

2010 Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2012

PROJECT TITLE: HCP Phase VI Supplemental – Mississippi Bluffland Restoration (2p)
AFFILIATION: National Wild Turkey Federation
MAILING ADDRESS: 37305 Deer Lake Way
CITY/STATE/ZIP: Grand Rapids, MN 55744
PHONE: 218-326-8800
E-MAIL: rhorton@nwtf.net
WEBSITE: www.nwtf.org
FUNDING SOURCE: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
LEGAL CITATION: M.L. 2010, Chp. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 4f2p

APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$50,000

Overall Project Outcome and Results

This project was part of a long-term bluffland restoration effort by DNR, National Wild Turkey Federation, and private landowners in SE MN. Funds from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund were used to hire contractors to remove Eastern red cedar, buckthorn, honeysuckle, and prickly ash that was growing over former “goat prairies”. The project focused primarily on improving habitat for the timber rattlesnake, three other at-risk snake species (racer, bullsnake, and hognose snake) and numerous at-risk plant species in the Bluffland subsection.

Goat prairies are native prairies found on steep south-facing hills in southeastern Minnesota. They are important to wildlife because the wind prevents deep snowpack, and intense sunlight melts much of what does stick. Animals can then rest and forage on the exposed sites. Nearby rock bluffs hold snakes, which forage in the prairies in summer. These prairies were historically maintained by periodic wildfire, but fire prevention has allowed native red cedar and non-native brushy species to encroach on them. These need to be removed to restore the native habitat. Restoring vegetation through these methods also reduces soil loss and improves water quality within the watershed.

During this grant period we treated 29.2 acres of habitat on private lands by hand cutting the invasive overstory. Stumps were treated with herbicides to prevent re-sprouting. Cut material was piled and burned on-site. A ten-year agreement was required from the landowners before any work began. The level of brush infestation, location and access impacted the contract price, which in turn led to lower than anticipated accomplishment acreage. The treatment area was 28 acres rather than the anticipated “up to 45 acres” as indicated in the initial plan. A second site was added later and an additional 1.2 acres treated. Periodic prescribed burning will be conducted by DNR (non-Trust-Fund monies) and will maintain the site in the desired habitat state.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

Accomplishment Reports and press releases will be made available at <http://www.mnhabitatcorridors.org>

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2010 Work Program Final Report

Date of Progress Report: June 18, 2012
Final Report
Date of Work Program Approval: 06/09/10
Project Completion Date: 6/30/12

I. PROJECT TITLE: Mississippi Bluffland Restoration (2p)

Project Manager: Rick Horton
Affiliation: National Wild Turkey Federation
Mailing Address: 37305 Deer Lake Way
City / State / Zip: Grand Rapids, MN 55744
Telephone Number: 218-326-8800
E-mail Address: rhorton@nwtf.net
FAX Number:
Web Site Address: www.nwtf.org

Location: HCP Area 11.

Total ENRTF Project Budget:	ENRTF Appropriation	\$ 50,000
	Minus Amount Spent:	\$ 49,998
	Equal Balance:	\$ 2

Legal Citation: ML 2010, Chap.[362], Sec.[2], Subd. 4(f)2p.

Appropriation Language:

\$1,344,000 is added to Laws 2009, chapter 143, section 2, subdivision 4, paragraph (e), from the trust fund for the acceleration of agency programs and cooperative agreements. Of this appropriation, \$308,000 is to the commissioner of natural resources for agency programs and \$1,036,000 is for agreements as follows: \$425,000 with Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; \$50,000 with National Wild Turkey Federation; \$164,000 with the Nature Conservancy; \$102,000 with Minnesota Land Trust; \$200,000 with the Trust for Public Land; \$45,000 with Friends of Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District; and \$50,000 to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to plan, restore, and acquire fragmented landscape corridors that connect areas of quality habitat to sustain fish, wildlife, and plants. The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service is an authorized cooperating partner in the appropriation. Expenditures are limited to the project corridor areas as defined in the work program. Land acquired with this appropriation must be sufficiently improved to meet at least minimum habitat and facility management standards as determined by the commissioner of natural resources. This appropriation may not be used for the purchase of residential structures, unless expressly approved in the work program. All conservation easements must be perpetual and have a natural resource management plan. Any land acquired in fee title by the commissioner of natural resources with money from this appropriation must be designated as an outdoor recreation unit under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.07. The commissioner may similarly designate any lands acquired in less than fee title. A

list of proposed restorations and fee title and easement acquisitions must be provided as part of the required work program. All funding for conservation easements must include a long-term stewardship plan and funding for monitoring and enforcing the agreement.

