



Grasslands Unlimited
663 N 132nd Street #7439
Omaha, NE 68154

March 29, 2024

United States Environmental Protection Agency
William Jefferson Clinton Building North
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Letter of Commitment for the City of Omaha's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) Implementation Grant

To Whom it May Concern:

On behalf of Grasslands Unlimited (GU), this letter acknowledges our organization's commitment to support and participate in the projects submitted by the City of Omaha and outlined in the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Statistical Area CPRG Implementation Grant.

Grasslands Unlimited is an Omaha-based nonprofit organization dedicated to restoration and conservation of Great Plains ecosystems. Our work includes policy advocacy, research, and on-the-ground restoration projects. Within the Omaha area, our work focuses primarily on converting marginal and underutilized land into urban habitat preserves. Restoration projects have focused on rights-of-way and medians owned by the City of Omaha and park properties managed by the Omaha Parks Department. Our initial small-scale projects, which we called "pocket prairies", served as pilot conceptual proofs for a broader vision to reintroduce native habitats to urban spaces. By replacing turf grass with native wildflowers and grasses, we lessen the need for maintenance, manage problematic weeds, beautify Omaha's streets and intersections, and provide habitat for imperiled bees and butterflies.

GU currently maintains four pocket prairies in Omaha, with five more scheduled for restoration in 2024. Our work incorporates native species that tolerate drought, road salt, and other harsh conditions encountered in urban environments. We have tried to put these projects in high visibility areas to showcase the idea that these spaces can be put to higher use, while ensuring that traffic visibility remains unobstructed. The result is a safe, vibrant area that is largely self-sufficient. Because the City does not need to mow

these areas, they obviate the need for diesel powered maintenance equipment, which is a huge contributor of urban greenhouse gas emissions.

With this grant, we hope to implement these habitats throughout the entire city. Expansion would enable partnerships with Omaha Public Works, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD), Omaha Public Schools (OPS), and local nonprofits. The City of Omaha has hundreds of acres of unallocated land that is simply maintained as turf grass. These areas are frequently ignored, however, because they are not contiguous and occur in small fragments. GU seeks to expand capacity to convert as many of these areas as possible to pocket prairie and urban habitat.

These restoration projects will serve to reduce Omaha's carbon footprint in multiple ways. First, the habitats themselves will sequester carbon. Prairie plants are extremely efficient at sequestering carbon underground in root systems, which can be sloughed off and regrown indefinitely under proper management. When herbaceous landscapes lose productivity, such as through intensely managed monocultures of manicured turf grass, their ability to sequester carbon is greatly reduced. For instance, higher temperatures, unnecessary and elevated levels of grass clippings, and other factors actually lead to the soil in lawns and other manicured grassy areas emitting carbon dioxide. Research suggests that these emissions not only outpace the sequestration of the grass, but may nearly match emissions of major anthropogenic activities in urban areas. Restoring public areas back to low maintenance, diverse prairies will eliminate these emissions, and restart the process of diverting atmospheric carbon into the soil. The reduced maintenance requirements of these prairies will also help reduce Omaha's carbon emissions, as mowing equipment and operations are significant sources of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and other greenhouse gasses and pollutants.

We hope that the EPA will approve this grant application and support the work of the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor Pellerite', written in a cursive style.

Trevor Pellerite
President, Grasslands Unlimited
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