PROGRAM GUIDES

NATURE SMART CLIMATE READINESS PROGRAM

GRASSLANDS

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Not Accepting Applications

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PROGRAM AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Association

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View Program Online →

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Funding through the Nature Smart Climate Readiness Program (NSCRP, or “Nature Smart”) supports two separate types of projects, conserving existing grasslands OR establishing new grasslands. Grasslands directly support nature–based solutions to store and capture carbon, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and contribute to biodiversity.

Conservation grassland projects under the Nature Smart program are anchored on an existing grassland – they represent protection and enhancement of the grassland to maintain and increase carbon storage and sequestration.

Projects to support grassland restoration under the Nature Smart program pertain to the establishment of a new grassland on agricultural land which would be suitable to grasses, but where there are currently no grasses or where grasses or other vegetation are currently harvested or grazed.

A single project cannot include both conservation of existing grassland and restoration of new grasslands – these would be separate projects. Conserved or restored grassland projects cannot be used for agricultural production, harvesting or grazing.

INTAKE DATES

INTAKE	INTAKE DATES	ELIGIBLE PROJECT START DATE (INVOICE DATE)	ELIGIBLE PROJECT COMPLETION DATE	CLAIM DEADLINE	PREVIOUS INTAKE GUIDE
1	Intake opens: January 22, 2024 Intake closes: March 15, 2024 5pm ET	April 1, 2023	A Conservation Agreement must be entered into on or before March 31, 2024 Projects must be implemented by March 31, 2024, and maintained until March 31, 2033	March 31, 2024	View
2	Intake opens: July 29, 2024 9am ET Intake closes: August 27, 2024 5pm ET	April 1, 2024	A Conservation Agreement must be entered into on or before December 1, 2024 Projects must be implemented by December 1, 2024, and maintained until March 31, 2034. Ongoing maintenance costs (until March 31, 2034) may be included in the proposed costs of an application; see the bid guidelines.	December 1, 2024	View
3	Intake opens: May 1, 2025 9am ET Intake closes: May 21, 2025 3pm ET	April 1, 2025	A Conservation Agreement must be entered into on or before December 1, 2025 Projects must be implemented by December 1, 2025, and maintained until March 31, 2035. Ongoing maintenance costs (until March 31, 2035) may be included in the proposed costs of an application; see the bid guidelines.	December 1, 2025	

Eligible activities and costs can only be incurred on or after April 1, 2025.

COST SHARE SUMMARY

Cost–share funding percentage is determined by selection of a competitive bid submitted by the applicant, up to a maximum cost–share payment of $40,000 per project.

There is no limit to the proposed costs of an application, but the maximum bid is $40,000.00 per project.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Who is Eligible to Apply?

To be eligible for Nature Smart, an applicant must meet the following three criteria:
Own farmland in Ontario as demonstrated by:

- A valid **farm business registration number (FBRN)** *For information on registering a farm business and/or a religious exemption, visit Overview (agricorp.com).*

OR

- A Religious Exemption Letter provided by the OMAFRA Appeal Tribunal (provide with application submission)

OR

- A Cultural Exemption Letter provided by the Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario to First Nations farmers, verifying the farm business operates in a First Nations community (provide with application submission)

OR

- An income exemption from the Farm Property Class Tax Rate Program (i.e., Start-up farm businesses, Business structure change, Not a normal production year, Age/Illness/Death of a spouse) (provided with application submission)

OR

- A current Municipal Property Assessment Notice, Municipal Tax Bill, or a Farm Property Tax Class Assessment, in the name of the applicant, for a minimum of 25 acres or more assessed as farmland which includes the proposed project location (provide with application submission)

Applicants must:

- Own the farmland where they would like to complete the proposed project.
- Be willing to enter into a signed Conservation Agreement with OSCIA, committing the farm business to maintaining the proposed project for ten (10) years.
- Be in compliance with all requirements of law and remain in compliance for the duration of the project.

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Eligible Activities and Costs

Funding supports two separate categories: conserving existing grassland projects or establishing new grassland projects (restoration). Conservation of grasslands under the Nature Smart program is anchored on an existing grassland – it represents protection and enhancement of an existing grassland to maintain and increase carbon storage and sequestration. Creation of new grasslands under the Nature Smart program pertain to the establishment of grassland on agricultural land where there are currently no grasses or where grasses or other vegetation are currently harvested or grazed.

