

Request for Grazing Application

Cooperative Agriculture Program

Conservation Grazing on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge

Date: 6/27/2022

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge
Cherry County, Nebraska



Applications Due:
August 2, 2022

Point of Contact:
Juancarlos Giese-Refuge Manager
Valentine National Wildlife Refuge
Juancarlos_Giese@fws.gov
402-376-3398

PART – I: GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Valentine National Wildlife Refuge (VNWR), is seeking applications from qualified individuals to provide resource management services in the form of cattle grazing in our Cooperative Agriculture Program. The purpose of the grazing program is to utilize grazing as an important habitat management tool to promote and enhance native grass and forb diversity in the prairies, enhance nesting cover for migratory birds and waterfowl, reduce invasive species, and to aid in the control of cattail in the wetlands. Grazing is also utilized to provide and maintain habitat for many other species of native mammals, birds and pollinating insects.

B. Scope of work

The selected producers will operate under a Cooperative Agriculture Agreement as a “cooperator” with the Service. Under this Agreement, the Service is proposing that the cooperator will be responsible for providing the requested number of cattle and providing the necessary labor and materials to adequately fulfill the responsibilities of the refuge grazing program. Cattle will be maintained in order to graze on the VNWR for a period of up to 5 years.

The grazing regime for the refuge will be rotational grazing with duration and timing determined by habitat needs. The Valentine NWR has pastures, or habitat units, that range in size from approximately 50-1000 acres. Movement of herd will be required approximately every 3-15 days, and not all units within the designated area will be grazed. Units grazed will depend on habitat conditions and objectives of prescribed units on the grazing schedule. Depending on habitat conditions, haying may also be utilized as a tool to meet habitat objectives on grazing schedules.

Grazing Period: April 20 –July 15th each year(grazing dates are approximate and may be adjusted by up to 2 weeks in the spring based on weather and habitat conditions, and grazing may extend later into the summer, fall and winter to meet habitat objectives) The Cooperative Agricultural Agreement allows the cooperator and refuge the option to re-new the grazing permit each year for up to 5 years (2023-2027). Up to six CAA’s will be awarded.

Stocking Rate: 0.1 -1.5 Animal Unit(AU)/Acre depending on habitat conditions

Stock: The cooperator will be required to provide 250 animal unit equivalents to graze the refuge. (Higher stock numbers may be allowed in order to meet habitat objectives)

Example: 208 cow/calf pairs = 250 animal unit eq.

C. Grazing and Haying pricing

Applications will be based on price per AUM. The USFWS Valentine NWR are based on the grazing fee rates published by the USDA- National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The USFWS Grazing fees are anticipated to be \$37.60/AUM in 2023 and the USFWS rate will rise no more than \$1.00 per AUM per year to coincide with the expected NASS rates. (Note: Cooperator is responsible for fencing, maintaining watering infrastructure and needs, etc. – see Appendix C for full list of cooperator responsibilities.) Depending on habitat conditions, haying *may* also be utilized to meet habitat objectives on grazing schedules. Hay will be calculated based on AUM’s. Deductions to the final bill will be given to compensate for time spent maintaining fence and water infrastructure.

For the purpose of this lease, one Animal Unit (AU) is considered to be one dry mature cow, two years old and above. This AU rate is to consistently measure AUM’s and to compare with previous year’s data. AUM values are:

Animal Kind and Class	Animal Unit Equivalent (AUM)
Cow, dry	1.00
Cow, with calf	1.20
Bull, mature	1.50
Yearling	.7

D. Eligibility and minimum qualifications

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

PART – II: INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS

A. Refuge meeting & property tour

Applicants are encouraged to attend a property site visit and discuss any questions or concerns with the refuge manager prior to submitting an application. Site visits for interested operators will be conducted in the last 2 weeks of July at Valentine NWR.

Transportation to and from the Refuge will be the responsibility of the interested

operator(s). Contact Juancarlos Giese at 402-376-3398, or Juancarlos_Giese@fws.gov to schedule a site visit.

B. Request for Application process schedule (all dates are in calendar year 2022)

- 1) Site visits will take place prior to application deadline.
- 2) Applications must be **received by 4:00pm, Tuesday, August 2, 2022** to be considered eligible.
- 3) All applications will be opened within 2 business days.
- 4) Cooperator selection will be announced by August 8, 2022.
- 5) Cooperative Agricultural Agreement finalization be conducted in January, 2023.
- 6) Permit to graze will commence in Spring 2023.

