

Request for Grazing Application

Cooperative Agriculture Program

**Conservation Grazing on
Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge**

2/19/2026

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge

702 E Xavier Rd

Kirwin, KS 67644

Point of contact

Jillian Boyd

Station Manager

jillian_boyd@fws.gov

Office: (785) 543-6673 x14

PART – 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), is seeking applications from qualified individuals to provide resource management services through cattle grazing to promote and enhance native prairie grasslands. When properly managed, grazing improves habitat by reducing invasive cool-season grasses, limiting the dominance of weedy forbs, and encouraging diverse, desirable plant communities. Grazing at Kirwin NWR is implemented in coordination with other management tools and is adjusted seasonally and annually in response to changing resource conditions.

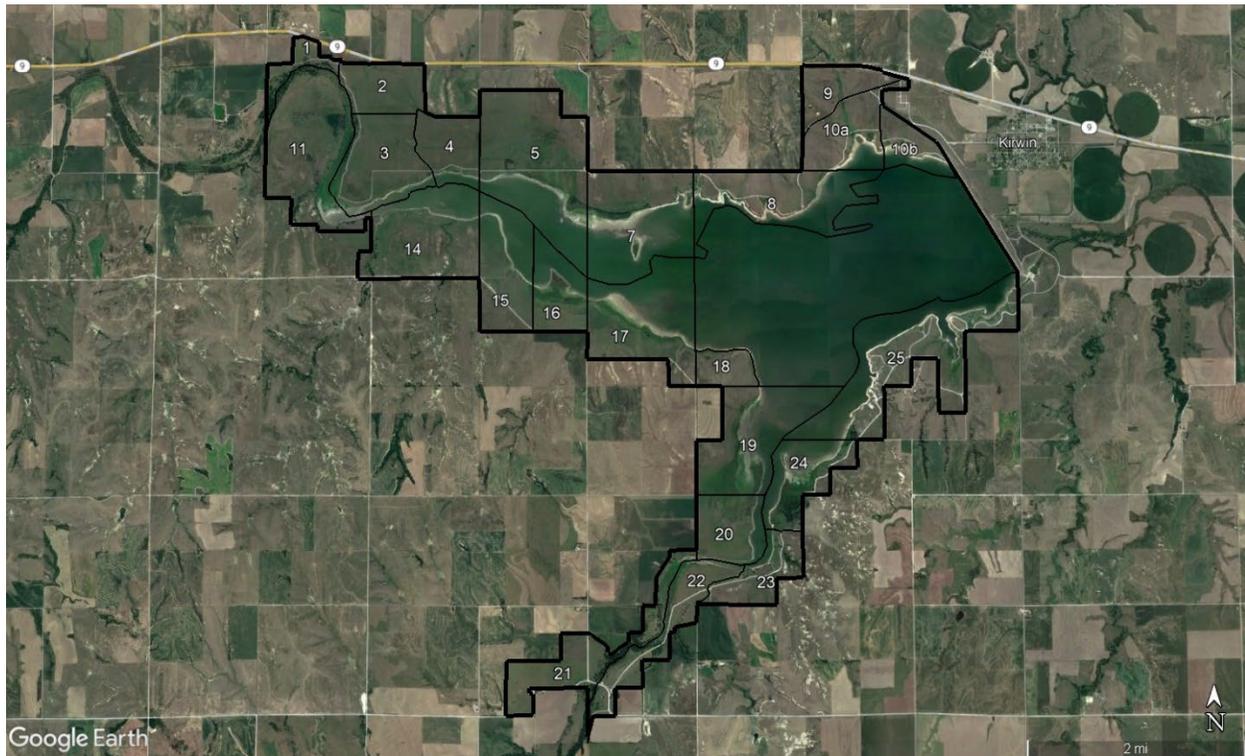
Kirwin NWR was established in 1954 on a Bureau of Reclamation irrigation and flood control reservoir, making it the first national wildlife refuge in Kansas. The refuge encompasses 10,778 acres of prairie grassland, open water, shoreline, wetlands, and wooded riparian areas. Located in the rolling hills and narrow valley of the North Fork of the Solomon River in north-central Kansas, the refuge lies where the tall-grass prairies of the east meet the short-grass plains of the west. Due to this convergence, Kirwin NWR is considered a mixed-grass prairie with plants and wildlife common to both habitats. The refuge is a popular destination for recreational activities such as hunting and fishing, as well as viewing and photographing diverse wildlife such as waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and many other bird species, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and plants.