If your project activities include both conserving an existing grassland **and** establishing a new grassland, which are distinct, you must submit **two separate applications** (one for the existing grassland, and one for the new grassland).

Eligible activities and costs may include:

Mixed planting of native grassland species (e.g., little bluestem, Indian grass, brown–eyed Susan) or non–native grassland species (e.g., timothy, orchard grass, clover).

- Legumes cannot represent more than 40% of the speciation based on the planting rate.
- *Species planted must not be invasive to Ontario. Contact OSCIA prior to application submission if you are unsure of a species' status.*

- Site preparation and maintenance
- Rental and/or purchase of specialized planting equipment
- Custom planting costs
- Brush encroachment mitigation and control of invasive species to improve establishment and maintenance of the grassland, including mowing or chemical treatment (according to best management practices)
- Livestock exclusion fencing (application must mention the presence of livestock)
- Opportunity costs associated with land taken out of production
- Controlled burns in grassland according to best management practices
- Permits

Adding nesting structures or other wildlife habitat features based on best management practices. These include, but are not limited to:

  - Bat houses and/or bat roosts
  - Specialized nest boxes for Species at Risk birds (e.g. barn owl, barn swallow, prothonotary warbler, short–eared owl)
  - Winter bird roosts
  - Pollinator nesting sites to support pollinators and plant species at risk
  - Snake hibernacula (overwintering sites)
  - Pollinator plantings

- In–kind time to support project implementation and/or maintenance.
- Costs of a third–party technical expert to provide project planning, design and support

More information and further resources on habitat structures can be found on the Species at Risk Resources page of the OSCIA website.

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Ineligible Activities and Costs

- Planting invasive species. *Contact OSCIA prior to application submission if you are unsure of a species' status.*
- Clearing natural habitat (e.g., forested land) in order to plant a grassland.
- Any activities relating to pasture management or grasslands intended for forage or grazing
- Establishment of grasses and vegetation for harvest (e.g., biomass, forages, or other removal of vegetation from the grassland)
- Restoration of licensed aggregate pits/other lands covered by regulatory rehabilitation plans

- Fencing not directly associated with livestock exclusion from the grassland area
- Activities and expenditures as detailed in the section Other Ineligible Activities

Other Ineligible Costs and Activities

- Projects that have the sole purpose of coming into or maintaining compliance with Requirements of the Law that pertain to current business operations.
- Any activity, in the opinion of OSCIA, not required to complete an eligible project, as set out under Eligible Activities and Costs, and/or not specifically required for the execution of a project.
- Normal operating activities associated with conducting or expanding a business' current operations, including annual service fees of any type.
- Any cost that is eligible for a rebate, credit, or refund
- Gifts and incentives.
- Any cost purchased from a supplier who is not at arm's length from the applicant (i.e., businesses owned the same individual(s), or by siblings or parents, through blood or marriage).
- Applicant's costs of travel, hospitality, meals, and/or accommodations.
- Purchase, lease, construction or sale of land, buildings or facilities, and associated taxes or fees (e.g., land transfer tax).
- Extended warranties, taxes, legal fees, financing charges, loan interest payments, bank fees.

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What You Need to Know About In-Kind Contributions

Reasonable hours of labour invested by the applicant, his/her dependents, and business partner(s) may be proposed as in-kind contributions. These costs can inform the total proposed costs and bid of a project. Eligible in-kind contributions will be considered equivalent to cash payments for purchased goods and services.

Eligible in-kind contributions are invested in the project in the form of **unpaid** labour and/or use of equipment owned by the applicant and should be estimated in the application form based on the

following:

- The recommended labour rate is $25 per hour.
- The recommended in-kind equipment rate for a tractor/truck or similar equipment is $75 per hour of operation. Applicable in-kind operator charges (labour) may be claimed along with the in-kind equipment rate..

Examples of **eligible** in-kind contributions which can inform total estimated project costs:

- Applicant seeding using their own equipment
- Applicant labour to set up habitat enhancements
- Applicant time to perform maintenance to support plantings

Examples of **ineligible** in-kind contributions which cannot inform total estimated project costs:

- Staff or employee time when the individual is paid for their services by the farm business
- Time invested for education, supervision, or administration
- Use of equipment purchased as part of an approved application
- Equipment costs for use of hand tools or power tools

If an applicant plans to perform unpaid labour/use of their own equipment for the project, an estimate to the best of their ability should be reflected in the project costs submitted with the application.

