



# Texas Coastal Grassland Restoration Incentive Program Assessment

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Figure 1. C-GRIP partners and the roles they fulfill.

## Introduction

There are millions of acres of grasslands in the United States that provide vital habitat for wildlife, plants, livelihoods, and a wide range of benefits for environmental and human health. Grasslands are also among the most threatened landscapes and are disappearing and deteriorating at an alarming rate, with an estimated 2 million acres lost annually (1). This widespread habitat loss has led to steep declines in native grassland bird populations, with 74% of grassland bird species populations experiencing declines, more than in any other biome (2).

For more than 40 years grassland bird populations on the Texas coast have been steadily declining. There are many factors that contribute to these population declines, but the primary cause is the loss of available habitat needed to sustain these species. Conversion of native grasses to introduced pasture, overgrazing, suppression of fire, and brush encroachment have all had a significant impact on the ability of Texas grasslands to provide for the needs of grassland bird species.

Efforts to improve the state of grasslands are multifaceted. Some key actions involve working with private landowners to encourage and support their efforts to improve habitat for these grassland birds on the lands they own and manage. Incentive programs are one strategy designed to encourage landowners, agricultural producers, ranchers, and others to restore and conserve grassland ecosystems. These programs often provide financial assistance, technical support, and other resources to help implement practices that promote the recovery of native grasslands, enhance biodiversity, and improve ecological health. Many of these incentive programs focus on protecting, conserving, and restoring habitats for wildlife.

### Texas Coastal Grasslands Restoration Incentive Program

In 2018, the Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCJV) initiated the Coastal Grassland Restoration Incentive Program (C-GRIP) in central coastal Texas. The program aims to restore and enhance coastal grasslands, providing critical habitats for birds. It offers financial incentives to landowners and managers implementing habitat restoration and conservation practices, such as controlling invasive species, replanting native grasses, and applying land management techniques that improve suitability of grassland bird habitat.

Modeled after the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and other similar programs, C-GRIP reimburses private landowners for specific practices, including brush management, prescribed burning, native grass reseeding, and prescribed grazing. The program has gained popularity with Texas Mid-Coast landowners, resulting in over 60 projects covering 60,000 acres of improved grassland bird habitat on private lands.

The success of incentive programs like C-GRIP depend on effective enrollment and positive landowner experiences. Project managers play a key role in these areas. Their responsibilities include contacting and enrolling landowners and then working collaboratively with them on project proposal development, project guidance, and verification of project completion. Any natural resource professional that is an employee of a GCJV Management Board organization or other partner organization may be a project manager for the Texas C-GRIP (see figure 1). Proposals for C-GRIP must meet eligibility requirements, such as being on private land, located in a C-GRIP focal area, encompassing at least 25 acres, and maintaining practices for five years post-completion.

## C-GRIP Assessment

Five years into the program, GCJV staff initiated a collaborative social science effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Southwest Region Science Applications Program and the Texas Mid-Coast Initiative Team. The overall goal of this effort is to increase enrollment in the C-GRIP in Texas, thereby increasing suitable habitat for grassland birds. Using a participatory process that engaged C-GRIP project managers and Texas Mid-Coast Initiative partners, we aimed to assess how C-GRIP is working, learn from successes, identify challenges and project managers' needs, and maximize efforts in C-GRIP's focal areas.

The big-picture questions for this effort were:

- What are the experiences of Texas C-GRIP practitioners?
- What factors influence the likelihood of landowner enrollment in the Texas focal areas?
- What is needed to improve C-GRIP enrollment?

### *Phase 1 – Interviews with C-GRIP project managers*

Given the critical role that project managers play in the delivery of the C-GRIP, this phase aimed to understand how the program is working from their perspective by conducting one-on-one virtual interviews.

### *Phase 2 – In-person meeting with Texas Mid-Coast Initiative Team*

Phase 2 involved engagement of the full Texas Mid-Coast Initiative Team at their in-person June 2024 meeting. At the meeting, we presented the results of the interviews, discussed the implications, and together identified opportunities to improve on the implementation of C-GRIP.

The methods and summaries of the input from phase 1 and phase 2 are presented in the next two sections, followed by discussion and conclusions.

## Project Manager interviews

### Methods

We conducted interviews with C-GRIP project managers from November 2023 to February 2024. Most of the interviews were on Teams with video and audio, one was Teams audio only and one interview was by phone. We did not use audio or video recording, relying only on notetaking to capture the content.