B. Scope of work

The successful applicant will operate under a Cooperative Agriculture Agreement (CAA) as a “cooperator” with the Service. Under this agreement, the cooperator will be responsible for producing the requested number of cattle and providing the labor and materials necessary to maintain the herd in the assigned management unit(s) for the duration of the grazing prescription, as discussed and agreed upon by refuge staff and the cooperator prior to grazing operations.

The CAA is established for a period of five grazing seasons (2026-2030); however, cooperators are not guaranteed the opportunity to graze on Kirwin NWR every year. Conditions such as drought, flooding, and overgrazing may affect the schedule of grazing or cease operations altogether.

Kirwin NWR Management Units



Grazing units may be adjusted from the management units displayed here to align with conservation objectives, refuge management activities (e.g., prescribed burning or infrastructure maintenance), site conditions (e.g., drought, flooding, the presence of threatened and endangered species), and cooperator capacity for a given season. Unit sizes typically range from approximately 75 to more than 600 acres, and cooperators may be assigned one or multiple units by refuge staff. Grazing schedules and stocking rates will also be determined by refuge staff.

C. Grazing Fees

Grazing fees are based on the rates published in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agriculture Statistics Service annual publication of agricultural prices (attached). Grazing fees are subject to increase but will be limited to no more than \$1.00 over the previous year's fee per animal unit month. Grazing fees for 2026 for Kansas are \$24.50 for a mature cow and \$28.00 for a cow/calf pair. See attached Calendar Year 2026 Grazing Fees for conversion factors for other types of livestock.

D. Eligibility and minimum qualifications

The Service is seeking applicants with the flexibility to adapt their grazing operations to meet refuge requirements and conservation objectives. The producer will be selected through an open, transparent, and competitive process.

PART – 2: INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS

A. Site visits

Applicants who have not previously grazed at Kirwin NWR are strongly encouraged to schedule a site visit with refuge staff prior to applying. This is an opportunity to become familiar with the property, discuss the grazing program, and raise any questions or concerns. Site visits should occur in late February or early March. Transportation to and from the refuge is the responsibility of the interested parties. Contact Station Manager, Jillian Boyd, to arrange a visit.

B. Application process schedule

1. Grazing opportunity announcement will be posted mid-February.
2. Site visits will take place prior to the application deadline.
3. Applications must be received by Friday, March 13 to be considered.
4. Applications will be evaluated using the criteria in Part 3.
5. Selection will be announced by Friday, March 27.
6. Permit finalization will be conducted by Friday, April 10.
7. Permits to graze will be issued mid to late April 2026.

Dates will be followed as closely as possible but are subject to change.

C. Submission of required documents

Potential grazing cooperators meeting the selection criteria listed in Part 3 are encouraged to apply. Applications may be mailed, emailed, or personally delivered to the main office at Kirwin NWR (702 E Xavier Rd, Kirwin, KS 67644). Applications received by mail must be postmarked by the deadline to be considered. Mailed and delivered applications must be in a sealed envelope and addressed as indicated below. If you wish to highlight grazing experience, special interests, or qualifications, a cover letter is appreciated.

Mail applications:

Send To:

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge
Attn: Jillian Boyd
Grazing Application
702 E Xavier Rd
Kirwin, KS 67644

Email applications:

Subject:

Grazing Application – Applicant Name

Send To:

jillian_boyd@fws.gov

PART – 3: BASIS OF SELECTION

A. Selection process

The selection process will proceed as follows:

1. Review of applications, including qualification requirements.
2. Ranking of applicants following the criteria established below.
 - a. If multiple applications rank equally, a lottery will be held among those with the highest rank.

B. Selection criteria

The applicants will be selected through an open, transparent, and competitive process where applications will be scored and ranked based on the following objective criteria:

1. Operational capacity and qualifications.
2. Positive experience with prescribed grazing in the National Wildlife Refuge System or other public conservation lands.
3. Understanding of grazing management programs focused on conservation.

C. Administrative conditions

- This request does not commit the Service to pay any cost incurred by respondents in the preparation or submission of applications.
- The Service reserves the right to reject any and all applications. The determination of qualifications rests solely with the Service.
- The Service reserves the right to engage in discussions with any applicant if deemed necessary for understanding, clarity, or negotiations.
- There will be no more than one cooperator selected for each individual grazing unit.
- Grazing dates and stock numbers may be adjusted based on weather, habitat conditions, and necessary refuge operations.

