

Conservation Easements and Leases Mitigate Potential Losses of Grassland Birds in Montana

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The primary aim of the Grassland Initiative Project pursued by FWP from 2017-2022 was to work towards stemming declines of grassland species through preservation of existing grassland habitat. Through these efforts, FWP has increased conserved grassland by approximately 10% statewide. Functionally, this strategy works to reduce further decline of wildlife populations through prevention of potential habitat loss, an outcome that, because it is avoided, is more effectively modeled than observed. We are modelling population loss of grassland bird species of conservation concern that has been theoretically mitigated through implementation of grassland conservation easements in Montana by manipulating land cover values in habitat-based bird density models. For the first study species, Sprague's pipits, models indicate a particular mitigation effect of conserved grassland along the Rocky Mountain front and near Glasgow. We will present findings that integrate the risk of grassland conversion into the models and expansion to additional species.