II. and III. FINAL PROJECT SUMMARY

This project was part of a long-term bluffland restoration effort by DNR, National Wild Turkey Federation, and private landowners in SE MN. Funds from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund were used to hire contractors to remove Eastern red cedar, buckthorn, honeysuckle, and prickly ash that was growing over former “goat prairies”. The project focused primarily on improving habitat for the timber rattlesnake, three other at-risk snake species (racer, bullsnake, and hognose snake) and numerous at-risk plant species in the Bluffland subsection.

Goat prairies are native prairies found on steep south-facing hills in southeastern Minnesota. They are important to wildlife because the wind prevents deep snowpack, and intense sunlight melts much of what does stick. Animals can then rest and forage on the exposed sites. Nearby rock bluffs hold snakes, which forage in the prairies in summer. These prairies were historically maintained by periodic wildfire, but fire prevention has allowed native red cedar and non-native brushy species to encroach on them. These need to be removed to restore the native habitat. Restoring vegetation through these methods also reduces soil loss and improves water quality within the watershed.

During this grant period we treated 29.2 acres of habitat on private lands by hand cutting the invasive overstory. Stumps were treated with herbicides to prevent re-sprouting. Cut material was piled and burned on-site. A ten-year agreement was required from the landowners before any work began. The level of brush infestation, location and access impacted the contract price, which in turn led to lower than anticipated accomplishment acreage. The treatment area was 28 acres rather than the anticipated “up to 45 acres” as indicated in the initial plan. A second site was added later and an additional 1.2 acres treated. Periodic prescribed burning will be conducted by DNR (non-Trust-Fund monies) and will maintain the site in the desired habitat state.

IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:

RESULT 1: Restored 29.2 acres of “goat prairie” by removing red cedar and other invasive species, exposing native seed bank of prairie species to sunlight, and allowing those species to be rejuvenated.

The MN DNR conducts reptile surveys and habitat assessments on bluff prairies in the Blufflands subsection of SE Minnesota. Survey sites are selected based on an evaluation of Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) native plant community survey data, topographic maps, and aerial photos for the presence of bluff prairies. A second selection criterion is known or potential presence of timber rattlesnakes. Rattlesnake presence or potential is based on evaluation of MCBS reptile survey data, timber rattlesnake observation reports maintained by the Nongame Wildlife Program, historical information from landowners and wildlife managers, and word of mouth

reports. This process allows for targeting survey sites to bluff prairies in timber rattlesnake range. Sites are also selected for survey based on landowner permission for access. Once sites are selected and permission to access is attained, surveys are targeted for the month of May, which is peak emergence time for timber rattlesnakes. During site visits, the bluff prairies are surveyed for the presence of timber rattlesnakes and other reptiles. Sites are also evaluated for their habitat quality for timber rattlesnakes. In addition to reptile surveys, a plant inventory is conducted to document the presence of remnant bluff prairie, and an evaluation of restorability is also conducted, which includes an assessment of the cedar trees and invasive species present on the site. Once surveys are completed, sites are prioritized for restoration. Sites with timber rattlesnakes are of high priority, along with sites adjacent to bluffs with timber rattlesnakes. Once sites are prioritized, landowners are contacted for permission to conduct restoration work. This project only works with willing landowners. NWTF procures a 10 year agreement from participating landowners.

NWTF map the sites using GPS technology. Site-specific restoration plans are then developed and sent to prospective contractors by NWTF. Contractors bid on the sites, and are selected by NWTF. Contractor work is monitored by NWTF as work progresses. NWTF handles the contractor invoices, payments and reimbursement from the Trust Fund. Future prescribed burning and follow-up invasive species work will be conducted by the MN DNR Nongame Wildlife Program because they have an ongoing project on portions of the site included in this grant. This is done on project sites to rejuvenate the prairie plant species and keep out woody plant encroachment.

Project Properties:

Skauge property, Houston County, T102, R7, S8 – 28 acres
 Johnson property, Houston County T104, R5, S30 – 1.2 acres

Description: Identified sites, marked boundaries, bid projects, procured landowner agreements, hired contractors, and oversaw work done by contractors on 29.2 acres of bluffland.

Summary Budget Information for Result 1: ENRTF Budget: \$ 50,000
 Amount Spent: \$ 49,998
 Balance: \$ 2

Deliverable/Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. Restore 29.2 acres of "goat prairie"	June 30, 2012	\$50,000

Result Completion Date: June 18, 2012

Final Report Summary: One 28 acre site on the Skauge property (Houston County, T102, R7, S8) that was heavily infested with red cedar and buckthorn was selected for treatment. Competitive bids were solicited, a contractor selected and a landowner

agreement signed. The contractor cut down the red cedar, buckthorn, honeysuckle, and all other woody vegetation from the site, and applied herbicide to buckthorn stumps in winter 2010/2011. Brush piles will be burned in fall/winter 2011/2012.

The level of infestation, location and access impacted the contract price, which in turn led to lower than anticipated accomplishment acreage. We treated 28 acres rather than the anticipated "up to 45 acres" as indicated in the initial plan.

