

State of Illinois
Office of Resource Conservation

Annual Report to USFWS

Project Number: T-43-D-1

Project Title: Hill Prairie/Bluff Habitat Restoration

General Summary

The project is now moving along well with field work being accomplished and progress being made on a number of fronts. IDNR/INPC staff has completed all the initial identification, approval to begin work on 42 project sites. They have completed the baseline monitoring protocols for these sites. Contractors have started management work at 23 sites and 18 prescribed burns were completed. One major educational/outreach event has been completed.

Objectives

Objective 1. Identify Work Sites and Restoration Needs.

During the second year of work on this grant, field staff have completed the landowner contacts and completed all the initial work to begin management at 42 selected sites. This includes Landowner Agreements (if needed), Management Plans, initial GPS of prairie perimeters, Site Resource Assessments, and Work Orders. There are signed Landowner Agreements that cover 13 of the sites that are both privately or publicly (but not state) owned *and* do not have a current legal easement (Nature Preserve or Land and Water Reserve) on the project area. All other sites are either state-owned properties and/or have at least a 10 year easement in the form of a Nature Preserve or Land and Water Reserve. Additional sites from the list of potential sites will be processed and managed in the grant period but we were not able to address them yet due to limited staff time. One of the sites that was planned for work, Delabar Pruett in Henderson County, will be dropped because the prairie has been completely lost and money would not be well spent working on the site. This sad fact shows the time-critical need for this project. Another site that was very promising, Housen Hill Prairie, was sold to landowners that are unwilling to participate in the project. IDNR is pursuing purchase but the outcome is unknown at this time.

Objective 2. Restoration and Management.

The contract with Tallgrass Restoration LLC (Tallgrass) was signed in mid August, 2008. It had been delayed because of a protest by another contractor. Tallgrass received the contract for all four project areas, which will make the coordination of the project easier than if we had to work with multiple contractors. Tallgrass has been very attentive to our needs for this project, but they did initially have some difficulty with the details of retaining subcontractors for some of the

project areas, so there was some delay in getting the work started in those areas. However, given the time frame they have to complete the work, there should not be any problem completing the project. That said, IDNR is working on an amendment to this project that will both extend the grant period and add funding to project.

To date, management work has been done under the Tallgrass contract at 21 sites for a total of \$131,569.16. Additional work has been done by other contractors under separate contracts at 7 sites (5 of the same sites as the Tallgrass contract and 2 additional sites) for a total of \$41,245.00. Commodity purchases, which are herbicides and herbicide additives for management, to date total \$26,713.00.

Total expenses for management-related work: \$199,527.16

In addition to work done primarily by contractors, IDNR or INPC staff led 15 prescribed burns on hill prairie project sites from Fall, 2008 through Spring, 2009. Private landowners burned an additional 3 sites and an escaped fire (from a neighboring landowner) burned 2 prairies at Revis HP. Prescribed burning is a very important management action and the ability to have contractual workers available for prescribed burning helped our staff tremendously in getting more burning done than could have been possible without the SWG.

Objective 3. Monitoring.

Field staff has completed the pre-project site assessments for 41 sites planned for management work. Using GPS, the extent of the current project site hill prairies is being documented as a baseline. Then the GPS tracks were sent to our Springfield staff for conversion to shapefiles for use in Arcview. Some of these tracks needed to be “cleaned up” because of clearly nonsensical points that may have been due to satellite reception, GPS accuracy or user error. Because of the small size of some of these prairies the acreage determined by this method may not be accurate. However, it will give us information on the relative size of the sites and will hopefully be useful in showing the increase in acreage of hill prairie after management. In addition, each site was assessed for overall woody encroachment, presence of exotic/invasive species, and graded for initial quality.

New GPS units were purchase for this project because all of our previous models had developed “blue line syndrome,” which rendered the units unusable. The units were purchased with state funds and were coded to the project as match. The only other expense related to monitoring is personnel time, which was significant because it was a new procedure for staff and there were some technical challenges associated with this task.

Objective 4. Education and Training.

Several staff members have been coordinating with CLIFFTOP (Conserving Lands in Farm, Forest, Talus or Prairie), which is a local landowner organization in Southwestern Illinois with a focus on the Mississippi blufflands of Monroe and Randolph counties. This group has been very successful in raising awareness of the sensitive resources in this area including hill prairies and glades.

IDNR contracted with CLIFFTOP using project funding to co-host the Festival of the Bluffs event in Fults, Illinois on May 16, 2009. The purpose of the festival was to educate the public on the hill prairie corridor in the Illinois' Ozarks, improve land and wildlife stewardship, and raise the awareness of governmental and non-governmental efforts to conserve and protect the area. This event was done in place of a prescribed burning workshop because one had just been done the previous year and we felt it was too soon to have another one. This format allowed us to reach more local people and provide specific guidance and information on a variety of natural resource and management challenges along the bluff corridor.

The event consisted of display booths about the Hill Prairie/Bluff project, exotic species control, reptile and amphibian species, local conservation organizations, and presentations and field trips to the hill prairie and marsh at the base of the bluffs. There was also food, musical entertainment and vendor booths to provide additional incentives for people to attend. The event was very successful despite challenges in weather and last minute unforeseen changes. About 1100 people attended the event and over 350 people took the interpretive hikes to visit Fults Hill Prairie and Kidd Lake Marsh. Many of the attendees were local landowners and residents, which was the desired target of the event. We received press coverage from several local papers and also received a number of compliments on the event along with the hope that it will be an annual event. A newspaper article and a few emails are attached.