Part – 4: Conditions of the Cooperative Agreement (CAA)

1. The terms and conditions for the CAA and Special Use Permit (SUP) are established in accordance with Region 6 Cooperative Agricultural Guidance and the Kirwin NWR Agricultural Compatibility Determination. Only the Station Manager or designee has the authority to make changes to this agreement and/or the annual SUP.

2. Ownership – Branding is not required, but all livestock and their offspring should be marked in some way (e.g., ear tags, ear notching, paint) identifiable by the permit holder. The owner must be able to prove ownership to the Station Manager.

- Subcontracting is permitted only with the approval of the Station Manager. If approved, the permit-holder will be responsible for 100% of the cattle grazed in their respective unit(s), whether they own said cattle or not. The permit-holder is also responsible for payments due and meeting the requirements of the permit.
- Cooperators awarded a permit may not hold, participate in, or be associated with any

other grazing permit or grazing operation on Kirwin NWR during the 2026–2030 CAA period. This includes sharing or coordinating resources with other permit-holders or participating in their grazing activities, such as installing fencing, hauling water, maintaining livestock tanks, etc.

- Cooperators must comply with all applicable Kansas State livestock laws.
- All refuge regulations are in effect and apply to the permittees and their agents.

3. Cattle are permitted only: 1) within the prescribed grazing unit(s), 2) during the specified period of use, 3) in the authorized numbers, and 4) in the specified classes from the accepted application for the duration of the CAA and/or Special Use Permit.

4. Water for Livestock – Refuge staff will prepare livestock wells and turn on water before the cooperators are scheduled to begin grazing. From that point forward, **it is the responsibility of the cooperator to check the water for their livestock and complete repairs during the use of water facilities. Cooperators will be responsible for clearing the grazing tanks of vegetation to prevent clogs or damage to the tanks, plugs, and pipes.** If major repairs to the wells, tanks, hydrants, solar panels, or other water infrastructure are required, the cooperator must contact refuge staff to schedule repairs or obtain permission to make the repairs themselves. Costs incurred will be deducted from the cooperator's grazing fees. While the water source is being repaired, it is the cooperator's responsibility to provide water for their livestock. On days when the solar panels do not receive enough charge, the cooperator will be responsible for providing water until there is adequate power to the wells. If a water source is out of order for an extended period, the grazing rotation may be altered. Kirwin NWR does not monitor water quality in the wells or small wetlands. If there are concerns, please reach out to refuge staff.

5. Mineral – Salt and mineral supplements may be used but must be placed in a tub or mineral feeder and placed in such a manner as to encourage movement of livestock throughout the entire unit. All containers must be removed at the end of the grazing season.

6. Pesticide Usage – Cooperators must obtain permission from refuge staff before any chemical can be applied on the property.

7. Grazing Schedule – Prior to the grazing season, the cooperator and the Station Manager will agree upon a schedule for moving cattle on and off the refuge, however, under certain circumstances (e.g., drought, flooding, vegetation conditions, or other factors), the schedule may need to be adjusted, according to refuge staff's determination. Livestock will be moved on the dates specified in the SUP, or as near as possible to those dates, to keep within the grazing prescription and prevent undesirable impacts to the habitat like overgrazing. If varying from the schedule for more than one day, then the cooperator must notify refuge staff. **The movement of livestock, including during an emergency, is the complete responsibility of the cooperator.** The cooperator will communicate with the Station Manager as animals are brought on and within two weeks of removal. The cooperator must submit a complete and accurate Cooperator Grazing Record (attached), so refuge staff may analyze the planned vs. actual movements. Failure to provide the grazing record in a timely manner could lead to removal of livestock from the refuge and/or loss of future eligibility for grazing Kirwin NWR.

8. Monitoring Conditions – Cooperators are expected to monitor grazing unit conditions (e.g., overgrazing, woody encroachment, proliferation of invasive plant species and noxious weeds, soil erosion and compaction) and inform refuge staff of habitat degradation. While refuge staff will periodically assess conditions, it is the responsibility of the permittee to monitor grass conditions, coordinate with refuge staff, and move livestock according to staff direction. Monitoring is beneficial for maintaining desired wildlife habitat and healthy environmental conditions and is necessary to ensure adequate recovery time for the grass.