C. Submission of required documents

Eligible livestock operators meeting the minimum qualifications listed above are encouraged to submit applications. Applications will include a completed application (Appendix E). A mailed or hand-delivered application will be accepted at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge administrative office at the address below, but it must be sealed in envelope and marked as indicated below. If you wish to highlight grazing experience, or special interests or qualifications, a cover letter is appreciated.

Mail applications:

Mark envelope in lower left hand corner

Grazing Application 2023

**SEND TO: *Valentine NWR
39679 Pony lake Road
Valentine, NE 69201***

PART – III: BASIS OF SELECTION

A. Selection process- The selection process will proceed as follows:

- 1) Receipt and review of applications, including qualification requirements.
- 2) Ranking of the most qualified applicants based on submitted applications. If multiple applications rank equally, a lottery will be held among those with the highest rank.

B. Selection criteria

The producer(s) will be selected through an open, transparent and competitive process where applications will be scored and ranked by the following objective criteria:

1. Operational capacity and qualifications.
2. Experience with grazing systems on National Wildlife Refuges 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 costs incurred by respondents in the preparation or submission of applications resulting from this application.
- The Service reserves the right to reject any and all applications. The determination of qualifications is solely with the Service.
- The Service reserves the right to conduct discussions with any applicant if it is deemed necessary for understanding, clarity, or negotiations.
- Grazing dates and stock numbers may be adjusted based on weather and habitat conditions, and necessity of refuge operations.

Appendices

Appendix A- MORE ABOUT VALENTINE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

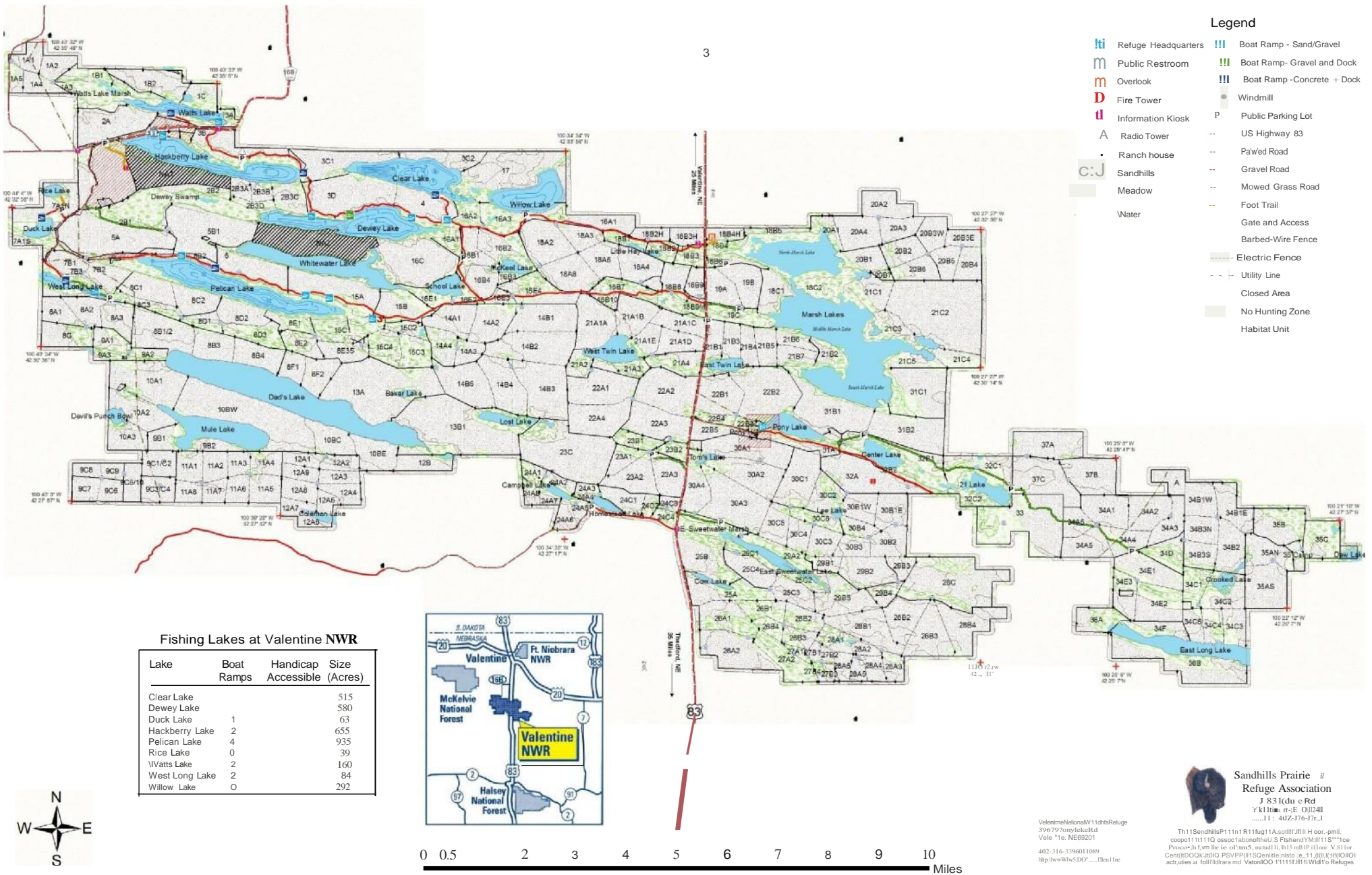
1. Background on the Valentine NWR and Current Public Uses


