

Assembly Bill 720

Conservation Ranching on Rangelands, Grazing Land, and Grasslands

Assemblymember Dawn Addis

SUMMARY

AB 720 includes grants for conservation ranching under the existing Rangeland, Grazing Land, and Grassland Program administered by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB).

BACKGROUND

Regenerative grazing, also known as conservation ranching, invigorates diverse plant communities and supports nutrient cycles that remove carbon from the atmosphere, rebuild soils, and conserve water.

AB 720 builds on the ongoing work of WCB and community partners by offering financial incentives to California ranchers and other private landowners to implement grazing practices that restore grassland habitat, soil health, and biodiversity on some of California's most endangered and sensitive landscapes.

PROBLEM

North America's grasslands are among the most imperiled ecosystems in the world. As a result, grassland birds have declined more than any other bird group in the continent, by as much as 80% for some species.

The vast majority of America's grassland birds breed on private lands which is why working with ranchers is our best hope for conserving them. California has 61 million acres of rangelands that provide food production, carbon sequestration, water infiltration, and habitat for a wide range of species.

A recent study identifies California grasslands as more reliable and resilient carbon sinks than forests (Pawlok 2018). However, this historic California land use is under threat with an average of 20,000 acres a year being lost to development or crop conversion (Cameron et al 2014).

Climate change, invasive species, aquifer depletion, and poor grazing practices also degrade large portions of grasslands, increasing economic and ecological

vulnerability. To slow the loss of rangelands, stabilize declining populations of grassland birds and wildlife, and contribute to climate mitigation, investment is needed by California climate leaders.

That said, the Wildlife Conservation Board, Department of Fish & Wildlife, and Department of Agriculture each maintain existing programs related to conservation, habitat restoration, and sustainability, but none focus specifically on the critical benefits and opportunities provided by conservation ranching.

SOLUTION

AB 720 equips us with the tools necessary to mimic historic wild herds of grazing mammals, supporting nutrient cycles, and removing carbon from the atmosphere.

The bill establishes a framework for statewide conservation ranching efforts to expand access to beef that is sustainably raised and benefits wildlife habitat in alignment with California's 30x30 and Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy (NWL CSS) goals.

SUPPORT

Audubon California (SPONSOR)

CONTACT

Julie Cravotto, Legislative Director

916-319-2030 | julie.cravotto@asm.ca.gov