

2012 State Wildlife Grant Proposal

Project Title: Phase II Implementation of State Wildlife Action Plan Strategies on Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area for CWCS Species of Concern in Oak Woodlands including Calcareous Glade Habitats.

Project Summary: Phase II will develop a self-sustaining collaborative multi-partner prescribed fire coalition for the restoration of oak woodland and calcareous glade habitats structure and species composition at the Hobbs State Park –Conservation Area (HSPCA) in the Interior Highlands of the Ozark Plateau Ecoregion by implementing prescribed fire and conducting ecological monitoring for Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan animal Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in order to measure progress toward desired ecological conditions.

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Budget Summary: Total Amount of Project Cost: \$70,800
Total Amount of SWG Requested: \$46,020 (65%)
Matching Funds from TNC and partners: \$24,780 (35%)
Alternate Budget
Total Amount of Project Cost: \$70,800
Total Amount of SWG Requested: \$35,400 (50%)
Matching Funds from TNC and partners: \$35,400 (50%)

NEED - FUNDING PRIORITY ADDRESSED BY PREPROPOSAL

This project addresses a priority implementation action listed in Appendix A of the 2012 SWG Request for Proposals (RFP): 1) Habitat Management to maintain or increase quality oak woodlands including calcareous glades located throughout the project area. Phase II, will continue to accelerate implementation of the Hobbs State Park – Conservation Area (HSPCA) Fire Management Plan to restore thousands of acres of oak woodlands and calcareous glades using collaborative multi-partner prescribed fire operations and ecological monitoring. This project will continue reintroducing landscape-scale fire to fire-suppressed habitats to benefit Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

In addition, this project will have a public education and outreach component to showcase current and ongoing prescribed fire activities at Hobbs State Park – Conservation Area. Project partners will develop a ½ day public education hike through the Van Winkle trail system which passes through an area that has recently had a prescribed fire.

In 2009, a State Wildlife Grant (SWG) was awarded to help build a collaborative fire management coalition to rapidly increase the acres treated by prescribed fire annually. In 2009, the coalition doubled the number of burns and acres treated by prescribed fire. However, continued work is needed for restoring oak woodlands and calcareous glades and generating a public education and outreach campaign.

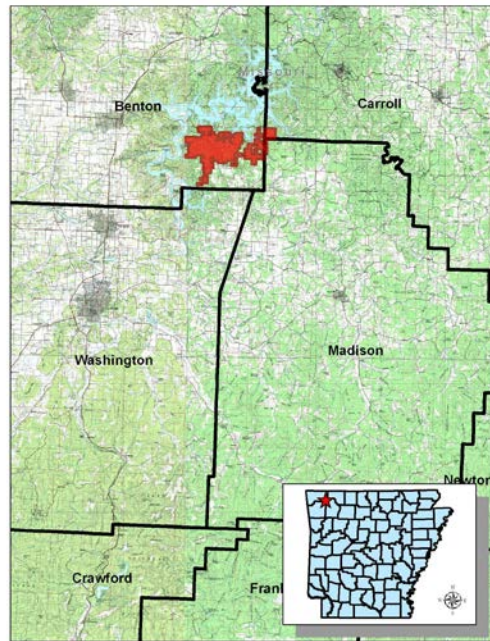


Figure 1. Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area.

ECOREGION WHERE PROJECT WILL BE CONDUCTED

Restoration activities will be conducted in the Interior Highlands of the Ozark Plateau Ecoregion, within the Hobbs State Park- Conservation Area in Benton, Carroll, and Madison Counties of Arkansas (Figure 1).

The Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area (HSPCA) covers 12,055 acres. This large tract of Ozark landscape consists of plateaus, ridges, valleys, and streams with upland forests of pine, oak and hickory. Numerous caves, springs, and karst features occur within the park. HSPCA is jointly managed by Arkansas State Parks, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this partnership continues to be working collaboratively to restore upland oak and oak-pine woodlands through the implementation the HSPCA 10 Year Fire Management Plan. This plan was developed in 2002 and has been partially implemented to date. The overall objectives of this project are to build a sustainable fire restoration program at HSPCA, restore habitat, and to create a public outreach campaign for greater awareness of fire management activities at HSPCA and the State. The primary activities will be ongoing collaborative prescribed fire operations and training opportunities and public education and outreach events. Specifically, Phase II of this partnership will implement four (4) cooperative prescribed burns in 2013 and 2014 totaling 1,500-2,000 acres, conduct Post Burn Evaluations

for each burn, and conduct photo point monitoring pre/post burn at permanent macroplot locations within each burn unit.

The partnership understands the public visibility these activities will receive and recognizes the need to be proactive with public outreach and education. In Phase II, a workshop for the public will be hosted at Hobbs State Park Conservation Area during the spring (post fire). The fire workshop will include a ½ day public education hike through the Van Winkle trail system which passes through an area that has recently had a prescribed fire. The objectives of this event will be to continue to educate the public on the benefits and needs of prescribed fire, provide a forum for discussion and provide an activity for the public to interact with project staff to showcase current and ongoing prescribed fire activities at HSPCA. The workshop will have leading botanists and fire ecology experts’ presenting information in a learning environment.

Expected Results and Measureable Outcomes

Expected results from this collaborative fire management partnership will be the continued implementation of the HSPCA Fire Management Plan to rapidly facilitate the promotion of suitable habitat for species-at-risk. The species-at-risk affected by this proposal occur in open and dry vegetation types typical of Arkansas woodland, savannas, prairies, and calcareous glades in the Interior Highlands of the Ozark Plateau Ecoregion. These species are dependent on open woodland structure and herbaceous understory habitat maintained by periodic fire during their life cycles. As a result of fire suppression, most of this type of habitat has become increasingly limited due to densification of vegetation. In addition, most of the calcareous glade habitat has been encroached by surrounding vegetation including eastern red cedar. This current condition plays a large part in the loss or degradation of habitat suitable for oak woodland and calcareous glade dependent species-at-risk in this area (Table 1).

Table 1. Targeted Species of Concern in the Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area. (CWCS Database).

Class	Genus	Scientific_Name	Common Name	Rank
Insecta	<i>Speyeria</i>	<i>Diana</i>	Diana fritillary	G3S2
Reptilia	<i>Eumeces</i>	<i>obsoletus</i>	Great Plains skink	G5S1
Reptilia	<i>Ophisaurus</i>	<i>attenuatus</i>	Western slender glass lizard	G5S3
Reptilia	<i>Sonora</i>	<i>semiannulata</i>	Ground snake	G5SH
Reptilia	<i>Terrapene</i>	<i>Ornate</i>	Ornate box turtle	G5S2
Reptilia	<i>Crotaphytus</i>	<i>collaris</i>	Eastern collared lizard	G5S3
Aves	<i>Aimophila</i>	<i>aestivalis</i>	Bachman’s Sparrow	G3S3
Aves	<i>Thryomanes</i>	<i>bewickii</i>	Bewick’s Wren	G5S2
Aves	<i>Lanis</i>	<i>ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead Shrike	G4S3
Aves	<i>Pipilo</i>	<i>erythrophthalmus</i>	Eastern Towhee	G5S3
Aves	<i>Colinus</i>	<i>virginianus</i>	Northern Bobwhite	G5S5

To restore the open habitats that species’ identified by the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies (CWCS) requires establishing a suitable fire regime that promotes ‘open’ oak woodlands by reducing native and non-native vegetation encroachment in oak woodlands and calcareous glade habitat types. This project has selected 1,500-2,000 acres for prescribed fire and monitoring. Measurable outcomes include:

- Written burn plans for each burn unit.
- Install fire lines around burn units.
- Install photo points throughout burn units.
- Implement four (4) prescribed burns on 1,500-2000 acres.

