



Thousand Hills Ranch near Clearwater is the first Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly ranch in Minnesota. From left, family ranchers and land stewards Mikhale Maier, Matt Maier, and Melissa Larsen. Photo: Ellen Schmidt

5 Audubon Conservation Ranching farms on 5700 acres in Minnesota Locations include Mora, Winona, Redwood Falls, and Clearwater

AUDUBON CONSERVATION RANCHING

Audubon Conservation Ranching is the flagship grassland habitat initiative of the National Audubon Society. The growing and innovative effort operates in 22 states and was recently launched in Minnesota in 2023.

The goal is to stabilize declining grassland birds in partnership with farmers and ranchers. Grassland species are among North America's most imperiled group of birds: Total populations have declined more than 53 percent since 1970.

Most grasslands in Minnesota are private working lands, so working with landowners is the most effective partnership to affect habitat and bird populations at scale.

The program functions through Audubon's unique Bird-Friendly Land Certification:

- Built on rotational grazing as the primary means to manage a mosaic of grassland habitat for birds.
- Landowners must meet stringent habitat management, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare standards.
- Once qualified by third-party audit, producers then use the Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly seal for the packaging and promotion of beef or bison products grazed on Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly lands.
- Consumers support conservation when they select products from these bird-friendly lands.

Helping Farmers & Ranchers Help Habitat

Building Resilient Lands: Audubon is committed to helping farmers and ranchers create and maintain highly diverse ecosystems that support wildlife and livestock. Improved forage, reduced chemical use, and grazing lands that can withstand drought and heavy rains stand to benefit long-term sustainability and bottom lines.

Rigorous Monitoring: The program includes thorough bird and soil monitoring, providing landowners with valuable data to support adaptive management practices and business decisions.

Landowner Assistance: Unlike other certification programs, Audubon Conservation Ranching provides services to farmers and ranchers at no cost. This includes habitat management planning, technical support, and audits.



Eastern Meadowlark. Photo: Brady Karg/Audubon

Conservation Partners

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Photo: Jenn Askerman and Tim Gruber