

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION



# CART's Grassland Community of Practice: Supporting Conservation and Restoration of Semi- Arid Grasslands



*Pronghorn at Las Cienegas National Conservation Area*

## INTRODUCTION

Semi-arid grasslands in the southwestern USA and northern Mexico provide critical habitat for wildlife, support community livelihoods, and provide ecosystem services. Semi-arid grasslands face many large-scale challenges such as erosion, land fragmentation, encroachment from woody plants, spread of non-native species, and climate change. Yet management of southwestern grasslands is often carried out at smaller scales on lands under a single jurisdiction, impeding ecosystem-scale management of grasslands and making it difficult for managers to learn from each other. In response, the Conservation and Adaptation Resources Toolbox (CART) launched a Grassland Community of Practice in March 2021 to support peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, develop decision-support tools, and coordinate opportunities for collaborative action to address priority topics.

## KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

Limited forums exist to share knowledge and document “who was doing what, where” to help people facing similar challenges learn from their peers about what was working and what wasn’t. Managers expressed a desire for support documenting and sharing the results of their work and researchers wanted help sharing the results of their research with managers.

Grassland practitioners expressed a need to efficiently access knowledge, tools and resources that are relevant for the conservation and management of semi-arid southwestern grasslands.

There was a need for increased coordination capacity to undertake collaborative, large-scale, and cross-boundary grassland projects.

## PROJECT GOALS

- Increase **knowledge sharing** by developing **case studies**, hosting **field visits** & facilitating **workshops**.
- Develop **decision-support tools** that synthesize relevant research and make information easily accessible.
- Support Grassland Community of Practice participants in taking **collaborative action**.



*Project Location*

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

### Case Studies Share Knowledge & Resources:

CART produced [55 case studies](#) on: erosion control and hydrology; habitat improvement; management of woody species and non-native grasses; fire as a management tool; grazing management & range improvements, and more.

**Webinars and Panel Discussions:** CART hosted [15 webinars](#). Between 40 and 120+ participants attended live sessions and over three thousand people watched the webinar recordings between 2021 and 2025.

**In-Person Workshops Promote Cross-Watershed Collaboration:** Over 90 participants attended a three-part workshop series about soil health and mesquite management. Workshops featured presentations from researchers and land managers on wildlife habitat improvements, soil health, and techniques to manage mesquite.

### Decision-Support Tools Synthesize Relevant Resources:

CART produced a searchable database of grassland related decision support tools and a [storymap toolkit](#) about management of semi-arid grasslands.

**Collaborative Development of Project Proposals:** CART staff engaged 17+ partners representing 14 entities from across four southwestern states to develop a project proposal to address the gap between planning and implementation of projects in the Pinyon-juniper/grassland ecotones on the Colorado Plateau.



*Baboquivari Mountains in the Altar Valley*

## LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging Community of Practice participants in case study development was helpful to many aspects of the Community of Practice. Having **participants guide the topical focus of case studies and review content** ensured relevance and accuracy. Sharing case studies through **webinars and panel discussions helped catalyze conversations** about important grassland topics.

These conversations often resulted in new partnerships, greater awareness of participant's work, and sharing of valuable tools and resources. **Panel discussions with multiple speakers helped grow participation** in the Community of Practice and maintain interest of participants. Promoting through speaker networks and **tracking participant registration** helped increase webinar participation. Recording webinars allowed increased viewership and producing **post-webinar summaries** facilitated sharing of resources and information from post-webinar discussion.

Having **dedicated coordinator funding was critically important** to growing and maintaining the Community of Practice. It ensured continuity and follow-through on the many projects and products the Community of Practice developed despite participants busy schedules.

## NEXT STEPS

- Maintain case studies, tools and toolkits as active online resources for grassland conservation and restoration practitioners

## PARTNERS

- University of Arizona
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Science Applications
- Bureau of Reclamation
- USDA Southwest Climate Hub
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