

The Native Grassland Advantage

A Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) for Tennessee & Kentucky

Native vegetation delivers multiple benefits, providing a better value than introduced species.

Did you know that native plants are just as effective or better than introduced species for soil conservation, soil health, water quality, air quality, and livestock forage? They are also more beneficial for wildlife, including quail and pollinators.

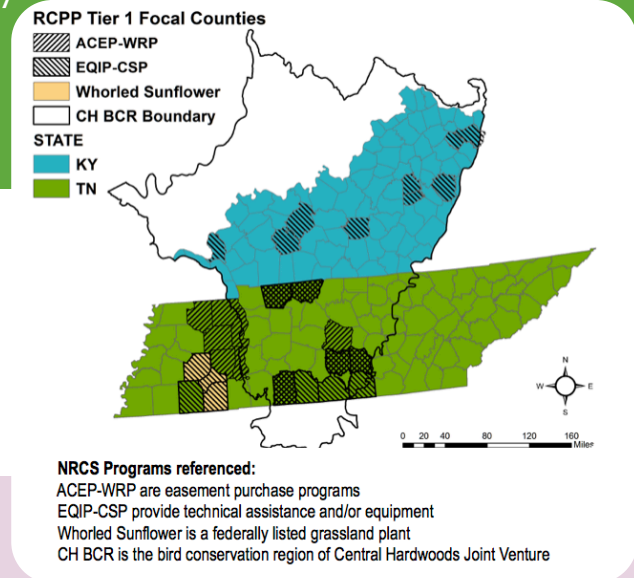
Our “Native Advantage” RCPP will boost conservation efforts on private lands, especially near existing wildlife management areas and bobwhite focal areas. The RCPP combines funding support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with expertise, services, and organization from regional nonprofit conservation groups and state wildlife agencies.

Our Goals

- Assist interested landowners in recovering native grassland plants and animals, which can benefit their operation’s value and bottom line.
- Recover some of the hundreds of species of plants and animals, particularly grassland birds, that enrich our lives by making their homes in the native grasslands of Tennessee and Kentucky.

How native restoration benefits wildlife

- Converting cropland or fescue pastures to native grasses provides habitat for birds and many other species of wildlife adapted to them.
- Opening the structure of native grasslands by removing woody cover or using prescribed fire provides the cover, nest space, and room to move needed by native grassland birds such as bobwhite and meadowlarks (especially their chicks).
- Increasing the amount of wildflowers (forbs) in pastures benefits native plants and pollinators.
- Adjusting grazing approaches can provide habitat for deer and other wildlife, as well as increase overall forage production.
- Helping landowners to alter haying regimes can avoid disturbance during peak nesting season by incorporating native grasses into production.



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Shannon Co., MO 2012

Native grasses

Fescue



What's in it for you?

Economic/operational

- NRCS and partners provide **financial resources** and **technical assistance** to absorb initial costs of restoration or converting to native pasture.
- Native grasslands produce **more forage** at a comparable cost —up to twice as much as non-natives in summer.
- Native grasses are an **endophyte-free**, high quality forage that allows ranchers to avoid fescue toxicosis.
- **Average daily gain** (ADG) for livestock on natives averages 1.5 - 2.0 compared to 0.5 - 0.8 +/- on tall fescue over the same time frame.
- Native grasses are more **drought resistant** than fescue or bermuda.
- Native grasses require less fertilizer and build soil, reducing runoff and improving **water quality**.
- The **assessed value** of a ranch or farm based on aesthetics and wildlife habitat or its recreational opportunities can often exceed the property's agricultural value.
- Native grasslands support honeybees and other **pollinators**, benefiting crops that require pollination.
- Native grasses improve **soil health**. With natives it is easier to increase soil organic matter and microbe populations, which guards against erosion and increases soil water-holding capacity.

Recreational/sustainability

- Stocking rates on native grasslands can be managed to benefit **quail**, other grassland birds and **wildlife** species.
- With proper grazing of natives, it's possible to reduce or avoid the need for burning, while at the same time native grasslands are **fire tolerant** and can be managed using prescribed fire to enhance native plant diversity.
- Native grasslands are **beautiful**.