We used a semi-structured approach to conduct the interviews. Our interview guide had several pre-determined questions of interest, and we used probing questions to follow up on interesting points that we wanted to explore in more depth. Our predetermined questions were:

- In your current position, how are you engaged with C-GRIP?
- What strategies and approaches do you employ to enroll landowners?
- In your C-GRIP work, what is going well?
- In your C-GRIP work, what is challenging or difficult?
- Who enrolls in C-GRIP currently? Why?
- Who doesn't enroll in C-GRIP? Why?
- From your perspective, what factors most influence the likelihood of enrollment in C-GRIP?
- What could C-GRIP practitioners design together to increase enrollment?
- Do you track contacts with landowners and enrollments?

## Interview Results

Eight project managers participated in one-on-one interviews. Two potential participants declined to participate based on their minimal involvement with C-GRIP. Interview length ranged from 27 to 60 minutes, with an average time of 42 minutes. Participants represented state and federal agencies (4), national and state conservation non-profits (3), and a trade association (1).

Project managers for C-GRIP are involved in work with landowners more broadly. In general, they described connecting with interested landowners and working with them to identify their needs and interests and understand the potential for habitat restoration or protection measures on their land. All paired landowners with multiple habitat conservation incentive or reward programs, not just C-GRIP. Incentive programs focus on encouraging future actions with financial or technical support, while rewards focus on compensating past conservation efforts. At the time of the interviews, the number of projects per individual project manager ranged from 1 to 21 and the average was 7.

Overall, project managers' sentiments about the Texas C-GRIP were positive. Project managers appreciate the collaborative approach it fosters between project managers and landowners, highlighting its potential to promote effective conservation practices. The program is seen as beneficial for restoring crucial habitats and enhancing ecosystem services. Summaries of responses for each area of inquiry with descriptions of themes follow.

### *What strategies and approaches do you employ to enroll landowners?*

The main sentiments emphasized the importance of building personal connections and trust with landowners through direct communication and relationships within the community. Relying on word-of-mouth and in-person visits helps establish rapport, while honesty and transparency about conservation programs foster credibility. Many of the project managers were members of the communities or had worked on conservation in the area for a long time. One participant mentioned that they tried cold calling landowners in the past, but that was never a successful approach, adding, "and rightfully so, it sounds like a scam." The main themes to emerge were:

**Building relationships:** Making personal connections: with landowners through phone calls, meetings, and working on conservation projects. Know the landowners in the area or know someone who knows the landowner.

**Community involvement:** Being a member of the community and establishing trust.

**Word-of-mouth:** Relying on reputation—individuals' and organizations'—and referrals to connect with potential landowners.

**Targeted visits:** Face-to-face visits with landowners in focal area and in other specific areas, where trying to achieve habitat/population targets.

**Honesty and transparency:** Clearly communicating the benefits and potential drawbacks of each program.

**Workshops and seminars:** Workshops and seminars on topics relevant to landowners and managers serve as effective platforms for sharing information about programs like C-GRIP and allow landowners to ask questions. Typically, subjects such as grazing and brush control attract more landowners than those focused on prescribed fire.

**Be an asset:** Being an asset to landowners and managers supports other strategies, like fostering relationships and building a positive reputation that spreads through word-of-mouth. This can include assistance with mapping landowners' properties and providing or connecting them to professional technical assistance or information on topics such as fire management, seed availability for planting, and strategies for addressing wildlife-related issues.

**Partnerships:** Collaborating with other government agencies like Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, NRCS, Grazing Lands Coalition, and others. Partnerships offer opportunities to share information about landowner interactions or habitat management treatments that are successful.

*In your C-GRIP work, what is going well?*

Project managers value C-GRIP and view it as a useful tool with a lot of attractive features. They described how the program is going well due to its straightforward application process and minimal paperwork, which makes participation easy for them and for landowners. Staff responsiveness enhances satisfaction, while quick turnaround times and flexible solutions help address challenges effectively. Project managers also believe that landowners appreciate the program's benefits, including efficient payments and cost-sharing options. The main themes to emerge were:

**Easy to apply:** The application process is straightforward and less overwhelming compared to other programs.

**Simplicity:** The simplicity of the program overall is highly appreciated. It requires minimal paperwork, making it less cumbersome.

**Responsive staff:** The C-GRIP coordinator is easy to reach, very responsive, and has extensive knowledge of the program which facilitates problem solving and navigation of challenges.

