

The North American Grasslands Conservation Act now Introduced in The U.S. House of Representatives

Bill supports the protection of America's grasslands and shrub-steppe ecosystems

October 9, 2024 – Washington, D.C. – Today, the North American Grasslands Conservation Act was introduced in the House of Representatives by U.S. Representatives [Nancy Mace](#) (R – S.C.), [Sharice Davids](#) (D – Kan.), [Brian Fitzpatrick](#) (R – Penn.) and [Mike Thompson](#) (D – Calif.). Once passed, the legislation will be one of the most significant steps for grassland conservation efforts in the 21st century.

More than 70 percent of America's tallgrass, mixed grass, and shortgrass prairies have vanished, followed by the precipitous decline of grassland bird populations – more than 40 percent since 1966. Additionally, grazing lands that have sustained generations of ranchers are dwindling and species from bobwhite quail and pheasants to monarch butterflies and elk to are struggling to navigate landscapes they used to call home.

The Grasslands Act would kickstart the voluntary protection and restoration of grasslands and sagebrush shrub-steppe ecosystems – and the livelihoods and wildlife dependent upon them. Functionally, the legislation is modeled after the successful North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and would create a landowner-driven, voluntary, incentive-based program to conserve America's critically imperiled grasslands. There's urgency to maintain these grassland biomes for agriculture, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and for future generations while supporting ranchers, farmers, Tribal Nations, sportsmen and women and rural communities.

The concept of a Grasslands Act was first introduced in the U.S. Senate during the 117th Congress, led by Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Michael Bennet (D-Colo.). This new U.S. House version has some key changes aligning it more closely with NAWCA, improving tribal provisions, and making it more bipartisan.

“The United States has over 125 million acres of grasslands that are threatened, and right here in South Carolina, we see firsthand how important conservation is to the health and beauty of our natural ecosystems,” Mace said. “Our office has made a promise to preserve this beauty, not just for today but for future generations.”

“In Kansas, we have grassland prairies that are well known throughout the Great Plains for their beautiful landscapes and scenic hiking trails, but grasslands once covered millions of acres across North America, stretching from coast to coast,” Davids said. “Grasslands are vital to ranchers and producers, Tribes, and folks who love spending time outdoors. They're critical habitat for countless species of birds, important pollinators, and treasured animals like the bison. And, they're crucial to fighting the effects of climate change, bolstering our food security, and combatting extreme weather. I'm excited for this opportunity to highlight the protection of our grasslands and bipartisan solutions that build off of successful public-private partnerships.”

“Grasslands are vital to the livelihoods of our nation’s ranchers and the health of our native wildlife — yet they remain endangered. It’s great to join my colleagues to introduce the bipartisan North American Grasslands Conservation Act to invest in voluntary, incentive-based programs to help farmers, ranchers, Tribal Nations, sportsmen and women, and state and local governments preserve, rehabilitate, and responsibly manage our grasslands for generations to come,” Thompson said.

“Grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems in the world, with over 70 percent of America’s tallgrass, mixed grass, and shortgrass prairies now gone,” Fitzpatrick said. “Our grasslands are vital for the survival of farmers and rural communities across Pennsylvania and our nation, which is why I am championing this critical piece of bipartisan, bicameral legislation. By establishing a landowner-driven, incentive-based program and investing in restoration programs, the North American Grasslands Conservation Act will protect essential habitats that support our American farmers, ranchers, and Tribal Nations and revitalize these critical ecosystems, ensuring they continue to sustain wildlife and rural communities for generations to come.”

More than 45 organizations are collaborating in support of the Grasslands Act. A full roster of those groups can be found at www.ActforGrasslands.org. Additionally, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has partnered with the coalition to develop the www.MapForGrasslands.org website, which provides a powerful tool to visualize the loss of grasslands habitat.

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