

# Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant Application

Name of Organization *LITTLE MISSOURI GRAZING ASSOCIATON*

Federal Tax ID# *45-0213473*

Contact Person/Title *Lola Hewson, Business Manager or Brian Gerbig, LMGA President*

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## MAJOR Directive:

**Directive A.** Provide access to private and public lands for sportsmen, including projects that create fish and wildlife habitat and provide access for sportsmen;

**Directive B.** Improve, maintain, and restore water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems and to support other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching;

**Directive C.** Develop, enhance, conserve, and restore wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands; and

**Directive D.** Conserve natural areas for recreation through the establishment and development of parks and other recreation areas.

**Additional Directive:** Choose all that apply

**Directive A.** Provide access to private and public lands for sportsmen, including projects that create fish and wildlife habitat and provide access for sportsmen;

■ **Directive B.** Improve, maintain, and restore water quality, soil conditions, plant diversity, animal systems and to support other practices of stewardship to enhance farming and ranching;

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○ **Directive D.** Conserve natural areas for recreation through the establishment and development of parks and other recreation areas.

**Type of organization:**

○ State Agency

○ Political Subdivision

○ Tribal Entity

■ Tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation, as described in United States Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. § 501 (c))

**North Dakota Century Code section 36-08-02**

**Project Name *Little Missouri Grazing Association Noxious/Invasive Weed Control***

**Abstract/Executive Summary.**

This project is designed to provide financial and technical assistance to all 104 members of the Little Missouri Grazing Association (LMGA). The Association's goal is to aggressively control the North Dakota noxious and other invasive weeds within the Little Missouri Grazing Association controlled land. 2013 survey data confirms that infested acres are increasing across the Association, particularly along the drainages into the major creeks that drain into the Little Missouri River.

Our mobile society is so conducive to invasive weeds' becoming established or spreading. Regardless of how careful travelers are, seeds will lodge in vehicles' tires and undercarriage and drop where the seeds can establish.

The USFS land north of the Little Missouri Grazing Association in Billings County has severe infestations of noxious weeds. The federal lands are used for recreation and hunting extensively by North Dakotans as well as "out of staters." Many LMGA members are reluctant to enhance deer habitat because deer spread weeds effectively, particularly houndstongue and leafy spurge, the worst weeds to control.

The LMGA's own grazing strategies using deferred grazing creates ideal growing conditions for Canada thistle. Canada thistle thrives when litter is thick and extended periods without grazing allow it to utilize extra moisture.

Biological control efforts have not been successful. Black leaf beetles and Brown leaf beetles have been dropped into heavily infested drainages over several years, but very few populations have established and reduced leafy spurge populations. The sandy soils along the drainages do not provide suitable overwintering habitat for the leaf beetles.

To combat the spreading noxious weeds, the LMGA will:

1. Develop contracts with commercial sprayers with the LMGA.
2. Coordinate LMGA members with sprayers for efficient spraying time.
3. Develop working partnership with the Slope County weed board and develop a strategy to combat the worst invasive infestations.
4. Develop educational programs to heighten member awareness about potential biological control efforts.

The LMGA wants to contain the current noxious weeds to their present occupation within a 3 year cycle, by treating 1,160 acres of moderately to heavily infested situations. Once the noxious weeds are contained, the LMGA wants to reduce the invasive weeds to an economically viable population that moves the biological diversity and productivity of the plant community toward improved wildlife habitat and healthy livestock grazing. Aggressively controlling established noxious weeds requires several years of repetitious treatment to effectively reduce a weed infestation.

The project would begin May 1, 2015 and end September 30, 2019.

LMGA Cash/In-kind	\$291,665
Outdoor Heritage Funds	\$875,000

Outdoor Heritage Funds would be used to increase treated acres and allotments above and beyond the annual appropriations through the Forest Service's Participating Agreement.

**Amount of Grant request \$875, 000**

**Total Project Costs \$1,166,665.00**

(Note that in-kind and indirect costs can be used for matching funds)

**Source(s) of Matching Funds**

Please provide verification that these matching funds are available for your project.