**Efficient processes:** The review process for project applications is quick, with feedback provided in a couple of weeks and the payments to landowners are also processed quickly, particularly in comparison to other incentive programs, which is a significant advantage.

**Flexibility:** The program is flexible and the GCJV staff are willing to adjust and have addressed most barriers and challenges

**Cost share:** The cost share on fire and herbicide is beneficial.

**Positive feedback from landowners:** Landowners seem very pleased with the program.

**Not highly competitive:** As a newer program, there is less competition for enrollment.

*In your C-GRIP work, what is challenging or difficult?*

Project managers identified a few big-picture challenges for C-GRIP work and brought up several challenges related to technical aspects of program administration. Some of the challenges related to program administration represented misunderstandings about program details, highlighting the need for better communication with project managers from C-GRIP coordination staff.

The big-picture challenges identified were:

**Limited interest:** There aren't many landowners whose objective is habitat improvement.

**Limited awareness:** Not all potential beneficiaries are aware of the program.

**Communication and outreach:** There is a need for better promotion of the program.

The following challenges concern the technical aspects of program administration. We present these challenges as expressed by the project managers to maintain fidelity to their contributions, however, we also provide clarifications from GCJV staff where appropriate to prevent any confusion and address potential misunderstandings.

**Geographical limitations:** The program is limited to specific geographic areas, not allowing for projects to be implemented in good habitat zones outside of these areas.

*GCJV: The focal areas where C-GRIP operates were identified by the Initiative Team to intentionally cluster grassland improvements and allow for monitoring evaluation of the program's impacts.*

**Grazing payment:** The program stopped paying for rotational grazing, which led to a loss of interest from several landowners.

*GCJV: There is a misperception among some project managers that the program stopped paying for rotational grazing, however, C-GRIP does pay for rotational grazing if it represents a change to the grazing regime. It will not pay for rotational grazing and grazing deferment on the same acreage.*

**Budget uncertainty:** Not knowing the budget for the upcoming year creates uncertainty. Project managers may not pursue projects if they are uncertain that funds will be available.

*GCJV: Funds available for C-GRIP projects have been fairly stable, exceeding \$200,000 annually for the first six years of the program. Estimated and actual annual budget projections are communicated with project managers as early as possible.*

**Brush treatment frequency:** Landowners can only participate in C-GRIP once every 5 years and brush treatments often need to be done more frequently. Supporting more frequent brush treatment could help maintain restoration and prevent negative conditions.

*GCJV: C-GRIP originators (i.e., GCJV board, staff, and initial funders) expect landowners to provide follow-up treatments as a necessary contribution to maintain conditions for five years.*

**Funding cycle:** The funding cycle ends on July 15, which can be inconvenient for practices that require follow-up. There is also a short window to spend project dollars that sometimes doesn't work well for practices like prescribed burns.

*GCJV: While July 15<sup>th</sup> represents the desired date for completion of projects, we do have the flexibility to amend agreements as needed to accommodate extenuating circumstances, and we can accommodate multi-year proposals when practice sequencing dictates that need.*

**Land ownership restrictions:** The program can't be used on city-owned land, state land, or federal land, which limits its application to private lands.

### *Who enrolls in C-GRIP currently? Why?*

Private landowners that enroll in C-GRIP often do so to improve habitats for conservation or recreational hunting purposes. Many enrollees have prior experience with government programs and a strong commitment to natural resource management. Enrollees are often independently wealthy ranchers or multi-generational landowners, while others are seeking economic sustainability. The main themes to emerge were:

**Conservation or hunting focused:** Landowners who have bought property to improve for conservation or hunting. This includes small landowners who often have land primarily for recreational purposes. Their main goal revolves around improving habitat.

**Past involvement:** Enrollees often have a history of working with government programs and care about natural resources.

**Independently wealthy:** Most landowners are perceived to be independently wealthy and can afford to implement conservation projects. The cost share is an incentive to ensure that it happens.

**Big landowners:** Many landowners own 1,000 acres or more. This dynamic is sometimes driven by project managers who focus on landowners with more acreage because they believe that the scale of the project (in combination with other well-managed tracts within a landowner's holdings) will have a greater conservation benefit than an isolated project on a small parcel of land. As one project manager commented, "If landownership is small, it is not worth the time developing a project on it."

**Ranchers:** The program is beneficial for ranchers, because C-GRIP aims to manage habitat that is compatible with their primary use of land.

**Economic sustainability:** A lot of landowners are just looking to offset problems and achieve economic sustainability.

**Multi-generational landowners:** Enrollees are often multi-generational landowners with a strong connection to their land and a desire to sustain its use across future generations.

### *Who doesn't enroll in C-GRIP? Why?*

There were several reasons identified by project managers for why landowners may choose not to participate in C-GRIP. Landowners dependent on cultivated crops and financially struggling landowners often find the costs prohibitive, despite available cost-sharing options. Additionally, potential sellers in rapidly developing areas may avoid agreements that could hinder their property sales, while emerging land uses like wind and solar farms compete for their interest. Short-term thinking, unwillingness to defer grazing, and a lack of conservation culture in some regions further contribute to lower enrollment rates. The main themes to emerge were:

**Agriculture-dependent landowners:** Those whose lands are heavily dependent on row crop agriculture may not enroll because they see the incentivized measures as incompatible or disadvantageous to their crop cultivation.

**Financially struggling landowners:** Those who are not independently wealthy, and struggle with day-to-day necessities, may be scared off by the cost of conservation practices, even with cost-sharing options.

**Potential sellers:** Landowners in rapidly developing areas may not want to enter an agreement that could impact potential sales.

**New forms of development:** With new forms of development like wind and solar farms emerging, landowners may opt for competing land use/development. Rapid population growth and urbanization also deter enrollment.

**Short-term thinkers:** Landowners who do not see the long-term big picture, or cannot comprehend the program benefits, may not enroll.

**Landowners unwilling to defer grazing:** Some landowners who have been contacted about C-GRIP have not moved forward because they were unwilling to do a grazing deferment.

**Lack of conservation culture:** The politics of an area can influence enrollment, with some regions being less conducive to conservation efforts. People living in areas where conservation is not a high priority are less likely to enroll.

*From your perspective, what factors most influence the likelihood of enrollment in C-GRIP?*

After describing why landowners do or don't enroll in C-GRIP, project managers were asked what factors most influence enrollment. The following reasons were identified as the most influential:

**Past involvement:** Past enrollment in C-GRIP or in similar programs.

**Program restrictions:** Whether or not the landowner views the program as too restrictive. If they have heard positive reviews from others about limited restrictions and other successes, they are more likely to enroll.

**Expense of conservation work:** Conservation work is expensive, and cost is a significant factor influencing enrollment.

**Wealth status:** Independently wealthy individuals are more likely to enroll, because they are not prohibited by the cost of a project.

**Community influence:** If there are many enrollees in one area, others may see it as a good way to move forward.

**Scale of landownership:** Some project managers tend to prioritize larger-scale landowners, operating under the belief that smaller properties may not justify the investment of time for project development. They feel that the effort required for small projects is comparable to that of larger ones, leading to the conclusion that properties under 500 acres may not be worth pursuing.

*What could C-GRIP practitioners design together to increase enrollment?*

To increase enrollment in C-GRIP, project managers suggested the following:

**Market success stories:** Sharing success stories on social media or through short videos could attract more landowners.

**Increase project managers:** Having more project managers and biologists on the landscape could help get more landowners enrolled and projects on the ground.

**Increase funding:** More funding would allow for more projects.

**Pursue tax incentives:** On a large-scale (beyond C-GRIP), implementing one-to-one or two-to-one tax write-offs for people placing conservation easements on their property could stimulate conservation and incentivize land purchases for conservation.

**Expand timeframe:** Expanding the timeframe to spend funds could increase enrollment.

#### *Do you track contacts with landowners and enrollments?*

We asked project managers about tracking landowner contacts and enrollments based on the assumption that this would tell us something about the appeal of the program and help us to identify which strategies for enrollment work well and which don't. Based on the interviews and responses to this question specifically, we learned that tracking is minimal, and the utility of this information is limited because when project managers are in contact with landowners, they are already confident that they will enroll in a program, whether it's C-GRIP or another program.

Overall, tracking practices varied. Some project managers do track enrollments; however, they did not keep track of those who did not enroll, which is potentially the most valuable information to scrutinize. Some project managers do track contacts for internal record keeping, especially if they are invited to a landowner's property. They noted that these are typically meetings to discuss potential projects, not necessarily specific to enrolling in C-GRIP. Some project managers do not officially track contacts, but keep an email folder with inquiries. They use this to keep track of individuals who have reached out about the program.

#### *Texas Mid-Coast Initiative June 2024 Summer Meeting*

The summer TMCI meeting was in June 2024 in Wharton, Texas. At the meeting the FWS GCJV and Science Applications staff presented a summary of the interviews that captured the key themes, insights, and participant perspectives. As we presented the results, we asked meeting participants if the summary reflected their experiences and perspectives, if any significant points or nuances were missing, and if anything was unclear or confusing. GCJV staff also addressed some of the challenges with C-GRIP that emerged during the interviews. This included clarifying misunderstandings regarding incentives for rotational grazing and project funding, and providing context for certain aspects of the program that, while undesirable for project managers, are necessary for its administration, such as geographical limitations and the funding cycle. While only a few meeting participants were active C-GRIP project managers, all TMCI partners are familiar with incentive programs for private land conservation in the area. We also facilitated discussion about the results and gathered additional input on C-GRIP through web-based *in situ* polls. This allowed us to further explore perspectives on how C-GRIP is working and how it could evolve and prioritize potential actions or efforts to improve program delivery.

## Poll Results

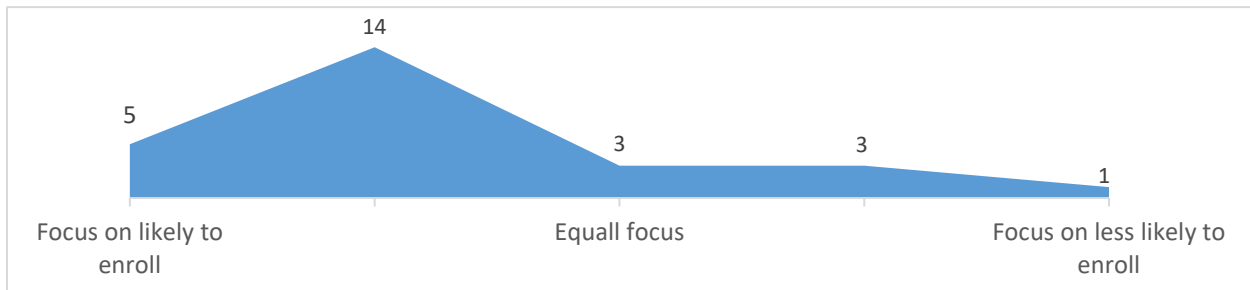
### *Involvement in C-GRIP*

To start, we asked meeting participants about their involvement in C-GRIP using the categories in the table below. Only 3 meeting participants were active project managers. Based on our discussions at the meeting, we found a lack of clarity regarding the distinction between the potential project manager and supporter categories. We concluded that supporters could also be potential project managers, noting that neither has previous experience managing C-GRIP projects. Additionally, there were varying levels of interest and perceived readiness to take on project management responsibilities within both categories.

Active C-GRIP Project Manager	3
Potential C-GRIP Project Manager	4
C-GRIP Supporter (no project management)	15
No involvement with C-GRIP	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

### *Considering who does and doesn't enroll, what is the best course of action?*

After presenting the summaries of responses from the interview questions about who does and doesn't enroll, we polled meeting participants to better understand what course of action they thought was better for C-GRIP—focusing on landowners who are likely to enroll in the program or focusing on landowners less likely to enroll. Participants were presented with a 5-point scale anchored with the two options, i.e., focusing on those likely to enroll on one end, and focusing on those less likely to enroll on the other end. The chart below represents the distribution of responses (n=26).



Overwhelmingly, participants indicated a preference for focusing on landowners who are likely to enroll, representing 73% of respondents. Three respondents were in the middle, representing an equal focus on both categories, and four or 15% preferred focusing on those less likely to enroll.

This poll led to interesting discussions about the best course of action as respondents further shared their perspectives and rationale. Those who thought the best course of action was focusing on those likely to enroll expressed perspectives that trying to enroll the “less likely” is not an efficient use of time. With limited time and resources, they prefer to focus on receptive landowners. This was consistent with how project managers described enrolling landowners in interviews. There they also indicated that they don't try to enroll landowners unless they are confident they will enroll. Overall, the perspective expressed is that it would be a lot of effort for little payoff to try to convince uninterested, or less interested, landowners to enroll in C-GRIP.

