency



Northern Catskills  
Audubon

Greene Land Trust

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