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I live in Windham County and am writing to request that GRH manage the Upper Meadows in Rockingham to support grassland bird nesting. Grassland birds are declining precipitously across our region. As I write on May 21, hayfields all over Windham County are being harvested. Farmers, facing ever tighter financial constraints, must harvest their fields 2-3 times a season. This intensification of agriculture is not compatible with the needs of wildlife who historically have depended on these open lands for habitat. Fields that are cut in early summer do not provide nesting habitat for ground-nesting grassland birds - bobolinks and eastern meadowlarks unfortunate enough to nest in these conventionally managed fields will not fledge young. Upper Meadows is currently managed under a delayed-mow regimen, and is therefore providing critical nesting habitat to a suite of birds that have been identified as top regional conservation priorities. But it has not always been this way.

In 2020 I assisted a small group of local volunteers flag a buffer around an occupied eastern meadowlark nest at Upper Meadows to safeguard it in advance of an imminent harvest. This was a last minute effort and involved quite a bit of scrambling. In the end, the young meadowlarks survived the hay harvest, but bobolink and Savannah sparrow nests were lost.

Since 2023, an EQIP grant from NRCS has financially subsidized the costs of delayed-mow management. Grassland birds are thriving in this grassland oasis. But this Upper Meadows EQIP grant will expire in 2025.

Habitat loss is an ongoing challenge and at this point there really is no other grassland bird habitat like Upper Meadows in Windham County. Please ensure that Upper Meadows be managed to support priority grassland species in perpetuity.

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