The few respondents who indicated that the best course of action was to focus on those less likely to enroll expressed surprise at the results being heavily weighted in the other direction. From their perspective, those who are likely to enroll may connect with C-GRIP or other conservation incentive programs without the focused efforts of project managers. They believed that programs like C-GRIP need to focus on those we are not reaching and work to identify ways to attract them to enroll to have the large-scale impact needed to protect habitat for species on the Texas coast.

#### *What knowledge and skills do Texas C-GRIP project managers need?*

We asked participants an open-ended question about the knowledge and skills needed for a C-GRIP project manager. Participants could provide multiple responses, and we received 20 responses from 16 respondents. We categorized the responses into the following themes (numbers in parentheses represent the number of times the theme came up in the comments).

**Interpersonal skills (14):** Key attributes needed for effective project managers include strong interpersonal skills and the ability to build positive relationships with contractors and partners. Effective project managers must be relatable to cooperators, possess keen observational skills to read people, and recognize landowners who are likely to sustain practices. Other essential qualities are patience, determination, communication skills (including both verbal and listening), and the ability to clearly convey a plan of action that ensures efficient management. Additionally, skills in selling and marketing are important for promoting initiatives.

**Habitat management and ecosystem knowledge (13):** Project managers need a comprehensive understanding of ecological implications and the specific responses of grasslands to various management practices. Managers need to align individual landowner goals with available programs, layering incentives where possible. Knowledge of multiple management techniques, restoration benefits for landowners, and when to implement practices for optimal results is essential. Familiarity with current management techniques, a working knowledge of local ecosystems, particularly coastal prairies, understanding ecosystem services, awareness of local wildlife habitat needs, and the ability to identify invasive species are also crucial for successful management.

**Knowledge of working lands (8):** Project managers need knowledge of agricultural practices, including what it takes to run a successful agribusiness and knowledge of sustainable agricultural practices. They also need knowledge of grazing management and rangeland management, along with an understanding of rangeland economics and effective practices.

**Knowledge of C-GRIP (4):** Project managers need a solid understanding of C-GRIP programmatic delivery and specific aspects like payment rates.

#### *Are there other information needs or questions you have about C-GRIP?*

We posed an open-ended question to participants regarding any additional information needs or questions about C-GRIP. We received 8 valid responses from 7 participants. After the meeting, GCJV staff reviewed the questions and identified which could be answered immediately and which needed further data, information, or strategic consideration. The questions and needs are categorized below and answers are provided where possible.

The following questions and needs could be immediately answered by GCJV staff:

**How are landowners held accountable?:** Questions about how C-GRIP ensures landowners maintain treatment areas for the five years of their agreement and if there are any repercussions if they don't.

***Answer:** Accountability mechanisms for C-GRIP are similar to those for its counterpart private lands wetland program in coastal Texas (Texas Prairie Wetlands Project). Signed landowner agreements provide a formal and legal mechanism for enforcing egregious and known non-compliance. In reality, the typical repercussions of poor compliance are the responsibility of project managers in not bringing forth future proposals from a poorly compliant landowner.*

**Integration with other programs:** Can landowners implement a C-GRIP project on land that is part of another incentive or compensation program, like NRCS EQIP?

***Answer:** Yes, there are no limitations (from a C-GRIP perspective) to implementing C-GRIP on tracts where NRCS EQIP or other programs have been implemented. While it is possible that NRCS or other programs might enforce some limitation from their perspective, we are not aware of such instances. We hope that C-GRIP will be used to complement other state and federal programs, and with significant conservation investments by landowners, to meet landowner objectives that are consistent with long-term avian bird habitat improvements.*

**How do we communicate success?:** Question about how we communicate C-GRIP successes and progress to landowners and other partners.

***Answer:** Currently C-GRIP successes are communicated almost exclusively through presentations by GCJV staff to various audiences, including Initiative Teams and the GCJV Board, and through annual reports and data requests from funding entities. Additional efforts to expand communication about successes and progress would require strategic planning and capacity.*

The following need could be met by summarizing existing data:

**Project data:** Information that summarizes the average acre size of current projects and project costs broken down by treatment type.

The following information needs would require new data collections:

**Are we seeing behavior change?:** Information as to whether landowners are exhibiting behavior changes (i.e., implementing follow-up practices on their land) after participating in C-GRIP or other programs like NRCS EQIP.

**Measurement of impact:** Information to quantify bird or carbon responses to different management strategies that can be used to attract new funding.

*What potential actions or efforts would you like to see to improve C-GRIP?*

The final open-ended poll question asked participants to identify potential action or efforts to improve C-GRIP. Eleven respondents contributed 13 responses. These ideas included involving landowners in discussions to gain valuable insights and perspectives, enhanced communication between project

managers and potential project managers to foster collaboration, conducting economic research and synthesizing outcomes relevant to producers, and developing a comprehensive outreach and communication plan.

#### Prioritizing recommendations

During a break at the meeting, we combined these contributions with like ideas from the interviews and other ideas that emerged during the meeting discussions into one list. Participants were then asked to pick the five ideas that they would prioritize to implement. GCJV staff then identified associated next steps for each idea, based on existing capacity relative to perceived effort and opportunity to implement.

Ideas	Votes	Next steps
Synthesize data regarding beef production compatibility with grassland health/bird habitat	10	JV staff will reach out to various organizations/people to find out what syntheses already exist that may be useful/applicable to our geography.
Invite landowner panel to meetings to provide input/perspectives	9	Explore with Initiative Team Chair Morel; take care to think through who we want to invite and how to structure questions so that they are most useful.
Increase program awareness to landowners	9	Need more information and/or capacity
Formalized process of data collection for feedback to landowners on benefits (e.g., economic)	8	Need more information and/or capacity
Consider incentivizing multiple small LOs to develop joint projects	7	While we don't envision providing additional financial incentives that favor small landowners, we do have a mechanism to accommodate a situation where multiple landowner tracts are required to meet the minimum acreage criteria. In such an instance, a single lead landowner is identified to sign the agreement and receive reimbursement on behalf of other involved landowners.
Pursue grazing/rangeland workshop for potential Project Managers	6	Need more information on demand, audience, and venue.
Develop communication strategy	5	Need more information and/or capacity
Develop FAQs to address reasons LOs do/don't enroll	5	Need more information and/or capacity to explore the need and format (could be talking points).
Explore education on range management for wildlife conservation folks	5	Not developing or hosting, but looking for and making folks aware of opportunities through IT network.
Develop list of potential contractors who do C-GRIP treatment work	5	Need to do so carefully, without endorsing anyone, but perhaps just a list of all

		contractors used; Project managers will need to be willing to provide info.
Explore landowners versus surface leaseholders (dynamics within and among)	3	We already accommodate both landowners and leaseholders with C-GRIP agreements.
Explore Project Manager mentorships	3	We have already done this to a small extent, and can look for future such opportunities, especially if requested by a new Project Manager.
Synthesize and share tract size and costs by treatment type	3	We have recently synthesized acreage and costs by treatment types, and this can be shared with the IT at subsequent meetings. If the intention here is something different, JV staff need a better understanding of the request.
Elevate/promote less expensive practices	3	The IT already has the capability to elevate cost rates as one means to promote inexpensive practices, or even to remove expensive practices from the eligible list. Project Managers can also promote less expensive practices in their interactions with landowners.
Explore mechanism to move folks from being “supporter” to “project manager”	2	JV staff will attempt to pair new potential project managers with mentor Project Managers, but this requires a potential Project Manager to initiate by reaching out to either JV staff or a mentor Project Manager.
Consider compensating Project Managers for their role	1	Outside of the purview of C-GRIP
Explore parcel size/ownership relative to enrollees	1	Need more information, addressed w/in other recommendations

## Conclusion

The assessment of the Texas C-GRIP highlights both the progress made and the challenges faced in the restoration and enhancement of grassland habitats critical to supporting native bird populations in Texas. Over the past five years, the program has successfully engaged landowners in habitat restoration efforts, resulting in significant improvements on over 60,000 acres of grasslands. Positive sentiments from project managers reveal that the program's straightforward application process and responsive staff have fostered favorable experiences among participants.

However, challenges remain, notably regarding limited awareness of the program and the impact of economic and developmental pressures for alternative land uses. The insights gathered from C-GRIP project managers and others involved in the Texas Mid-Coast Initiative Team point to the value of targeted outreach strategies, enhanced communication, and the establishment of success stories to inspire prospective participants.

Ultimately, the success of C-GRIP and its potential to mitigate ongoing habitat loss lies in collaborative efforts among landowners, project managers, and conservation organizations. Continued commitment to program improvements and stakeholder engagement will be essential to ensure that the ecological and cultural benefits of Texas' grasslands are preserved for future generations.

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