Expanded Crane Research in Teton Valley to support the goals of the Greater Yellowstone Sandhill Crane Initiative

The Greater Yellowstone Sandhill Crane Initiative, “Initiative,” is a multi-year project working to preserve critical staging habitat for the largest staging population of Sandhill Cranes in the Greater Yellowstone and to raise awareness and funding for private land conservation, a critical aspect of sustaining the wildlife of the GYR. This report accounts for the use and implementation of the $1,000 grant from the MBRWF 2019 grant. The 2019 grant funds were used to improve the Initiative’s monitoring program by expanding the survey of Sandhill Crane foraging to previously unsurveyed areas and conducting a complete roost survey. This expansion provided us with new information so that we can proactively secure unprotected roosts, protect previously unidentified lands on which the cranes forage, and expand the food plots in proximity to roosting habitat.

The grant funding was used to provide capacity for four aerial monitoring visits and additional ground-based surveys to confirm previously unidentified roost habitat and to confirm information gathered from aerial flights with ground-based surveys. Two properties identified in these surveys are currently underway for permanent protection through a conservation easement to be completed in 2020.
Organization or Name of Applicant: Teton Regional Land Trust  
Mailing address: PO Box 247 Driggs, ID 83422  
Website address: www.tetonlandtrust.org  
Tax ID number: 94-3146525  
Contact information for the person(s) responsible for directing the funding: Joselin Matkins  
Mission Statement: The Teton Regional Land Trust’s mission is to conserve working farms and ranches, fish and wildlife habitat, and scenic open spaces in Eastern Idaho for this and future generations.  
Title of grant: Expanded Crane Research in Teton Valley to support the goals of the Greater Yellowstone Sandhill Crane Initiative “the Initiative”.  
Amount Received: $1,000

DESCRIBE HOW THE GRANTED MONEY WAS USED
The $1,000 grant was used to expand our roost survey and population monitoring. The grant funding was used to provide capacity for four aerial monitoring flights and additional ground surveys to confirm previously unidentified roost habitat and forage areas. The support from the MBRWF was matched by other funds including state grants, other donations to the Initiative, and funds raised through the 2019 Greater Yellowstone Crane Festival.

DISCUSS HOW THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES IN THE GRANT WERE ACHIEVED
The goal for the grant funding request was to advance conservation driven research by expanding our monitoring program, surveying foraging patterns in areas of Teton Valley outside the scope of previous monitoring efforts and to conduct a roost survey.

Fall Monitoring Goal – We utilized the grant funds to expand our current monitoring efforts through four aerial surveys to identify foraging areas not currently covered by our annual Crane Surveys. Historically, our efforts have been focused in the central portion of the Teton Valley on the west side of the Teton River. The 2019 flights focused on areas north and south of the current monitoring route, and in areas where it is difficult to observe foraging cranes from public roads. The information gathered from these aerial surveys has provided TRLT with an increased understanding of habitat use in Teton Valley, opening up new opportunities for conservation easements and fee acquisitions.

Complete Roost Survey – The aerial surveys also gave us the opportunity to confirm and identify roosting habitat throughout the valley. Through these surveys, we identified two new night roosts that had not been previously documented. Other roosts that had been previously identified as active were confirmed in 2019. We did note that one roost that had been viable in past years was no longer suitable having been overgrown with cattails. Due to higher than average water during the fall, we also observed some transitions. Areas in the Teton River that are traditionally roosts had too much water to serve as roosts in 2019. Similarly, other areas that typically don’t have standing water suitable for roosting, served as viable roosting habitat in 2019. These areas will be revisited in 2020 to determine variability in roosting habitat from year to year.
STATE THE CONCLUSIONS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROJECT

For this grant request, our goal was to expand our forage and roost monitoring to improve our conservation priorities and efforts. This was advanced in 2019 with particular insights gained into the importance of the area at the head of Spring Creek and the confluence with North Leigh Creek near Tetonia. We are excited to report that we are already working on a new conservation easement that we expect to complete in early 2020 that places a conservation easement on one of the newly confirmed roosts. In addition to the area identified in the 2019 aerial surveys, we also began working with a landowner along the Teton River to expand protections for critical foraging areas. We are currently working on a second conservation easement to complete in 2020 that will protect important forage habitat.

The overall goal of the “Initiative” aims to ensure the viability of Sandhills in the Greater Yellowstone by securing the habitat that hosts the largest staging population of Sandhills in the region and by raising awareness of the importance of safeguarding the habitat for the largest staging population of Sandhill Cranes in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. We made progress in this regard in 2019 by identifying additional critical areas, advancing two conservation easement projects to protect roosting and foraging habitat, and hosting the 2nd Annual Greater Yellowstone Crane Festival. We attracted over 1,000 people to participate in a variety of activities over a week-long period. Collectively, these outcomes built on our efforts and enhance engagement in the protection of natural resources and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Matching Funds (Source)</th>
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<td>Expanded Surveys</td>
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