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How Much Cost-Share Funding Is Available?

Applicants must identify the total costs for their proposed project and a cost-share funding request (or “bid”) in their application. The maximum available cost share-funding for a single project is $40,000.00.

The maximum available cost-share funding for a single project is $40,000.00, so your bid should not go over this amount.

There is no limit on the proposed cost amount submitted with an application.

Selection of applications under Nature Smart is a competitive process, so applications will be assessed against one another based on their potential to sequester carbon and provide ecological benefits, against the amount of funding the applicant is requesting. Projects will be selected based on providing the greatest benefit per amount of funding requested.

Assessment criteria are reflected in the application form, and based on the project's location, and projects which have the greatest potential to sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions are the most competitive. The criteria include but are not limited to: soil carbon content, predominant vegetation type, landscape connectivity, area impacted, and enhancements to increase carbon storage (e.g., fencing to exclude livestock from natural features or planting on areas with erosion risk). These features of the project, taken into account with the amount of funding being requested (the "bid"), determines relative competitiveness against other Nature Smart projects.

Approved applicants are required to sign a ten-year Conservation Agreement with OSCIA before funding can be released.

A farm business can access a maximum of $120,000.00 in cost-share for all approved applications submitted to all project categories under the NSCRP, from January 2024 until March 31, 2026. There is no limit to the number of applications a farm business may submit to the NSCRP.

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Conservation Agreements

Nature Smart aims to provide long-term carbon sequestration through the use of Conservation Agreements. Before the cost-share funding payment can be issued, approved Nature Smart applicants are required to enter into a Conservation Agreement with OSCIA.

In the Agreement to support eligible projects, participants commit to implement and maintain the approved project for ten (10) years. It is encouraged, but not required, that the agreement be on title for the land where the project is implemented. Approved applicants must notify OSCIA of all land ownership or control changes.

OSCIA may verify practice implementation including conducting inspections throughout the duration of the Conservation Agreement. If the practice is not maintained as outlined in the approved application and signed Conservation Agreement, applicants will be required to repay all funding received for the approved project.

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What Do I Need to Apply?

Applications are only accepted during application intakes, which can be found above. Applications are evaluated based only on the information submitted and will not be considered if they do not meet the eligibility criteria or if they are incomplete.

Be sure to carefully review the Nature Smart Climate Readiness Program guide in its entirety.

The Nature Smart Grasslands Application Form is available for download here only during application intakes.

On your application form, you will be required to identify all costs for your proposed project and a cost-share funding request (or "bid"). Guidelines for deciding on a bid amount can be found here.

On your application form, you will be required to answer questions regarding landscape features at your project site. Please see the Nature Smart Glossary for definitions and help to ensure you can answer these questions.

You must include all of the information listed under Documentation Required With the Application with your application submission. You will be required to provide a detailed work plan on your application form that clearly outlines your commitment to implementing the proposed, eligible project. If the required documentation is not received with the submission, the application may be considered incomplete and denied funding.

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Documentation Required with the Application

Detailed site map(s) based on a satellite image (e.g., using GoogleMaps, AgMaps) of the grassland project location. The site map(s) must show the precise location (address or GPS coordinates) and total area (acres) of the proposed grassland restoration or conservation project. For an example of a site map, click here.

- **Note**: *Hand–drawn maps will not be accepted*—If you need help accessing a satellite image of your project location, contact your local OSCIA Field Representative for free assistance.

Click here for contact information.

A letter of support, and/or planning document(s), and/or similar documentation from a qualified third-party, such as a Conservation Authority or Ducks Unlimited Canada. You may use the optional template here if you wish. The document(s) must include:

- Project location (address/GPS coordinates) and total area (acres)
- Land use/condition of the project location before implementation of the project
- Proposed activity/activities (e.g., grass species to be planted, etc.)
- An estimated project timeline
- Name, signature, designation/organization and contact information of the qualified third–party

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How Do I Submit My Application?

Applications are only accepted during the application intakes dates noted above.

See the What Do I Need To Apply section to download the application form.
Application forms should be submitted by email to naturesmart@ontariosoilcrop.org or by post to:

1-367 Woodlawn Road West
Guelph ON N1H 7K9

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Limits of the Cost-Share Funding

- The eligible **start date** is April 1, 2025. Projects cannot be started, and costs cannot be incurred before that date.
- OSCIA issues full cost-share payment after the applicant has committed to maintaining the project for the required ten (10) years, as outlined in a signed Conservation Agreement and

complete claim package.