The 71,572-acre Valentine National Wildlife Refuge is located in the Sandhills of north-central Nebraska. The Refuge is a unique and ecologically important component of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) which includes over 500 refuges totaling approximately 93 million acres across the United States. The native grass prairie and wetlands found here support a diversity of wildlife. Little has changed from historic times. The Refuge was established by Congress in 1935 “as a breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.” The Refuge is home to 270 species of birds, 59 species of mammals, and 22 species of reptiles and amphibians. Several threatened and endangered plants, birds, and one insect are found here.

2. Description of Grassland Management on the Valentine NWR

Cattle grazing, rest, and prescribed fire are used to manage grasslands on the Refuge. The 61,861 acres of grassland on the Refuge are divided into 327 habitat units by barbed wire and electric fences. Of this acreage, 48,755 is in hills and 13,106 in meadows. Grazing achieves multiple objectives, from controlling invasive cool season grasses, to opening wetland pockets for waterfowl, to creating nesting or brood rearing cover for migratory and other native birds. Plans are made each winter to either graze, rest, or prescribe burn grasslands on the Refuge. Grazing schedules (see example in Appendix D) will be distributed by February 1 prior to the grazing season that identify the units to be grazed and dates when to move cattle in and out of the units in a rotational manner. Not all of the habitat units in yearly grazing map are grazed each year.

Appendix B- Map of the Valentine NWR



 Sandhills Prairie
Refuge Association
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Y kI tite. n-E OIIdI
.....11- 4U2-376-37c-1
Th11SandhillsP111n1R11fug11A.soollllR11H oor- pmll
coop1111111O assoc11abonoftheU.S FishendYM#11S""11ce
Procor-Jh lvm lte oltsm5. mctnd l1. bl15 mb1P-ll10ee V.5110ee
Cent11DOCK300D P5V1P1111SCent11te-n1.11.0118110101
act11ee at toll11d11rard md Vat1100 111111.111111W8110 Refuges

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge
SPECIAL USE PERMIT TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR LIVESTOCK
GRAZING

1. The Fee Schedule- Payment will be to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In total, 25% of the total bill will go to the USFWS, and the remaining 75% will be paid directly to area suppliers and contractors throughout the grazing season, as directed by the Refuge Manager in the Special Use Permit. Materials purchased and work done will be used for the benefit of the grazing program (i.e. fence materials, repair, windmills, tanks, supplies, invasive species control, habitat work, etc.).
2. Movement of Livestock - Each cooperator is provided with a grazing schedule for the grazing season (ex. number of days per unit). Livestock will be moved on the dates scheduled in the permit's grazing schedule. The movement of livestock is the responsibility of the cooperator. Refuge manager must be notified if livestock cannot be moved as scheduled a minimum of 3 days prior to scheduled move.
3. Cattle must be checked regularly by the cooperator. Any loose cattle will be returned within two calendar days to the required unit.
4. No subleasing is permitted. As approved by the Refuge Manager, partnering with another rancher will be allowed should the number of livestock needed to achieve the desired outcome not be obtainable by a single rancher. If partnering is allowed, the initial permittee will be solely responsible for the total payment, management, liability and all special conditions of the permit.
5. The number and type of livestock submitted in an application form by a perspective applicant must be utilized in each of the habitat units if he/she becomes the successful applicant. Switching type of cattle is not permitted unless approved by the Refuge Manager. Replacement of losses due to sickness or death of stock is encouraged.
6. Report all cattle moves following the move on move slips provided, giving grazing unit number, number of animals by age class, date of move, where from and to which grazing unit, etc.

7. Cattle left in a habitat unit beyond the prescribed length of time will be charged at double the AUM rate.
8. Salt and mineral should be used to promote uniform grazing/livestock distribution in each unit. Supplement stations will be changed to avoid eat-outs or bare sand. Location of supplemental salt or mineral may be determined by manager for desired habitat conditions. Vehicle use in servicing supplement stations away from trails will be minimized. Sandy or choppy sites will be avoided. Supplement stations will be removed from each unit within 5 days of livestock removal. Moving, sorting, salting and handling of cattle is solely the cooperators responsibility.
9. If livestock run out of water due insufficient wind for windmills, a refuge pump jack may be used, cooperator may haul water, or cooperator can remove livestock from the refuge. If cattle are removed from the Refuge due to a lack of water the cooperator will be charged for only those AUMs used.
10. Cooperators are encouraged to use horses or ATVs while checking or moving livestock on the Refuge. Use of 4x4 pickups should be minimized. Motorized vehicles will be operated on established trails whenever and wherever possible. Motor vehicles will only be used in order to travel to assigned grazing units.
11. The names of any employees and associates of the Cooperator who are assisting with the management of the cattle must be made known to the Refuge Manager. Cooperator will be responsible for informing these persons of the requirements of the Refuge and will be accountable for their actions while they are on the Refuge. All liability relating to livestock and livestock management to include all persons working for the permittee, whether related, hired or as a partner is strictly that of the permittee as listed on the SUP.
12. Barbed wire and electric fence will be reviewed for needed repairs before cattle are turned in. These repairs will be done by the permittee. Cooperator is responsible for the fence, setting up refuge supplied fence chargers while cattle are in the unit. The cooperator will be responsible for periodic maintenance on barbed wire and electric fences, water gaps, gates as well as cleanout of cattle guards as needed in the units they are responsible for grazing. Fence maintenance overview: refuge supplies materials; cooperator provides vehicle, tools, gas, and labor. Virtual fence will also be utilized. Installation and maintenance of collars, as well as periodic virtual monitoring, is the responsibility of the permittee.

13. The refuge will do initial maintenance on all mills, towers, tanks, and mill cribbing. The cooperators will be responsible for periodic maintenance including leather changes, (leather quality is Clayton/Mark oil treated or better), minor repairs on windmills, towers, cribbing, tanks. Refuge has oil, leathers and bentonite for needed maintenance.
14. Pesticides: No cattle rubs may be placed on the Refuge and no sprays, ear tags, or pesticide-laden supplemental minerals permitted while cattle are on refuge lands.
15. The permittee must be in compliance with the respective state and local livestock health regulations.
16. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reserve the right to modify the grazing period, animal use months, numbers and types of livestock or terminate the SUP if habitat conditions warrant. The length of permit, season of use, type of livestock, stocking rate and/or other parameters will be determined by the Refuge Manager. Livestock are permitted only: Within the prescribed allotment, during the specified period of use, in the authorized numbers, and in the specified classes. If the cooperators desire any change in grazing, either as to times, numbers, or class of livestock and it is not approved in this permit, the refuge grazing manager shall be contacted in advance, regarding the desired change in order to modify the permit.

Appendix D: Example Grazing schedule.

