

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

Date of Report: 11/24/09
Date of Next Progress Report: 11/30/10
Date of Work Program Approval:
Project Completion Date: 6/30/12

I. PROJECT TITLE: HCP Phase VI Supplemental - Mississippi Bluffland Restoration (2p)

Project Manager: Dave Neu
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Location: HCP area 11.

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

Legal Citation: M.L. 2010, Chap. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 4f2p

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. PROJECT SUMMARY AND RESULTS: Eastern red cedar and other invasive species are growing over former “goat prairies” in the blufflands, destroying valuable habitat for wild turkeys, reptiles, and other wildlife. The project will focus on the population sustainability of the timber rattlesnake (*C. horridus*), three other at-risk snake species (racer, bullsnake, and hognose snake) and other numerous at-risk plant species in the Bluffland subsection of southeastern MN by removing red cedar and other invasive species on private and public lands.

This project will reduce the amount of canopy cover to 30% or less around the timber rattlesnake den sites by controlling invasive plant species such as Eastern red cedar, buckthorn, honeysuckle, and prickly ash. A multiple treatment approach includes hand cutting of red cedars and invasive brush species, prescribed burns, and exotic species control. During this grant period, up to 45 acres of habitat on public and private lands will be enhanced. There is very little ground layer vegetation under dense stands of red cedar. Removing the invasive overstory has proven to allow the native prairie species (and the seed bank in the soil) to be exposed to sunlight and once again flourish on the site. This habitat is valuable to timber rattlesnakes, other snakes, small mammals and wild turkeys. Periodic prescribed burning will be conducted by DNR (non-Trust-Fund monies) and will maintain the site in the desired habitat state.

Restoring the goat prairie vegetation through these methods will also reduce soil loss and improve water quality within the watershed. A ten-year agreement is required from the landowners before any work begins. Site-specific restoration plans will be developed when final site selections are made, and will be made part of the contractor bid specifications.

Bluffland restoration is a long-term effort by DNR, NWTF and private landowners in SE MN. Several grants and outreach programs have been and continue to be used to restore this rare and valuable habitat. The blufflands have been identified in the North American Wild Turkey Management Plan as both a Habitat Focus Area and a Land Protection Area.

III. PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF *[insert date of Work Program progress report]:*

IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:

RESULT 1: Restore up to 45 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.

DNR and 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, which is why they are a partner in identifying priority sites. This is done on project sites to rejuvenate the prairie plant species and keep out woody plant encroachment.

For this grant cycle, the MN DNR has recommended five landowners for habitat restoration based on the potential funds available. These landowners have not been approached to sign a landowner agreement to receive restoration work yet because funding has not been awarded yet. As a result, it is possible that one or more of these landowners will not be interested in entering an agreement with NWTF to have restoration work completed. If that happens, NWTF will work with the MN DNR to identify replacement priority sites and those landowners will be contacted to determine interest in the program. Additionally, if a new site is discovered by the MN DNR that far exceeds currently identified sites, consideration will be given to changing the priority list for landowner contacts and enrollment in the program.

Potential Project List:

Girls Scouts of America, River Trails property, Houston County, T103, R7, S30
Griggs property, Houston County, T103, R7, S3
Johnson property, Houston County, T104, R5, S30
Scheu property, Houston County, T104, R5, S16

Thorson property, Houston County, T103, R6, S7

Description: Identify sites, mark boundaries, bid projects, procure landowner agreements, hire contractors, and oversee work done by contractors on up to 45 acres of bluffland.

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

Deliverable/Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. Restore up to 45 acres of "goat prairie"	June 30, 2012	\$50,000

Result Completion Date:

Result Status as of November 30, 2010:

Result Status as of March 30, 2011:

Result Status as of November 30, 2011:

Result Status as of March 30, 2012:

Final Report Summary:

V. TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET:

Personnel: \$ 3,000 (approximate)

Contracts: \$ 45,000

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: \$ 2,000 (approximate)

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 run by DNR. It is part of an ongoing effort to restore bluffland habitats in SE MN.

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:

Attachment A: Budget Detail for 2010 Projects - Summary and a Budget page for each partner (if applicable)					
Project Title: Mississippi Bluffland Restoration (2p)					
Project Manager Name: <i>Dave Neu</i>					
Trust Fund Appropriation: \$ 50,000					
2010 Trust Fund Budget	<u>Result 1 Budget:</u>	Amount Spent <i>(date)</i>	Balance <i>(date)</i>	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BALANCE
	<i>Restore up to 45 acres of "goat prairie"</i>				
BUDGET ITEM					
PERSONNEL: wages and benefits NWTF Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist Dave Neu	3,000			3,000	3,000
Contracts					
Professional/technical - for removal of red cedar and other invasives	45,000			45,000	45,000
Travel expenses in Minnesota	2,000			2,000	2,000
COLUMN TOTAL	\$50,000	\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000