- Applicants are required to notify OSCIA of any changes of scope of an approved project. OSCIA will amend the application form and/or Conservation Agreement if deemed necessary.

- Applicants are responsible for securing all necessary approvals and permits for the proposed project before starting and complying with all applicable municipal bylaws and provincial or federal regulations. OSCIA may require copies of permits obtained for some projects before issuing payments and/or may request copies of permits throughout the duration of the Conservation Agreement.

- OSCIA reserves the right to require additional documentation and ultimately accept or reject a claim for funding consideration.

- Stacking of Nature Smart Climate Readiness Program (NSCRP) funding from one or more businesses towards the same project is not permitted.

- NSCRP funding can be stacked with other nongovernment and/or federal, provincial or municipal sources of funding, provided that the total amount of funding, including the NSCRP payment, does not exceed 100 percent of the total eligible expenditures of a project, and provided that the stacking is permissible within the program stipulations of the other source(s) of funding. The farm business shall ensure that the total cost-share assistance from all sources for eligible expenses shall not exceed 100 percent of project costs. Applicants must refer to the limitations of funding imposed by any other source(s) of funding, as stacking NSCRP funding with other funding source(s) may depend on the stipulations of those other source(s) of funding. All funding for a project from additional off-farm sources, excluding financing, must be listed on the claim form for an approved project.

- It is the responsibility of the applicant to determine if the other source(s) of funding allow stacking with NSCRP funding and/or if those other source(s) allow carbon credit stacking, as the Nature Smart Conservation Agreement stipulates that any GHG emission reductions or carbon sequestration arising from an approved project between April 1, 2025 and March 31, 2035, shall not be used by the Farm Business to apply for any existing or future federal or provincial offset credit programs. After March 31, 2035, if the applicant chooses to continue to maintain the project they may access carbon credits through other federal or provincial offset credit programs.

- Projects that have received funding are routinely inspected. The decision to inspect may be based on project type, amount of funding, or any other criteria selected by OSCIA. Projects may also be inspected randomly. Inspections may be carried out after project implementation and at any time during the 10-year Conservation Agreement. Inspections may include soil sampling

and/or vegetation assessments and/or Species at Risk habitat or population monitoring. Biosecurity protocols are followed by all representatives of OSCIA.

- The information presented in this guide is the best available at the current time. In the event of a conflict between anything set out in this program guide and/or any other program material and the Minister's Order, the Minister's Order will prevail. Errors and Omissions excepted. Check with OSCIA for applicable updates. Material is subject to change without notice as the cost-share program evolves.

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How Do I Submit a Claim?

If an application is approved for an allocation, written confirmation will be provided by OSCIA by email. This approval letter will include:

- Confirmation of project completion and claim submission deadlines.
- A Conservation Agreement, which must be entered into by the applicant before cost-share payment can be issued
- Links to the necessary documents (e.g., Claim Form, Electronic Funds Transfer Form, etc.). *Note that Nature Smart claims do not require invoiced costs and proofs of payment.*
- Information on how to submit the claim, including providing photo(s) of the project.

The applicant ***must enter into a signed Conservation Agreement*** with OSCIA, committing the approved applicant to maintain the eligible project for ten (10) years, and the signed Agreement must be included with the claim submission.

Note: OSCIA reserves the right to verify project implementation, including conducting a site inspection before and/of after cost-share is issued, and throughout the duration of the Conservation Agreement, and this may include soil sampling. If the project is not maintained as outlined in the approved application and signed Conservation Agreement, applicants will be required to repay all funding received for the approved project.

OSCIA may be required to collect project information (e.g., via emailed electronic survey) at any time throughout the duration of the Conservation Agreement.

Payments are made by electronic funds transfer (EFT) in the name of the applicant. All funding is considered income to the applicant for tax purposes. OSCIA will issue a tax form (AGR-1) and report the amount paid to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA); this is why an applicant's Social Insurance Number (SIN) is collected if the applicant does not have a CRA Business Number. Only one claim can be submitted per project per program year, and only one payment will be made per claim.

If you have any questions about program requirements, project timelines or claim submission dates, contact OSCIA at:
naturesmart@ontariosoilcrop.org.

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