9. Drought Conditions – If severe drought conditions occur, early removal of livestock may be necessary, dates and stocking rates may be adjusted, or postponement of the entire season until the following year. Grazing fees will be recalculated to reflect any changes made. It is the responsibility of the cooperator to have or find alternative pastures or locations for cattle under these conditions.

10. Flood Conditions – If flooding conditions occur; livestock might have to be removed from the refuge and returned when conditions improve. If this occurs, grazing fees will be recalculated to account for the changes to the schedule. It is the responsibility of the cooperator to have or find alternative pastures or locations for cattle under these conditions.

11. Equipment –The use of trucks, ATVs/UTVs, and horses is permitted for driving or herding cattle, installing fence, maintaining facilities, and treating sick livestock, however, cooperators must obtain permission from refuge staff before utilizing heavy equipment (tractors, skid steers, mowers, etc.) on the property. Exceptions will be made in the case of emergencies. Use of vehicles and equipment must be conducted in a manner that minimizes disturbance to wildlife and wildlife habitat.

12. Weed-Free Equipment/Animals – All equipment, including horses, used in grazing operations must be weed-free prior to use on Kirwin NWR to prevent the spread of noxious weeds and invasive plant species.

13. Temporary Electric Fences – There will be situations where temporary electric fencing is required to achieve refuge goals. The cooperator is responsible for putting up and taking down any temporary electric fencing. He/she will mow the area where the fence is to be installed and furnish the necessary materials for installation and maintenance. The cooperator will receive a deduction to their bill for labor and expenses. The cooperator is responsible for providing fence chargers when electricity is not available. **He/she will be responsible for connecting fence chargers and providing adequate grounding to ensure cattle stay in the designated area.** The cooperator will conduct electric fence repairs and maintenance before cattle are brought onto the grazing unit. The cooperator is responsible for keeping electric gates and fences in operation while cattle are on the unit(s).

14. Routine Maintenance – The cooperator is responsible for inspecting refuge boundary fencing and gates within their assigned unit(s) for damage prior to grazing. Routine maintenance of boundary fences and other range improvements within the grazing unit(s) is also the permittee's responsibility. Maintenance includes, but is not limited to, repairing broken wires and removing downed trees or limbs from fences, gates, and related

infrastructure. The cooperator may obtain maintenance and repair supplies from Kirwin NWR or provide materials of comparable type and quality. Approved material costs will be deducted from grazing fees. To receive deductions, all work and materials must be communicated to and documented with the Station Manager or their designee.

15. New Structures – Construction, installation, and maintenance of temporary and/or permanent range facilities such as wells, reservoirs, corrals, etc., must be approved in advance by the Station Manager or designee. Prior written authorization is required before any construction.

16. Improvements – Refuge staff will determine/approve what services or materials are needed to complete grazing unit improvements. Improvements will primarily be performed by the cooperator or their employee. The cost will be deducted from the cooperator's final grazing fees. Some materials for making improvements are available at refuge headquarters. Contact refuge staff if interested.

17. Gates and Locks – Locks are placed on most of the gates across the refuge. Keys will be issued to the cooperator at the beginning of the grazing season if necessary to access their unit(s). Keys must be returned to refuge staff at the end of each season.

18. Property Loss – The refuge will not guarantee a head count during the grazing season or at its conclusion; this is the responsibility of the permittee. The reality is that cattle go missing from time to time and are usually found safe. Other times a cow is found injured, sick, or dead. These losses can occur for a host of reasons, including but not limited to, hail, lightning strikes, toxic plant ingestion, diseases, wildlife, environmental stress, etc. The refuge is not responsible for any loss or damage to property of any kind, such as animals, vehicles, and equipment. Nor is the refuge responsible for injury to the permittee or their relative(s), or to the officers, agents, employees, or any others who are on the property for grazing operations or government employees or representatives carrying out their official responsibilities. The cooperator should inform refuge staff of any death, missing cattle, theft, or other loss.

The schedule for prescribed grazing and the stocking rates are indicated on the permit. If cattle are removed from the grazing unit(s) early or there is a death, the cooperator's fees will be adjusted to reflect the change in numbers. In such cases, the permittee should restock to bring numbers back to what was permitted for that grazing season. Any dead livestock discovered on the refuge will be moved to a remote area of the grazing unit as soon as possible. If uncertain, the Station Manager will coordinate the choice of such a site. The Station Manager may request to have the dead animal removed from the refuge.

