The Central Grasslands, also known as the Great Plains, are one of North America’s largest and most vital ecosystems. Home to hundreds of plant and animal species, this landscape is essential not only for wildlife and their habitats, but also to the people and communities who live, work and thrive in these areas.

Grasslands support essential pollinators like bees and butterflies and provide critical habitat for a variety of birds. In addition to helping produce food that supports people around the world, this ecosystem plays a critical role in bolstering climate resiliency, including by sequestering carbon, reducing soil erosion, ensuring clean water, and protecting biodiversity. Since time immemorial, grassland systems have also been integral for Indigenous communities, many of which relied on bison that once thrived across the Great Plains.

Yet despite their outsized importance in providing ecosystem-wide benefits, grasslands are being lost at a far faster pace than they are being conserved. In the last 10 years alone, we have lost more than 50 million acres of grasslands. Habitat loss from factors such as woody plant encroachment, agricultural conversion, and invasive species threaten the health of grasslands and risk a biome-scale collapse that would be catastrophic for fish and wildlife, people and their communities, our food sources, and the environment as a whole. The imperative to preserve this ecosystem is made even more urgent by the impacts of climate change, including warming temperatures, historic droughts, and intense wildfires.

To address these urgent threats, as part of the Department of the Interior’s Restoration and Resilience Framework funded by President Biden’s Investing in America agenda, the Department’s bureaus and offices are working to protect, conserve and restore the Central Grasslands. The Department is utilizing funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to support grasslands conservation, solve key conservation challenges, and advance climate resilience.

As part of these efforts, we are working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers, state and local leaders, Tribal Nations, the outdoor recreation community, private landowners, and other stakeholders to conserve North America’s Central Grasslands for the people, wildlife, and economies they support. For example, the Department has supported the Central Grasslands Roadmap, an effort to engage multiple nations across three countries and eight diverse sectors to identify a shared vision, common principles, and collaborative priorities for grasslands conservation and Tribal co-stewardship. These locally led efforts also help advance the Biden-Harris administration’s America the Beautiful initiative, a nationwide effort to conserve, connect, and restore the lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend.