

**Rees, Gareth C.**

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**From:** Hundt, Nate  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 01, 2009 11:30 AM  
**To:** Shafroth, Will; Farquhar, Ned; Lyder, Jane  
**Subject:** badlands/ northern great plains submissions

FYI, just got these submissions for TL's in northern great plains from WWF. Relates to our discussion yesterday w/ USDA.

I'll add to our running collection, but they may be areas we could collaborate w/ USDA.

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Nate Hundt  
Special Assistant  
Office of the Assistant Secretary  
Fish, Wildlife, and Parks  
(O) 202 208 4946  
(C) 202 403 4923  
[nate\\_hundt@ios.doi.gov](mailto:nate_hundt@ios.doi.gov)

----- Forwarded by Nate Hundt/SIO/OS/DOI on 09/01/2009 10:37 AM -----

**From:** "Kauffman, Martha" <Martha.Kauffman@WWFUS.ORG>  
**To:** "Nate\_Hundt@ios.doi.gov" <Nate\_Hundt@ios.doi.gov>  
**Cc:** "DeFerrari, Gina" <gina.deferrari@wwfus.org>  
**Date:** 08/31/2009 07:54 PM  
Treasured Landscapes submission  
**Subject:**

Hello Nate,

Attached are descriptions of two landscapes in the Northern Great Plains that we would like to submit for consideration in the Treasured Landscapes Initiative. We have also attached maps of these areas showing the public, tribal and private lands, as well as the conservation area boundary.

If you have any questions or would like more information please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these. Please let us know what the next steps are this develops.

Best,

Martha

Martha Kauffman  
Managing Director  
Northern Great Plains Program  
World Wildlife Fund  
202 S. Black Ave., Suite 3  
Bozeman, Montana 59715  
Phone: 406.582.0235  
Fax: 406.585.7910  
[martha.kauffman@wwfus.org](mailto:martha.kauffman@wwfus.org)  
[www.worldwildlife.org/ngp](http://www.worldwildlife.org/ngp)



Great Plains Montana\_Aug2009.pdf



Badlands\_Conata\_Aug2009.pdf



Badlands\_Conata Basin SD.doc



Great Plains Montana.doc



Great Plains  
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Badlands\_Conata\_  
Aug2009.pdf

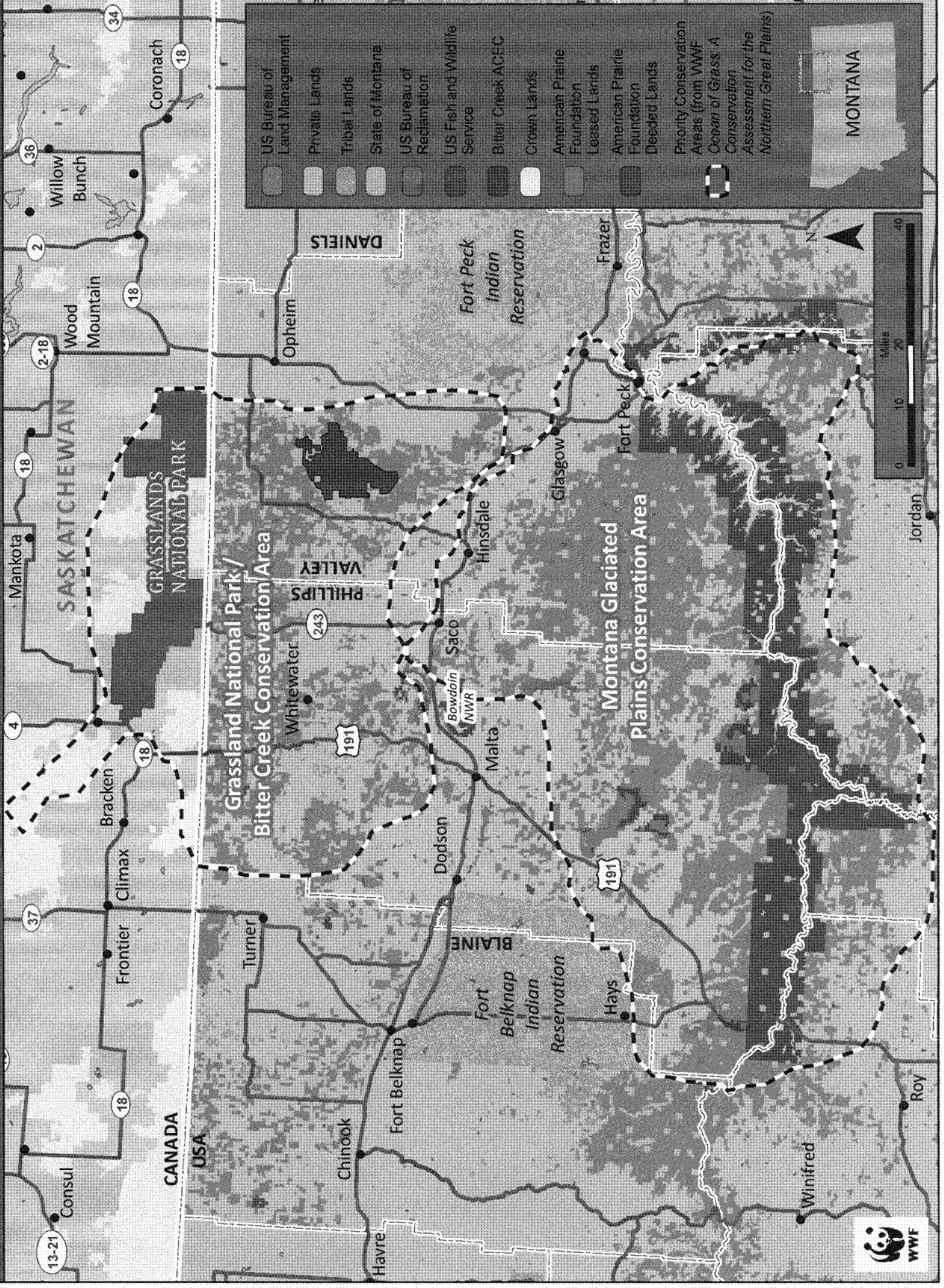


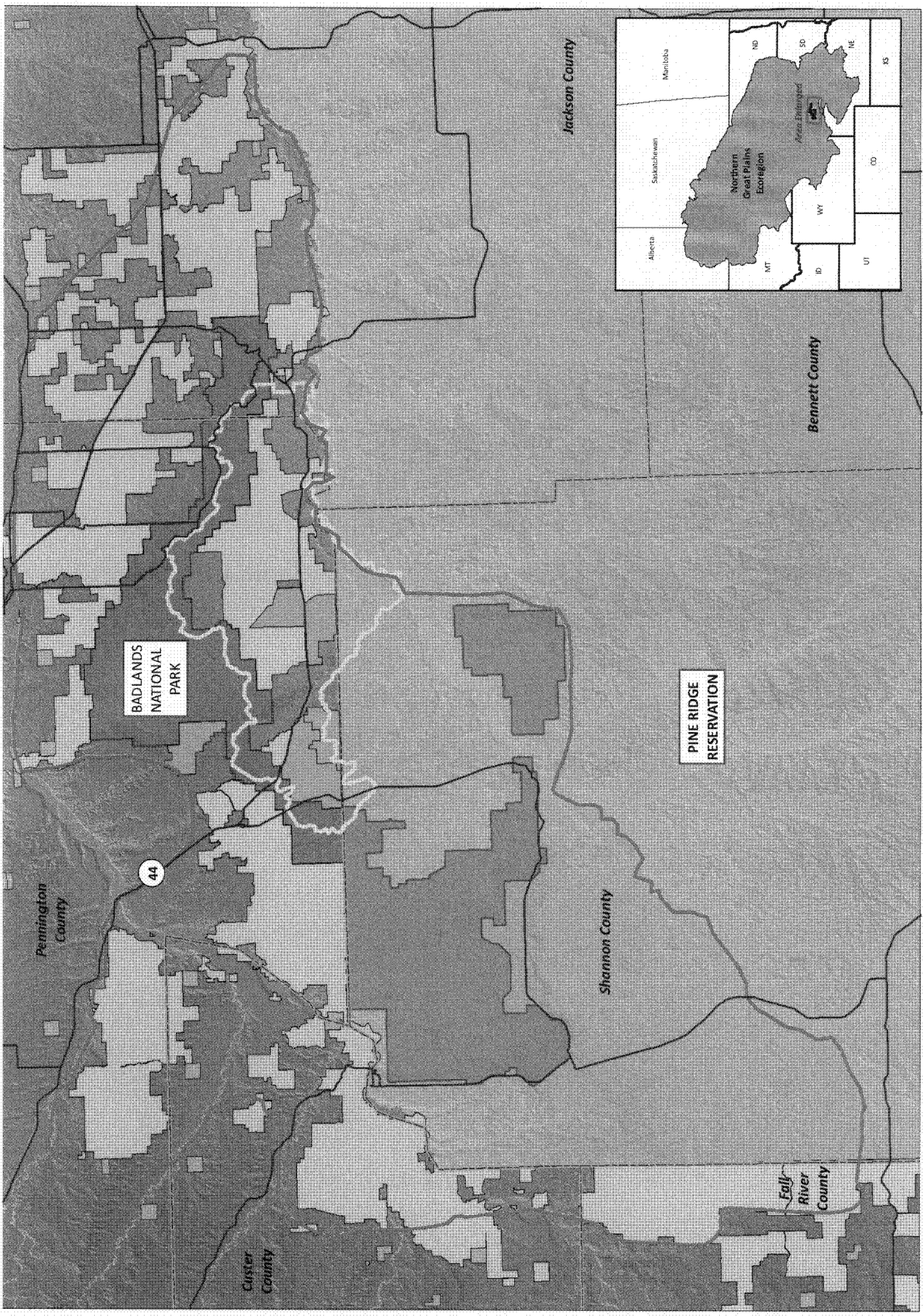
Badlands\_Conata  
Basin SD.doc



Great Plains  
Montana.doc

# GREAT PLAINS MONTANA - MISSOURI RIVER TO CANADA MIXED GRASS PRAIRIES





Conata Basin  
Conservation Area



State



Tribal Land



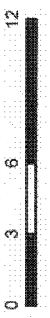
Wildlands and TNC Properties



Buffalo Gap National Grassland



# Badlands/Conata Basin, South Dakota



## **Badlands/Conata Basin, South Dakota**

### **Importance**

The Badlands/Conata Basin landscape located in southwestern South Dakota has been identified by WWF and others as one of the priority landscapes for conservation in the Northern Great Plains. It includes major portions of the north and south units of Badlands National Park and contains extensive public ownership in US Forest Service Buffalo Gap National Grasslands lands and communal tribal lands within the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The Conata Basin is approximately 140,000 ac at the core of this area, comprised of a mix of National Grasslands ownership and eight private ranches, three of which are currently owned by The Nature Conservancy.

The Conata Basin contains a globally significant population of the endangered black-footed ferret, the most endangered mammal in North America, as well prime habitat for and significant populations of declining and imperiled prairie dog-dependent species such as swift fox, burrowing owls, and ferruginous hawks. The Conata Basin abuts the north unit of Badlands National Park and currently supports a bison herd. At 300-600 individuals this herd has the potential to be one of the largest public herds in the Northern Great Plains. Expansion of NPS holdings and key management leases could potentially double the size of this herd, bringing it to over 1,000 individuals – the estimated herd size required to maintain genetic viability within bison populations. Because of its importance to the black-footed ferret recovery program, the area has been recommended at various times for inclusion as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Culturally this area is a complex mix of western and Native American cultures. The US Census Bureau has recently found that the majority of non-metro counties in the Northern Great Plains is losing, and is predicted to continue to lose, population. Meanwhile the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is gaining population and struggling with high unemployment rates.

### **Current Status**

Badlands National Park has gone through NEPA review for boundary expansion for several key properties in the Conata basin. The new Forest Supervisor has indicated an interest in raising the profile of National Grasslands and their biodiversity conservation potential. Landowner intolerance of prairie dogs, however, has led to the poisoning of prairie dogs—the ferret’s major prey—on the private lands and their associated grazing allotments inside the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands. Both TNC and WWF are interested in purchase of these base properties and consolidating some of the ownership through exchange for federal grazing lands outside the Basin. The Nature Conservancy has initiated some of this process for parts of the three properties it currently owns. In addition WWF is working with several private landowners in the greater landscape who are interested in the concept of private nature reserves— private lands managed for and benefitting economically from biodiversity conservation – through guided excursions, buffalo hunts, birding, photo safaris, paleontology tourism, which would generate income and jobs for the local communities. Pine Ridge Reservation has a bison herd and an interest in wildlife restoration and management.

### **Needs:**

- Congressional approval and appropriation for expansion of the boundary of Badlands National Park and acquisition of private properties in Conata Basin: \$7M
- Additional key NPS boundary adjustments and acquisition by NPS: \$7M

Submitted by World Wildlife Fund, Northern Great Plains Program: 8/31/09

- Land exchanges with the Forest Service: \$1.5M
- Additional acquisition funds for private lands within Conata Basin: \$8M

**Cost:** List total cost for 5 yrs \$23.5M

**Outcome**

This landscape offers the opportunity to permanently secure habitat for the black-footed ferret and other prairie dog ecosystem associates. This project will result in creation of a large conservation reserve, incorporating Badlands National Park and adjacent Buffalo Gap National Grasslands, along with remaining private lands held in conservation ownership. This would provide sufficient acreage to maintain an ecologically functional bison herd, along with a full range of native grassland species including robust populations of black footed ferrets (375 breeding adults), swift fox, burrowing owls, elk, pronghorn and other grassland species. Adjacent communities, including the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, would benefit from wildlife-based ecotourism ventures. Because several of the communities in the project area already focus on ecotourism due to the presence of Badlands National Park, they are poised to capitalize on an additional draw generated by wildlife viewing and hunting.

## Great Plains Montana – Missouri River to Canada Mixed Grass Prairies

### Importance

The Great Plains occupies not only the center of the North American continent, but also figures centrally in our cultural consciousness. Images of a vast sky, blackened by swarms of migrating birds or insects, or vistas filled with spectacular numbers of bison, elk, and pronghorn stretching to the horizon of a seemingly endless plain are etched in our collective memory, whether passed down through the stories of Native Americans or of Lewis and Clark and other early explorers. Temperate grasslands were once home to some spectacular assemblages of wildlife, but have been modified by human activity to such a degree that they are now the most modified and least protected major habitat type on earth. The mixed-grass prairie of North America has been identified by numerous government and non-governmental organizations as one of the best remnant grasslands globally, an ecoregion where conservation of temperate grasslands is still possible and a priority global conservation concern.

The fate of the black-footed ferret, one of North America's most endangered species, the greater sage grouse, recently petitioned for listing under the ESA, and a suite of endemic grassland birds – declining more steeply than any other bird assemblage in North America -- depends upon conservation success in this region. Plains Bison, the largest North American terrestrial mammal, maintained its core historical range here and are the focus of international restoration efforts. In the meantime, the US Census Bureau has recently found that the majority of non-metro counties in the Northern Great Plains is losing, and is predicted to continue to lose, population. The ecological potential, along with the socio-economic trends, means we have an opportunity to create conservation areas at a scale not seen since the days of Teddy Roosevelt. Creation of large protected areas with robust wildlife populations may serve to diversify and strengthen the economies and communities of the Great Plains.

Local, regional and national conservation organizations have identified a few priority landscapes in the U.S. and Canadian plains where opportunities exist to restore large-scale ecological processes and provide habitat for significant populations of native wildlife. Two of the landscapes, identified by World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, the Council on Environmental Cooperation, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Parks Canada and many others, that present excellent opportunities for restoring the native grassland landscape, are found in north central Montana: the Montana Glaciated Plains and the Bitter Creek/Grasslands National Park landscapes – together referred to as the Missouri River/Transboundary Mixed Grass Prairies— are separated only by the floodplain of the Milk River. Together they comprise approximately 6.2 million acres of largely intact grassland.

### Current Status

- (1) **The 3.5 million-acre Montana Glaciated Plains** is 77% untilled grassland and more than half is in public ownership (the 1.1M-acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and 1.5M acres of BLM lands). A portion of the 650K-acre Ft Belknap reservation is also located within this

landscape. The Glaciated Plains is home to a diverse assemblage of endemic grassland birds, the largest complex of prairie dog habitat in the northern range of the prairie dog, a reintroduction site for black-footed ferrets, one of the continent's largest and most stable sage grouse populations and the largest private conservation herd of bison in the northern prairies. We envision a 3.5 million-wildlife complex eventually seamlessly managed by what will be the five key land stewards in the region including BLM, FWS, Tribal associations, MT Department of State Lands and American Prairie Foundation. When complete, this multi-jurisdictional landscape will be the largest prairie reserve ever created in North America, nearly a million acres larger than Yellowstone Park.