Example grazing schedule spring/summer VNWR

Grz Unit	Acres	Comments	Treatment	Cow_Calf	Adult	Yearling	Bull	In_Date	Out_Date	NoDays	AUMS
31A	169.8		ESSD			150		4/20/2017	4/28/2017	8	27.5
32B2	111.8		ESSD			150		4/28/2017	5/3/2017	5	17
32A	454.6		ESSD			150		5/3/2017	5/8/2017	5	17
31A	169.8		ESSD			150		5/8/2017	5/15/2017	7	24.1
27A2	260.6		ESSD	250				5/16/2017	5/22/2017	6	59
26A1	280.4		ESSD	250				5/22/2017	5/26/2017	4	39.4
25A	285.9		ESSD	250				5/26/2017	5/31/2017	5	49.2
26B2	150.9	Graze with 26B1, 26B3, 26B4	SDS	250				5/31/2017	6/5/2017	5	
26B3	108.5	Graze with 026B1, 26B2, 26B4	SDS	250				5/31/2017	6/5/2017	5	
26B1	146.0	Graze with 26B2, 26B3, 26B4	SDS	250				5/31/2017	6/5/2017	5	49.2
26B4	81.1	Graze with 26B1, 26B2, 26B3	SDS	250				5/31/2017	6/5/2017	5	
29B5	310.1		SDS	250				6/5/2017	6/10/2017	5	49.2
Grazing Uni	Acres	Comments	Treatment	Cow_Calf	Adult	Yearling	Bull	In_Date	Out_Date	NoDays	AUMS
29A2	197.2	Graze with 29A1	SDS	250			10	6/10/2017	6/15/2017	5	51.7
29A1	79.2	Graze with 29A2	SDS	250			10	6/10/2017	6/15/2017	5	
30A4	223.7		SDS	250			10	6/15/2017	6/19/2017	4	41.3
30A2	334.9		SDS	250			10	6/19/2017	6/23/2017	4	41.3
31A	169.8		SDS	250			10	6/23/2017	6/26/2017	3	31
22B4	60.8		SDS	250			10	6/26/2017	6/29/2017	3	
22B5	143.6		SDS	250			10	6/26/2017	6/29/2017	3	31
22B3	42.4		SDS	250			10	6/26/2017	6/29/2017	3	
30A1	366.7		SDS	250			10	6/29/2017	7/3/2017	4	41.3
Sum AUMS											569.2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

**APPLICATION FOR CONSERVATION GRAZING
COOPERATIVE AGRICULTURE AGREEMENT**

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge
39679 Pony Lake Road
Valentine, NE 69201

TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT

APPLICANT NAME _____ DATE _____

BUSINESS NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ST _____ ZIP _____

PHONE NUMBER _____ EMAIL _____

I. Qualifications. Please answer the following questions:

A. What numbers and type of stock could you bring to the refuge?

- If bringing bulls, would you be able to bring them home after 60 days.

B. Maintaining a diversity of habitats for native wildlife is a major component of the Valentine NWR grazing objectives. Are you willing to graze particular upland units to maintain bare ground habitat and in wetlands to control cattails?

C. Due to the limited access and roads in the grazing area, are you able to bring your cattle from lands neighboring the refuge lands on the grazing area map?

D. Do you have control of adjacent private land through ownership or lease for the life of this proposed grazing system, that you are willing to graze in rotation with refuge lands?

E. The refuge will utilize a combination of barbed wire, electric and virtual fencing. As a cooperator would you be able to conduct fence repair and maintenance, and work with staff and contractors for installation of virtual fence collars and digital monitoring of cattle?

II. Narrative. Please provide a brief narrative for each of the following:

A. Describe your grazing operation(i.e.- spring/fall operation), and how early you would be able to bring cattle onto the refuge:

B. Describe your experience using grazing to benefit native wildlife species, such as native birds, pollinating insects or rare/endangered species. (Specifically, how did you use grazing to benefit the wildlife species (which species)?):

C. Describe any specific areas of specialization and expertise: (relevant certifications, education, and specialized training if applicable).

D. Have you ever worked with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service? If so, where, when, and what was the nature of the work?

- E. Describe the availability and expected response time (minimum and maximum response time, in days or hours) of the operator or employees of the operator, in the event of that you are notified of an issue, such as a livestock/human conflict, sick or injured livestock, cattle on a highway, cattle out of assigned unit, etc.
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Applicant may, if desired, answer any or all questions on a separate sheet. Please reference questions numbers (e.g., I.A.) when providing answers.

I certify that I meet all qualifying standards and I have read, understand and agree to any special conditions associated with the Refuge use for which I make application.

Applicant's Signature

Date signed