LMGA member contribution (cash)	\$201,010.00
LMGA member and Board In Kind contributions	\$ 90,655.00
Outdoor Heritage (FA).....	<u>\$ 875,000.00</u>
	<u>\$1,166,665.00</u>

**Certifications**

I certify that this application has been made with the support of the governing body and chief executive of my organization.

I certify that if awarded grant funding none of the funding will be used for any of the exemptions noted on Page 1 of this application.

## Narrative

### Organization Information –

The Little Missouri Grazing Association (LMGA) was formed in 1940 after the North Dakota legislature authorized cooperative grazing associations in 1935. The government's intent was to permanently re-vegetate these lands and stabilize local economies, through local cooperative grazing associations. These lands evolved into the National Grasslands and are administered by the United State Forest Service, specifically, the Dakota Prairie Grasslands, housed at Bismarck, North Dakota.

The LMGA's mission is to aid its members with "*conservation, restoration, improvement, development and utilization of natural resource within the area of the Little Missouri in the counties of Slope and Golden Valley ... where a grazing area has been acquired.*" The LMGA also integrated private and other non-federal land into the Association controlled land when necessary to create natural management units that facilitate sound land management practices. Today, the LMGA's 117 allotments is comprised of:

Forest Service Lands	155,216.6 Acres
Private Lands	95,839.4 Acres
North Dakota State Lands	7,541.9 Acres
Private Land in Montana	40.0 Acres

The LMGA is divided into 5 districts and each district is represented by an elected board member from each district. There are 3 officers: President, Vice – President, and Secretary – Treasurer. The Board of Directors employs a full-time business manager and a seasonal range technician.

The LMGA responsibilities include identifying potential conservation practices and funding necessary to facilitate grazing management. The Board of Directors assists members installing conservation practices approved by the Forest Service. Since 2002, the LMGA has contracted with commercial sprayers to treat noxious weeds on allotments, using the USFS Participating Agreement monies. The LMGA coordinates with APHIS on grasshopper outbreaks and the range technician sprays grasshopper infestations. The LMGA has contracted with North Dakota State University to complete vegetation surveys. That data is used to assess grazing management and recommend changes as needed. The LMGA partnered with North Dakota Game and Fish to establish baseline sage grouse habitat data. This data will be used to enhance sage grouse habitat through grazing management.

### **Purpose of Grant – Describe the proposed project identifying how the project will meet the specific directive(s) of the Outdoor Heritage Fund Program**

The LMGA goal is to annually treat 1,160 acres of noxious and invasive weeds on privately owned and publicly owned lands within the Association. By attracting a reliable commercial sprayer with a lucrative offer, the LMGA hopes to keep treating these acres for 5 years. Adequate funding will increase the LMGA opportunity to improve soil health, stabilize stream banks, improve wildlife habitat and enhance grazing systems.

Noxious weeds invaded and occupied North Dakota since leafy spurge was first recognized near Fargo in 1919, and had spread to nearly 1 million acres by 1997. The Little Missouri Grazing Association harbors 4 of North Dakota's 12 invasive noxious weeds: **leafy spurge, Canada thistle, absinth wormwood, Russian knapweed.** LMGA also has Slope County noxious weeds: **houndstongue and black henbane.**



This patch of houndstongue was sprayed in June 2014. The re-growth was photographed in August.

The re-growth is from the seed bank in the soil, not from the original houndstongue plant, which is completely killed by herbicide. This houndstongue patch is on Forest Service Land, and the federal money has already been spent on other infested acres. The permittee had already spent \$8,000 on his own private ground spraying houndstongue.

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture recognized that both new and continued noxious weed infestations diminish the productivity and biological diversity of ecosystems. Noxious weed infestation suppresses native plant species due to competition for space, nutrients, and water. Native plant losses negatively impact wildlife habitat as well as healthy viable livestock grazing.