- Train four or more state partners in prescribed burn operations.
- Complete post-fire effects monitoring and After Action Reviews (AARs).
- Conduct photopoint monitoring after burns.
- Conduct public outreach Workshop titled: “Fire and Wildlife” at Hobbs State Park Conservation Area.

Approach - Existing Resources and Partnerships

Prior to 2009, project partners were limited in the scale and scope of their collaborative efforts. In short, less than 1000 acres of prescribed fire was conducted annually at HSPCA, little to no post burn monitoring was being completed, and no public outreach and education on the benefits and needs of fire management were being conducted. This project continues to be a priority because of the current momentum with the existing collaborative fire management partnerships currently in place at HSPCA. In Phase II, this project seeks to continue facilitating the momentum within this diverse fire management coalition and will continue to implement the current fire management plan at HSPCA. In phase II, this project will build the capacity for a long-term sustainable fire management program at HSPCA. In addition, the coalition will continue to provide prescribed fire training opportunities for all partners.

Approach - Public Connection

The HSPCA has recently completed construction on the new Visitor Center. This new facility opened to the public in 2009 and currently attracts thousands of visitors monthly. The new Hobbs Visitor Center provides a perfect venue to communicate the overall goals of the fire management program to the public. The facility includes several displays highlighting the importance of the fire adapted communities and the associated plant and animal species found at HSPCA. In Phase II, one of the main objectives of this partnership is public outreach. This venue and the surrounding trails bisecting through oak and pine woodlands where fire management is ongoing will provide a unique opportunity to organize guided hikes for the public to see first hand, the benefits of the collaborative fire management program.

Proposed Budget

The estimated budget for this project is outlined in Table 2, and includes all divisions as requested by the RFP. All sources have been compiled for all partners. Salary/Benefits include all staff time. Operating expenses includes travel reimbursements and needed supplies.

Table 2. Proposed budgets allocation as outlined in the 2012 SWG RFP.

Category	Total	Partnership (Match) 35%	SWG
Salary / Benefits	\$57,780	\$24,780	\$33,000
Operating Expenses	\$6,000	0.00	\$6,000
Capital Expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subtotal	\$63,780	\$24,780	\$39,000
Indirect Costs (18%)*	\$7,020	\$0	\$7,020
<i>Totals</i>	<i>\$70,800</i>	<i>\$24,780</i>	<i>\$46,020</i>

*Indirect Costs: The Nature Conservancy anticipates a FY13 federal negotiated indirect cost rate (NICRA) of 18%.

Category	Total	Partnership (Match) 50%	SWG
Salary / Benefits	\$57,780	\$33,780	\$24,000
Operating Expenses	\$6,000	0.00	\$6,000
Capital Expenses	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subtotal	\$63,780	\$33,780	\$30,000
Indirect Costs (18%)*	\$7,020	\$1,620	\$5,400
<i>Totals</i>	<i>\$70,800</i>	<i>\$35,400</i>	<i>\$35,400</i>

Qualifications of Partnership

Mark Clippinger is the Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area Superintendent. Mark has over 20 years of experience at the park. Mark has been the active burn boss for the park for 5 years and continues to oversee day to day operation of the park.

Fred Sutton is the Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area Ranger. Fred has been with the park for over 6 years and oversees the fire management plan and in charge of overseeing the fire program at the park. Fred also acts as the park burn boss.

McRee Anderson is the Interior Highlands Fire Restoration Project Manager for the Arkansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. McRee is currently a National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) certified RXB2 Burn Boss. McRee co-leads The Nature Conservancy's Prescribed Fire Program in the state and has been involved in fire management for 8 years.

George Stowe-Rains is the Benton County Ranger for Arkansas Forestry Commission. George has over 20 years of experience in wildlife suppression and prescribed fire operations. George has well developed relationships with the Volunteer Fire Departments located in Benton County and specifically for this project around Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area.