A couple of accounting errors caused us to request work program amendments which led NWTF to contribute more matching dollars than anticipated. The Minnesota State NWTF Super Fund contributed \$2,640 to pay contractors, and NWTF Headquarters assumed responsibility for an additional \$450 in staff time. This resulted in \$3,090 in matching funds contributed to the project. We have learned to be more diligent in our accounting.

We also amended the work program to transfer unused Travel Funds into the Contracts category and added the Johnson property (Houston County T104, R5, S30) to the treatment list. This allowed us to fund an additional 1.2 acres of treatment.

V. TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET:

Personnel: \$ 3,050

Contracts: \$ 46,802

Bid specifications for each site (including scope of work involving cedar removal) will be sent to prospective contractors, contractors will be chosen for each site, and cedar removal will be done on sites by contractors per bid specifications.

Equipment/Tools/Supplies: \$

Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements): \$

Travel: \$ 148

Additional Budget Items: \$

TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET: \$ 50,000

Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500:

VI. PROJECT STRATEGY:

A. Project Partners:

The MN DNR Nongame Wildlife Program is a project partner. The DNR representative for this partnership is Jaime Edwards, Nongame Wildlife Specialist. As a project partner, the MN DNR will conduct surveys and habitat assessments of bluff prairies in the Blufflands subsection of SE Minnesota. Sites eligible for restoration will be prioritized based on the survey and assessment data. The MN DNR will work with NWTF to recommend priority sites for restoration as part of this grant project. Restoration of recommended sites will work toward meeting goals laid out in the State Wildlife Action Plan and the Minnesota Timber Rattlesnake Recovery Plan.

In addition to identifying priority sites, the MN DNR will also provide technical assistance to the NWTF on restoration needs, including bid specification review for compliance with management guidelines outlined in the Timber Rattlesnake Recovery Plan. MN DNR will also be available to private landowners receiving restoration work for consultation on habitat and management goals and implementation.

B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy: This project compliments the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) run by DNR. It is part of an ongoing effort to restore bluffland habitats in SE MN. The MDNR LIP-funded project on the Upper bluff portion of the Skauge property will involve an experimental management technique of using goats to graze buckthorn over the next several years. As a result, MDNR has agreed to assume all future management and monitoring responsibility for the Skauge property, including the ENTF-funded work on the lower bluff portion, rather than have NWTF and MDNR duplicate efforts. Both the NWTF and MDNR Landowner Agreements with the Skauge family extend for a 10-year term. Both agreements started the same year and are running simultaneously. MDNR will conduct monitoring on both the upper and lower portions of the Skauge bluff as part of their LIP-funded grazing project. Monitoring consists of photo points as well as vegetation plots on both the upper and lower portions of the bluff. Prescribed burning will be conducted by the MDNR using MDNR funds when this management application is feasible on the bluff. Additionally, MDNR will conduct at least one rattlesnake survey and habitat assessment during the second half of the 10-year Landowner Agreement as required by the Timber Rattlesnake Recovery Plan. This effort will be funded by MDNR funds. Copies of these reports will be available from the MDNR Non-Game Specialist Jamie Edwards, (507) 206-2820, Jaime.edwards@state.mn.us.

C. Other Funds Proposed to be Spent during the Project Period:

D. Spending History: State Wildlife Grant 2006 – \$23,510 (matched 100%)

LCCMR -HCP Phase V - \$70,000

LCCMR – HCP Phase VI - \$70,000

VII. DISSEMINATION: Accomplishment Reports and press releases will be made available at <http://www.mnhabitatcorridors.org>

VIII. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: Periodic work program progress reports will be submitted not later than November 30, 2010, March 30, 2011, November 30, 2011 and March 30, 2012. A final work program report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 1, 2012 as requested by the LCCMR.

IX. RESEARCH PROJECTS:

Project Title: Mississippi Bluffland Restoration (2i)					
Project Manager Name: Rick Horton					
Trust Fund Appropriation: \$ 50,000					
2010 Trust Fund Budget	Result 1 Budget: (Revised)	<u>Final Amount Spent</u> (June 16, 2012)	<u>Final Balance</u>	<u>TOTAL BUDGET</u>	<u>TOTAL FINAL BALANCE</u>
	<i>Restore 29.2 acres of "goat prairie"</i>				
BUDGET ITEM					
PERSONNEL: wages and benefits NWTF Regional Wildlife Biologist Rick Horton	3,050	3,050	0	3,050	0
Contracts					
Professional/technical - for removal of red cedar and other invasives	46,802	46,800	2	46,802	2
Travel expenses in Minnesota	148	148	0	148	0
COLUMN TOTAL	\$50,000	\$49,998	\$2	\$50,000	\$2

Skauge Property Map
David and Christy Skauge
Houston County, T102, R7, S8