From 2002 through 2014, the Little Missouri Grazing Association has spent **\$640,715.00** spraying noxious weeds, most notably: leafy spurge, houndstongue and Canada thistle on Federal land. The Forest Service contributed **\$388,533.00** through its Participating Agreement. The goal has been to control the spread of leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and houndstongue while preventing new infestations. Unfortunately, less than 10% of the infested acres are treated each year, and the **noxious weeds are gaining ground**. A 2013 North Dakota Department of Agriculture State Noxious Weed Survey revealed that invasive weed acreages have **increased**. Larger infestations occur on private land as money and member time is spent on federal land. The Forest Service has implemented a "good neighbor policy" and allowed spraying on private land within one mile of federal land being treated, however the funding limited treatment to 4 man hours on private land.

Each year, the earmarked Participating Agreement monies totals approximately \$60,000 and is used up quickly on a small portion of the Association. The federal monies, which are an annual appropriation, are not guaranteed; the money is very dependent on the federal budget, which is uncertain every year. The 155,216.6 acres of federal land are exempt from Slope County's 3 mil levy

for weed control. The Payment in Lieu of Taxes money the county receives from the Forest Service is spent only on roads, bridges and schools.

Financially, the LMGA cannot compete with the oil field opportunities. Commercial sprayers find it more lucrative to spray weeds for the oil companies' roads and oil pads. The LMGA lost its 2014 contracted sprayer to the oil fields. The LMGA cannot afford to pay oil field wages that would attract a reliable knowledgeable employee to spray the weeds.

Financial quandary aside, the expanding use of Federal Lands contributes to the spread of noxious weeds. The Maah Daah Hey Trail extends south into Slope County, attracting more hikers and cyclists, and potentially, more weeds. The prairie dog colonies are frequently accessed by out of state hunters, as well as normal game and upland bird hunting. The increased use of All Terrain Vehicles spreads invasive weeds along trails.



The Maah Daah Hey Trail through Wanagan Creek. One Google search yielded 10 YouTube videos of cyclists traversing the Maah Daah Hey Trail.

While oil field impact is very low in the Little Missouri Grazing Association today, mineral leases have been aggressively purchased in Slope and Golden Valley Counties. Exploration will occur in the near future and the LMGA desires to have the current noxious weed populations controlled so that the potential seed source is minimized.



This photograph is a riparian area on Forest Service land in the heart of oil development.



Where did the drill go after it had completed this well? Do well drillers have time to clean equipment before going to the next site?

The LMGA urgently needs financial assistance to adequately control the noxious weeds on **private land and federal land** within its 117 allotments. Noxious weeds do not recognize land boundaries and the Little Missouri Grazing Association would like to aggressively treat all acres.

#### **Management of Project –**

The Little Missouri Grazing Association's Business Manager has over 11 years of experience developing contracts with private businesses and with the federal government. She has a complete understanding of contracting language and developing project completion logs and documentation.

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### **Evaluation – Describe your plan to document progress and results.**

The commercial sprayers will use current required documentation to record locations, time, mileage and supplies used. The sprayers also use GPS units to record locations and those points will be downloaded into a spreadsheet and onto computer generated maps.

LMGA members will use current documentation to record their time, vehicles and equipment used to spray on their allotments. LMGA members will be required to visually inspect treated areas to assess effectiveness. The members will report their findings to the LMGA Board of Directors annually.

Water samples will be taken every 3 years to determine if pesticides are leaching into Deep Creek, Sand Creek, Second Creek and the Little Missouri River. Management will be re-evaluated and changed to accommodate the findings.