19. Payment – Payment will be determined by the total number of livestock grazed minus deductions set by the Service Cooperative Agricultural Use Agreement (see attached Cooperator Grazing Record for deductions). Cooperator payments must be in the form of a check and/or electronic payment, as directed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and must be postmarked/delivered within 30 days of receiving the invoice for payment.

20. Wildlife – Wildlife protection is an important consideration when grazing cattle on Kirwin NWR. Wildlife may not be harassed or displaced from refuge habitats. If federal trust species are present—including, but not limited to, endangered whooping cranes, threatened piping plovers, greater prairie chickens, migratory birds, shorebirds, or raptors—the cooperators must notify refuge staff of their presence. Any entry onto refuge lands with cattle must be coordinated with the Station Manager.

Units will be monitored for whooping cranes prior to cattle turnout. Once cattle are present, the cooperators must promptly report any federal trust species sightings and reduce activities that could cause disturbance. In most cases, cattle will remain in place, as removing them would likely create greater disturbance than leaving them in the unit(s).

21. Litter – Any litter produced from grazing operations must be removed immediately from the refuge by the cooperators. Equipment or supplies may not be stored on refuge property after grazing/haying is complete.

22. Contact Information – The cooperators will be required to provide a reliable phone number and be available at that number. Failure to answer or return calls within one business week will be considered a violation of these conditions.

Grazing Questionnaire for Cooperative Agriculture Agreement Application 2026-2030

1. Are you willing to adjust your grazing plans, including moving or removing cattle early, when necessary, to support refuge management objectives and avoid undesirable impacts (e.g., overgrazing, drought, or flooding conditions)?
2. Are you prepared and willing to haul water to a grazing unit that may not have a reliable water source (e.g., haul water from offsite if there isn't enough sun to keep solar wells running)?
3. Are you willing to maintain and repair current fences, as well as install, maintain, including mowing and clearing fence lines, and remove temporary electric fence as needed?
4. Have you ever worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or any other public conservation lands? If so, when, where, and what was the nature of the work?

12. Additional comments and information that you would like to add to your application:

**Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge, Kansas
Applications for 2026-2030 Grazing Permits**

SEALED APPLICATION DUE – Friday March 13, 2026

Applicants are eligible for only one permit. Successful applicants may not be associated with any other grazing permit or related operations on Kirwin NWR during the grazing period. This includes sharing and coordinating resources, assisting with cattle movements, or participating in activities connected to more than one permit.

Grazing is one of many management strategies used to support refuge habitat objectives to sustain a diversity of native plant communities and conditions. The cattle-grazing season will generally occur from mid or late April to early May through June, or roughly 2 to 2.5 months (60-75 days).

Name of Applicant: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please indicate any preferences you may have for grazing on Kirwin NWR (e.g. general area, unit acreage, type of livestock, etc.).

I have read, understand, and agree to the terms of this application and refuge regulations. I am currently a livestock operator and at least 18 years of age. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge reserves the right to adjust, or halt use, to protect the resource and to reject any and all applications.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Applications may be hand-delivered to Kirwin NWR in a sealed envelope labeled “Grazing Application – Applicant Name”, emailed to refuge staff with the subject line “Grazing Application – Applicant Name” at jillian_boyd@fws.gov, or mailed to:

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge
Attn: Grazing Application
702 E Xavier Rd
Kirwin, KS 67644

Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge

Cooperator Grazing Record 2026

Cooperator Name: _____

Grazing Unit(s)	Number of Animals	Type of Animals	Date In	Date Out	Notes

Was water supplied by USFWS? Y/N _____

DEDUCTIONS, IF APPLICABLE:

Any deductions must be documented and submitted to refuge staff or deduction credits will not be applied to your invoice.