Currently, some In 2001 WWF created a land trust -- the American Prairie Foundation (APF) -- to buy lands within this general area from willing landowners. Over the past eight years Montana-based APF has established itself as an entity independent from WWF, raised in excess of \$23 million, and purchased approximately 30K acres of private lands. APF also holds BLM and State Lands grazing permits on an accompanying 60K acres. They anticipate this number, ~90,000 deeded and leased acres, doubling or tripling in the next 2 years

WWF is working with APF to actively restore species and ecological processes. We have reintroduced bison, enhanced prairie dog communities, removed interior fencing, and restored streams, among other activities. APF and WWF share common wildlife objectives with the USFWS, and WWF and CMR are collaborating on a number of scientific research projects. WWF has committed to a long term leadership role working in concert with all participating land stewards to affect positive change from a biodiversity standpoint.

TNC is actively working with the ranching community here. Since 2000, TNC has operated its 60K-acre Matador Ranch, establishing a grassbank which annually promotes conservation practices on an additional 250,000 acres.

**Needs:** Expansion of CMR National Wildlife Refuge functional ecological capacity to include upland grassland habitats. This could be accomplished in a number of ways, but all could leverage the private dollars invested in purchasing lands by APF. We are exploring options with FWS and BLM and have discussed a number mechanisms including transfer and/or exchange of federal (BLM) lands, special management designation on BLM lands, cooperative BLM/FWS land management agreements, exchange of state land inholdings, acquisition of inholdings, purchasing/funding easements on private land, and private land leases.

Cost: Premature to assign cost. Will be developed through discussions in the coming months, could range from: \$30M - \$300M.

- (2) The 2.7M acre Bitter Creek/ Grasslands National Park** landscape straddles the Montana/Saskatchewan border and presents a unique opportunity to knit together a bi-national grassland reserve, as studies of pronghorn migration and sage grouse movements back and forth across

the border are demonstrating that the habitats are inextricably linked. The 240K-acre Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan has reintroduced bison, and will be reintroducing black-footed ferrets in October. On the U.S. side, the 590K-acre Bitter Creek area has some of the largest concentrations of public land in Montana and a 60K-acre area designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Approximately 74% of this landscape is untilled, and 40% is in public ownership. This landscape is a conservation priority for WWF, the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club which was actively involved in the ACEC designation on the BLM lands, and TNC which is actively pursuing large easements on two ranches in this area, potentially affecting over 100,000 acres, which combined with BLM lands will create hundreds of thousands of acres of connected and protected grasslands. State and Provincial agencies have agreed to manage migratory pronghorn and sage grouse collaboratively through the Northern Sage Steppe Initiative, and are exploring how the protection of these migratory corridors will buffer the impacts of climate change.

**Needs:**

- Formal designation of a transboundary wildlife management area connecting Grassland National Park in Canada with adjacent public lands in the U.S. -- protecting migratory corridors for pronghorn and sage grouse and their habitats.
- Withdrawal from leasing minerals within the wildlife management area to prevent fragmentation.
- Protection of grasslands on private lands through funding of conservation easements.
- Wildlife conservation practices in place on lands currently in private ownership: through incentives for conservation practices on private lands;.

**Cost:** Easements @100/acre; and fee title acquisition @ \$400/acre. Total \$15M

**Outcome**

The outcome would be a multimillion-acre wildlife complex creating the largest prairie reserve in North America anchored by the Charles M Russell National Wildlife Refuge to the south and Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan to the north. This would be the largest, unfragmented mixed-grass prairie in North America and would support the ecological recovery of bison, the endangered black-footed ferret, and grassland birds. Wild populations of large ungulates would migrate freely, protecting the longest mammal migration in the lower 48. The small human community would be supported by the mix of traditional uses and diversity of wildlife that is a world recognized resource. This project would contribute significantly to protection of grasslands and grassland biodiversity globally.