

GUIDELINES FOR GRASSBANK OPERATION AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

(Revised 14 January 2002)

Goal of Grassbank:

The goal of the grassbank project is to perpetuate the biological and cultural heritage of the Rocky Mountain Front through improvement of the ecological, economic, and community health of the Front. The grassbank does this by trading forage for conservation action.

Grassbank Management Sub-Committee Composition:

1. Shall be composed of at least **5** members appointed by Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee. One vote per member.
2. Of those members, one will be designated Chairperson – to be elected by the 5 member Sub-Committee.
3. Sub-Committee members shall serve for 3 years. The first set of Sub-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 Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee may reappoint a member for an additional term.
4. 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 Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee)
 - 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)
5. 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.
6. A deadlock on an even vote shall be broken by the vote of the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee. If the Chairperson has a conflict, the remaining members shall appoint a Chairperson from among them.

General Procedure for Determining Who Gets to Use the Grassbank: When a parcel becomes available, the Grassbank Management Sub-Committee shall:

1. Be responsible for the development of a sound management plan for the grassbank. This plan will address, among other things, range and riparian condition, weeds, wildlife, property infrastructure and capital needs, monitoring, and suggested stocking rates.

2. Based on the management plan, the Sub-Committee shall develop a written list of conditions for participation and a proposed Grassbank lease to present to potential users.
3. The Sub-Committee shall publicize the availability of the grassbank and the deadline for written notification to the Committee of a participant's desire to participate in the grassbank.
4. Prospective participants must, by the specific deadline for response, notify the Sub-Committee Chairperson in writing of their desire to bid on the grassbank. Persons who fail to respond by the deadline shall not be considered.
5. The Sub-Committee shall send a prospectus and application form to those who have responded; and, upon return of the application forms by the specified deadline for response, the Sub-Committee shall select finalists. The Sub-Committee shall ask each finalist to submit a written, detailed proposal by a specific deadline.
6. The Sub-Committee, guided by its judgement and selection worksheet, shall by a designated deadline, select the preferred participant and notify by certified mail, return receipt requested, that person of his or her selection. The selected participant shall have Ten (10) days from date of receipt of notification of selection, to accept or reject the grassbank project.
7. The Sub-Committee and the selected participant (s) shall then execute the necessary lease agreements, documents, and complete tasks necessary to put the grassbank into effect.

Some Guidelines for the Grassbank Property Management Plan:

1. The management plan should address at least the following areas:
 - Processes: weeds, grazing, fire
 - Current and desired condition: range, riparian/wetland, forest, wildlife, other
 - Monitoring: range, riparian/wetland, weeds, other
 - Infrastructure: maintenance, replacement, development
 - Operating costs: short and long term
 - Needs and wishes of the owner
 - Other issues: water, taxes, owner desires, recreational access
2. The plan should set the range of options for grazing use, and should include recommendations for stocking rates, rotations, season of use, long-range infrastructure development/changes, and fire management. It must allow sufficient flexibility to deal with variation in weather and forage conditions.
3. The plan should address who conducts and pays for each management action; i.e., monitoring, weed control and prevention, infrastructure maintenance. Involvement of appropriate experts important.
4. The fee per AUM assessed by the grassbank should at least cover the overhead and management (taxes, infrastructure, monitoring) and capital needs of the property not otherwise provided by the grassbank participant.
5. The Grassbank program is intended to promote wise management of ranch lands in conjunction with the short- and long-term goals established by Grassbank Management Sub-Committee of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee.

6. The Grassbank is not intended be a “subsidized” lease for participants; however, the Sub-Committee may offer forage in exchange for management services or conservation values or actions, thereby reducing lease fees for the participant.
7. Participants must be willing to enter and abide by the conservation principles and the terms of the agreement.
8. Geographic proximity to the grassbank will likely have some bearing on participant selection, since closer participants will likely be able to better care for the grassbank property and have better local knowledge.

Proposal Evaluation/Participant Selection:

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

- Abatement of noxious weed threat
- Economic stability of ranching operations
- Minimize fragmentation of habitat or conversion of habitat through sodbusting, subdivision, or inappropriate development.
- Maintenance/improvement of range, riparian, wetland, and forest condition/health
- Healthy wildlife populations especially T&E species like grizzly bears and cutthroat
- 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:

- Demonstrate commitment to the goals and principles of the Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Committee.
- Demonstrate conservation benefits achieved by use of grassbank and their duration.
- Demonstrate sound management of the base property, including an appropriate monitoring plan.
- Be willing to participate in the evaluation/adaptation of the management plan for the grassbank property.

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.)

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?

Some Other Legal Issues Relating to Grassbank Lease:

1. Who pays for maintenance and replacement of fences, improvements.
2. Insurance? How much and what type.
3. Who does all the paperwork/legal work
4. Who does the monitoring of the lease
5. What about access for study/review/public/recreation/etc.
6. How do you settle disputes – should there be a “Dispute Resolution Committee” to handle disputes. Attorney allowed or not allowed? Appeal?
7. Minimum term of participation?
8. What are the damages if someone violates?
9. Default provisions?
10. Death, disaster, etc.?
11. Lien on Cattle or other assets to secure payment?
12. Video the participant’s base property and the grassbank property at the beginning of the term and at the end.
13. Who monitors conservation values of base property?
14. If a participant does not meet the requirements of the grassbank then what? Is there a cost they agree to in the lease agreement? What is the Sub-Committee's financial recourse?
15. Participants must submit an annual monitoring report for the base property.

SOMEONE NEEDS TO:

1. Develop a standard form, short-term conservation agreement
2. Develop a standard form, perpetual conservation easement
3. Develop management plan template for grassbank and base property management plans.
4. Develop an “application form” for soliciting proposals for participation
5. Develop an “agreement” form for a participant to state in writing his/her commitment to minimum conservation practices on his/her base property prior to being eligible for participation.