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HEART MOUNTAIN GRASSBANK ADVISORY GROUP OPERATING PRINCIPLES
Draft document. July 2002

I. Name: The name of the group shall be Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group

II. Goal of Grassbank: Maintaining open space, wildlife species and their habitats, and natural communities and ecological processes within the Eastern Absaroka Landscape by providing an alternate forage base that affords land management flexibility and economic opportunity.

III. Context/Area of Effectiveness: Eastern Absaroka Landscape

The Eastern Absaroka Landscape encompasses over three million acres along the eastern flank of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. It takes in the eastern slope and adjacent lowlands of the Absaroka Range from its northern tip on the Wyoming/Montana border south to the Owl Creek Range near Thermopolis, Wyoming. Four major watersheds dominate the landscape: the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River, the North and South Forks of the Shoshone River, and the Greybull River.

IV. Purpose of Grassbank Advisory Group: To advise The Nature Conservancy on the operation and management of Heart Mountain Ranch Grassbank and on the selection of participants.

V. Membership: Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group shall be open to membership by interested parties in the community, but shall reflect participation from the following: business/economic expertise, range/riparian/wildlife management expertise, ranching community, The Nature Conservancy, and the community at large

VI. Officers: There shall be two co-chairs, rotating annually. The duties of the co-chairs shall be to call and run the meetings.

VII. Meetings: Meetings shall be semi-annual, at the call of the co-chairs, with one meeting being in the fall.

VIII. Committees:

A) The Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group shall appoint a Selection Committee for the purpose of evaluating project/grazing applications. The Selection Committee shall be guided by the following:

1. Shall be composed of at least **5** members appointed by Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group. One vote per member.
2. Of those members, one will be designated Chairperson – to be elected by the members of the Selection Committee.

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3. The Selection Committee may meet at will. They shall make recommendations to the Heart Mountain Advisory Group, who will evaluate and make recommendations to The Nature Conservancy.
4. Selection Committee members shall serve for 3 years. The first set of Selection Committee members will have 1 member serve 1 year to be replaced the following year by a new member to serve 3 years, 1 member serve 2 years to be replaced 2 years later with a new member to serve 3 years. The rest (whether it be 1 or more members) shall serve 3 years. This allows for staggered terms for at least 2 members. The Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group may reappoint a member for an additional term.
5. The members shall represent the following skills and interest groups:
 - a. financial/economic expertise
 - b. range/riparian/wildlife management expertise
 - c. ranching (e.g., a rancher serving on the Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group)
 - d. The Nature Conservancy (e.g., a TNC employee)
 - e. the community at large (e.g., a member who is not a rancher or designated specialist)
6. Any committee member up for grassbank consideration cannot vote on his or her approval. If a committee member requests to participate in the grassbank, he or she shall withdraw from voting and from participation in the decision making for that parcel. The remaining committee members shall vote.
7. A deadlock on an even vote shall be broken by the vote of the Chairperson of the Selection Committee. If the Chairperson has a conflict, the remaining members shall appoint a Chairperson from among them.

B) Other committees may be appointed as needed by the Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group

IX. Proposal Evaluation/Participant Selection:

The Sub-Committee will select grassbank participants based on achieving the greatest possible conservation benefit. In order to improve the long-term ecological and economic health of the Eastern Absarokas, the Sub-Committee intends for the grassbank to produce tangible, lasting results in the following areas:

- Maintenance/improvement of range, riparian, wetland, and forest condition/health
- Abatement of noxious weed threat
- Maintenance of healthy wildlife populations
- Economic stability of ranching operations
- Minimizing fragmentation of habitat or conversion of habitat through sodbusting, subdivision, or inappropriate development.
- Maintenance of healthy fire regimes

Proposals submitted by potential participants will be judged on the conservation benefits offered for these and other conservation values. Grassbank participants should:

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- Demonstrate commitment to the goals and principles of the Heart Mountain Grassbank Advisory Group
- Demonstrate conservation benefits achieved by use of grassbank and their duration.
- Demonstrate sound management of the base property, including an appropriate monitoring plan.

The selection committee will use the following selection criteria in evaluating proposals:

- Ecological benefit gained
- Urgency of threat
- Land management plan in place and being followed. Preference for current monitoring
- Commitment to future monitoring
- Timeline/turnover
- Leverage
- Need
- Capacity to pay grassbank fees and associated costs
- Landowner willing to participate

X. Monitoring:

Monitoring protocol would be specific to each project depending on targets and objectives, but in general the guidelines would include:

- Photos. Pre and post treatment
- Acres affected
- Production. Pre and post vegetative, wildlife numbers etc.
- Diversity
- Plan for future monitoring
- Ecological benefits i.e., water quality, water temperature, sediment load etc.

XI. Disclaimer: (Members of this advisory group shall not be bound financially....Members serve at their own pleasure...will suffer no liability etc.) Laura will acquire draft language for meeting.

XII. Ammendments:

(See following page)

Example of Rocky Mt. Front Selection Worksheet:

The following evaluation worksheet will help guide the Sub-Committee’s evaluation process. Worksheet scores may be qualitative or quantitative. For each finalist’s proposal, the Sub-Committee will produce a written record of reasoning behind scores given and a summary narrative describing the conservation values of the proposal and reasons for selection or rejection of the proposal. The committee may visit the base property as part of its evaluation process and may solicit additional input from other sources as necessary.

The worksheet is not magic and will not automatically select the best participant. It is intended to help the committee summarize and compare proposals, but is no substitute for the committee’s best judgement. The grassbank committee is not bound by some abstract worksheet over common sense. The committee has the freedom and responsibility to be creative and innovative when selecting grassbank participants in order to produce the greatest conservation benefit.

Proposal Evaluation Worksheet

To fill out the worksheet, the conservation benefits offered in the proposal are listed on the left and then scored in each category listed on the right. Scores are low, medium, high, very high (or a numeric scale if desired).

Value of Proposed Conservation Benefits

Benefit Offered	Ecological Value	Economic Value	Quantity	Duration	Threat/Risk	Need	Other

- **Ecological value**—relates to the character of the base property in addition to the improvements proposed.
- **Economic value**—relates to how the proposed benefit improves the economic health of the participant's operation as well as the community at large
- **Quantity**—how “big” is the proposed benefit?—acreage, AUMS’s, etc.
- **Duration**—how long will the proposed benefit last?
- **Threat/Risk**—what is the urgency of conducting the proposed benefit?
- **Need**—is use of grassbank necessary to achieve these conservation benefits?
- **Other**—other considerations (visibility/public relations value, leverage value, etc.)

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Contribution of Proposed Conservation Benefits to Improvement of the Health of the Front

Benefit Offered	Range	Riparian	Weeds	Fire	Economics	Development/ Fragmentation	Wildlife

- At what level does each proposed benefit contribute to the improvement of each category?