## Financial Information

### ATTACHMENT: Project Budget –

■ I certify that a project budget will be sent to the Commission

Project Expense	OHF Request	Applicant's Match Share (Cash)	Applicant's Match Share (In-Kind)	Total Project Cost
Commercial Spraying Contracted Labor (1)	\$837,500.00	\$188,510.00		\$1,026,010.00
Other Labor (2)			\$90,655.00	\$90,655.00
Chemical (3)	\$37,500.00	\$12,500.00	\$	\$50,000.00

***This budget is for the complete amount requested over 5 years. The estimated total annual cost to treat 1,160 acres equals \$233,333.00, with an annual OHF request of \$175,000.00.***

- (1) A commercial sprayer quoted a current rate of \$65.00/hour for a 7 person crew.
- (2) Other Labor is LMGA staff, directors, and members' in-kind labor. The labor includes assisting sprayers and scouting. This also includes the members' use of their own equipment and vehicles. These costs have been calculated from the most current NDDA (North Dakota Department of Agriculture) In-kind Rate Table. LMGA member labor is required. The LMGA uses an hourly rate of \$28.50 per hour, an actual cost due to local wages increasing from oil field activity. (See attachment)
- (3) Chemical costs are from the most current pricing for the 2014 year actual costs. Chemicals we use are Outpost, Milestone, Plateau, CB 4# amine, Hi-Light, and MSO.

The terrain where the weeds occur often causes actual hours worked, miles traveled and acres sprayed per day difficult to determine accurately. Based on past spray logs Forest Service Participating Agreements, the total cost of treating (on average) 331 acres per year is \$201.00 per acre.

### Sustainability

Once Outdoor Heritage Funding is expended, the noxious weed acreages will be reduced to a population that the LMGA "can live with," meaning that normal LMGA member fees and services will adequately keep the weeds from exploding again.

### Partial Funding

In the case of partial funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, the OHF money will be used to re-treat the houndstongue in late summer or early fall.

**Partnership Recognition - If you are a successful recipient of Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars, how would you recognize the Outdoor Heritage Fund partnership?**

The Little Missouri Grazing Association frequently submits press releases to several agricultural newspapers and North Dakota newspapers that document LMGA success stories. LMGA has always recognized the partners that have collaborated with LMGA because without their assistance, those successes would not be possible.

The LMGA will submit a press release that chronicles our partnership with the Outdoor Heritage Fund to the following publications:

- Tri-State Livestock News
- Western Livestock Reporter
- Dickinson Press
- Bowman Pioneer
- Bismarck Tribune (Bismarck Tribune has not published our press releases, but LMGA will continue sending submissions)
- RANGE magazine

The LMGA invites current partners to the members' annual meeting in May to speak to our members or to just be recognized. The May 2014 meeting included the NDGF, the USF&W, the NRCS, and the Bowman-Slope Conservation District. The LMGA believes "putting a face" to the acronym allows our members to see that agencies or organizations have real people behind the policies and money. Invited partners that cannot attend are recognized with the project summary that is presented.

The LMGA would invite OHF board members and/or Karlene Fine to attend the annual meeting to present why OHF considered the LMGA application worthy for funding.

Attachment 2: the most current copy of a press release submitted to above-mentioned publications.

## NDDA In-kind Rate Table (November 2013)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	RATE (DAILY)	RATE (HOURLY)	RATE (OTHER UNIT)
<b>Labor</b>	Commercial applicator	Actual		
	Volunteer labor	Actual		
<b>Vehicles</b>	ATV 4X4 300-400cc	\$90		
	ATV 4X4 300-400cc, with sprayer	\$112		
	UTV with Sprayer	\$142		
	UTV	\$120		
	3-wheelers and motorcycles	\$56		
	NDDOT Rate	Sedan/wagon		
NDDOT Rate	Light pickup .5 ton/cargo van/full-size utility			\$0.61/mile
NDDOT Rate	Heavy pickup 3/4 ton and 1 ton			\$0.74/mile
	Trucks (.5 ton), with sprayer	\$240	\$30	\$0.61/mile
	Trucks (.75 and 1 ton), with sprayer	\$240	\$30	\$0.74/mile
	Trucks (1 ton or more), with sprayer	\$560	\$70	
NDDOT Rate	Trucks, greater than 1 ton	\$320	\$40	
NDDOT Rate	Trucks, tanker	\$320	\$40	
<b>Trailers</b>	Average - all types	\$56	\$7	
<b>Boats</b>	Powered	\$160	\$20	
	Unpowered	\$80	\$10	
	Powered, with trailer	\$216	\$27	
<b>Equipment</b>	Sprayers, all types except ATV	\$240	\$30	
	Sprayers, backpack, 3gal.	\$6		
	Sprayers, backpack, 5gal.	\$8		
	Pump, transfer with hose	\$56		
	Sweep net	\$24	\$3	
	Computer	\$72	\$9	
	Auxillary			\$0.60/mile
	Water			\$0.02/gallon
<b>GPS Units</b>	General outdoor use	\$24	\$3	
	Attached to handheld computer	\$40	\$5	
<b>Livestock</b>	Horse	\$56		
	Horse, with sprayer unit	\$86		
<b>Contracted Services</b>	Ground broadcast (not including chemical cost)	Actual		
	Ground spot treatment	Actual		
	Backpack treatment	Actual		