Water hauled (gallons) _____

Boundary fence/gate repair (hours/description) _____

Temporary fence installation (feet) _____

Mowing type: parking lot # _____, well lanes # _____, firebreaks (hours) _____

Invasive treatments:

Equipment used/type and amount of chemical used

Spot spray noxious weeds/invasive plant species (hours)

Tree removal (hours) _____

ADDITIONAL DEDUCTION NOTES:



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Mountain-Prairie Region

IN REPLY REFER TO:
FWS/R6/NWRS

MAILING ADDRESS:
Post Office Box 25486
Denver Federal Center
Denver, Colorado 80225

STREET LOCATION:
1 Denver Federal Center
Building 53, Room FW100
Denver, Colorado 80225

DATE: February 11, 2026

TO: Managers, National Wildlife Refuge System, Region 6

FROM: Assistant Regional Director, National Wildlife Refuge System, Region 6 *Stacy Amstutz*

SUBJECT: Calendar Year 2026 Grazing Fees

Grazing fees for calendar year 2026 will be based on the average grazing fee rates published in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) annual publication of Agricultural Prices¹. If a refuge unit rate is below the published grazing fee, the rate will be increased by \$1.00/Animal Unit Month (AUM) annually until the current published fee rate is reached, per Regional Cooperative Agricultural Program Guidance. For consistency in charging for cow-calf AUMs, use the calculated rates listed in the table below.

The USDA fee structure is adjusted each year, resulting in the most current and defensible data available. If you elect to adjust any fee from what is listed below, you must document and justify the reason for the adjustment.

Grazing fees for 2026 are as follows:

State	Grazing Fees for 2026 (per AUM)		Grazing Fees for 2025 (per AUM)		USDA 2026 Published Rate	
	Mature Cow	Cow/Calf	Mature Cow	Cow/Calf	Mature Cow	Cow/Calf
Colorado	\$22.00 ²	\$25.50 ²	\$21.00	\$24.50	\$23.50	\$28.00
Kansas	\$24.50 ²	\$28.00 ²	\$23.50	\$27.00	\$27.00	\$33.00
Montana	\$28.50 ²	\$30.50 ²	\$27.50	\$29.50	\$29.50	\$32.50
Nebraska	\$40.60 ²	\$46.00 ²	\$39.60	\$45.00	\$47.50	\$56.00
North Dakota	\$24.00 ²	\$27.00 ²	\$23.00	\$26.00	\$25.00	\$27.50 ³
South Dakota	\$32.50 ²	\$39.00 ²	\$31.50	\$38.00	\$36.50	\$44.00
Utah	\$21.00	\$23.00	\$20.50	\$22.00	\$21.00	\$23.00 ³
Wyoming	\$27.00	\$27.50	\$26.00	\$27.00	\$27.00	\$27.50

¹Available at: [Agricultural Prices 01/30/2026](#)

²Fee increase limited, per Regional guidance, to \$1.00 from previous year's fee.

³Insufficient data for 2025, used 2024 number

The grazing fees above are based on a mature cow or mature cow with a calf less than 6 months of age. If livestock other than cattle are used for grazing, or different-aged calves or bulls are grazed, the following conversion factors should be used to calculate grazing fees.

<u>Class of animal</u>	<u>Factor</u>
Yearling (9-18 months)	0.70
Weaner calf	0.50
Bull	1.50
Mature sheep or goat	0.20
Ewe w/lamb or nanny w/kid	0.30
Horse or mule	1.20
Bison	1.00

Some important factors to keep in mind are:

- The above rates are based on private, non-irrigated, grazing land.
- [620 FW 2](#) - This policy applies when entering into any new Cooperative Agriculture Agreement (CAA) on National Wildlife Refuge Service lands (excluding coordination areas) or to any existing cooperative agriculture agreement that is up for renewal. All agreements need to be compliant with this policy (i.e., appropriate and compatible, specified in a current management plan for the refuge, complies with [Biological Integrity Diversity and Environmental Health](#) (BIDEH) policy, and entered into under an open and competitive process).
- For national guidance on Cooperative Agriculture and to ensure compliance with policy, please visit the Branch of Conservation Planning and Policy SharePoint here: [National Cooperative Agriculture Guidance \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Policy does not allow for an emergency haying or grazing request process.
- When substantial involvement between the FWS and the agricultural cooperator is anticipated, a CAA is required. A CAA will include a Commercial Special Use Permit and a Plan of Operations that details operation requirements including communication on a regular basis, monthly status updates, and annual reviews.
- Posting your grazing opportunities is a requirement of the Cooperative Agricultural Program. Please send Requests for Application to christian_myers@fws.gov may be posted on the Cooperative Agriculture site (<https://www.fws.gov/service/cooperative-agriculture>).
- Additional resources for Region 6-specific Cooperative Agriculture may be found here: [Region 6 Cooperative Agriculture \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

If you have any questions, please contact Keely Lopez at (509) 412-2028, or via email at keely_lopez@fws.gov