## Little Missouri Grazing Association

For Immediate Release

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### LITTLE MISSOURI GRAZING ASSOCIATION COMMITTED TO PROTECTING SAGE GROUSE HABITAT

#### *Local Issue- oriented Cooperative Takes Proactive Position to Keep the Sage Grouse off of the Endangered Species List*

Over the past years, “prescribed grazing,” “riparian areas,” “residual cover,” and “canopy cover” are new terms and ideas ranchers have had to adopt as environmental mandates and regulations became part of their business operations without their input. However, the Little Missouri Grazing Association seized a rare opportunity to be *proactive*, rather than be reactive to the announcement that the sage grouse was a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Early in 2010, the Little Missouri Grazing Association (LMGA) requested a meeting with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) to learn what LMGA members could do now to preserve what sage grouse habitat they did have and to enhance potential habitat. In 2010, using NRCS protocol, the LMGA, with USFS assistance, began to establish sage grouse habitat monitoring points throughout North Dakota’s core sage grouse habitat range. Each “point,” a 100 feet transect established in big sagebrush or silver sagebrush plant communities, collected vegetation data that included type and height. This initial data collection is the “benchline,” or snapshot, of habitat quality as it exists today. These

permanently established points will be monitored to maintain and enhance habitat if necessary. The ultimate goal is to keep the sage grouse off of the Endangered Species List.

Sage grouse in North Dakota are restricted to approximately 800 square miles in western Bowman County, western Slope County, and southern Golden Valley County.

According to the Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Greater Sage Grouse in North Dakota (North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 2005), historical loss of sagebrush communities (particularly homesteading and tillage prior to 1972) has contributed to sage grouse population decline. Sage grouse are closely tied to sagebrush communities, particularly big sagebrush, for all their habitat needs, especially food and cover.

In 2010, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) added the sage grouse to the list of species that are candidates for Endangered Species Act protection. Because the USFWS determined that there are other species facing “more immediate and severe extinction threats” the sage grouse will not be placed under “threatened” or “endangered” status until those other species have been studied and analyzed. However, the USFWS will review the sage grouse status annually to determine if sage grouse needs immediate protection.

Much of the core habitat and range area is Dakota Prairie Grasslands administered by the US Forest Service and is leased to the Little Missouri Grazing Association. The LMGA is obliged “to promote, aid, and protect these resources and the livestock industry.”

Some LMGA members belong to the local Sage Grouse Working Group in Bowman and Slope Counties. This working group has teamed up with the NRCS to enhance their own

private land for sage grouse, like planting alfalfa in areas where forbs (the leafy plants) are needed for forage. Several of the LMGA members are multi-generational ranchers with a rich history and a vested interest to environmentally preserve their land. With historical knowledge and unique environmental savvy, who could be better qualified to monitor the quality and trend of big sagebrush plant communities, improve and maintain existing sagebrush habitat and restore connectivity to habitat? Taking action now protects landowners from increased regulation should the bird be listed under the Endangered Species Act in the future.

The Little Missouri Grazing Association administers and implements grazing use on federal lands assigned in Slope and Golden Valley counties.