The total cost to the project for this event was \$7500.00 in contractual funds to CLIFFTOP. The following was agreed to as project specifications for this event:

Contractor will plan, schedule, manage, and execute all the logistics requirements for festival activities at the park. This event is needed to raise awareness in the local community about the high quality resources and management needs there. This event will fulfill part of the educational outreach aspect of the Hill prairie SWG (T-43-D-1). Activities will focus on practicum-based demonstrations of improving land and wildlife management stewardship practices, and information on the natural history of the bluff-prairie corridor. At the same time, IDNR and INPC personnel will lead interpretive tours of Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve and Kidd Lake Marsh State Natural Area to increase awareness of these natural communities and their management needs. Contractor will also develop educational and public relations material as needed and as coordinated with IDNR staff. Primary job coordinator and other IDNR staff will work closely with the contractor to assure that the event will fulfill the needs of the Federal grant agreement and DNR and INPC goals for the area.

IDNR staff participated in the event guiding field trips and manning booths on the Festival grounds. In addition, a display of the Bluffs and Hill Prairies in this 3 county area (St. Clair, Monroe, and Randolph counties) was developed. IDNR also printed handouts that were developed by CLIFFTOP on various invasive species in the bluffs and how to control them. These and many other resource brochures were given out at the Festival.

A poster has also been developed to promote the Hill Prairie State Wildlife Grant Program at events such as the Illinois State Fair. It has been redesigned since last year and the newest version is attached.

During the past year we have continued to develop a draft Hill Prairie Initiative, which ties into the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan and attempts to set a strategy for long-term protection and management of our declining hill prairies. This planning initiative was started before the Hill Prairie SWG was approved, but the work done on this initiative ties in directly with the Hill Prairie SWG and in fact, gives it an even larger context. This document will be used for outreach both within and outside of the IDNR and to bring more partners together to raise awareness about the plight of hill prairies in Illinois and to stimulate more protection and management of these rare communities.

As a part of the Hill Prairie Initiative, Illinois Nature Preserve Commission staff helped to plan, organize and host the second Hill Prairie Conference in Illinois. The conference was held at Augustana College in Rock Island on May1-2, 2009. The conference included presentations, posters, discussion roundtables and field trips. Diane Tecic gave a presentation on how the Hill Prairie/Bluff State Wildlife Grant started and its objectives, approach and current progress.

Please see the following link for more information:

<http://www.augustana.edu/hillprairieconference/>

Compliance

-CERP (Comprehensive Environmental Review Process) approval has been received for all sites planned for management work.

-Section 7 approval has be given for all planned sites

-All sites planned for management have been reviewed for Historic and Cultural resources and all staff working on the project has been given information on these resources on the sites that they are managing and guidelines and limitations for work on those resource sites.

-No work is planned in floodplains and/or jurisdictional wetlands.

-No activities are planned which involve programs and/or site improvements subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

-All IDNR and contractor staff working on this project will possess a pesticide applicators license and will comply with all current state and federal regulations for chemical application.

Project Schedule: The planned project period is 5/15/07 - 10/31/10 – The following chart adjusts the dates to reflect actual approval date and change of schedule and shows what has been completed or initiated

Objectives	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Year 4	
	5/07	8/07	11/07	2/08	5/08	8/08	11/08	2/09	5/09	8/09	11/09	2/10	5/10	8/10
Objective 1. Identify Work Sites and Restoration Needs (Category 1 sites):														
1.1 Develop a management plan and cost estimate for each site chosen.			X		X	X	X	X	X					
1.2 Determine what work items will be done by contractors and what will be done by IDNR and INPC staff.		X			X	X	X	X	X					
1.3 Confirm landowner approval of management plan				X	X	X	X	X	X					
Objective 1. Identify Work Sites and Restoration Needs (Category 2 sites):														
1.1 Meet with landowners		X	X		X	X	X	X	X					
1.2 Develop a management plan and cost estimate for each site chosen.			X		X	X	X	X	X					
1.3 Determine what work items will be done by contractors and what will be done by IDNR and INPC staff.			X		X	X	X	X	X					
1.4 Get landowner approval of 3 year plan				X	X	X	X	X	X					
Objective 2. Restoration and Management approach														
2.1 Group the chosen sites into sub-project areas by location.					X									
2.2 Develop project specifications and bid packages for each sub-project area.			X		X	X	X							
2.3 Follow appropriate administrative procedure to hire a contractor for each sub-project area.			X		X	X	X							

List of current sites planned for management work.

<u>County</u>	<u>site name</u>	<u>Approx. Acres*</u>	<u>owner</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>primary contact person</u>
Area 1					
Carroll	French Bluff SNA	30	IDNR	INAI	Anderson
Carroll	Mississippi Palisades State Park	513	IDNR	INAI	Anderson
Henderson	Delabar-Pruett Hill Prairie	25	private	NHL	Moorehouse
Henderson	Henderson Creek Hill Prairie	80	private	NHL	Moorehouse
Henderson	North Henderson Creek	25	private	INAI	Moorehouse
Jo Daviess	Apple River Nature Pres. (Thompson Prairie)	421	IDNR	NP	Anderson
Jo Daviess	Falling Down Prairie	25	IDNR	INAI	Anderson
Jo Daviess	Hanover Bluff Nature Preserve, LWR, Rattlesnake area	630	IDNR /private	NP	Anderson
Rock Island	Indian Bluff Hill Prairie	5	public	INAI	Moorehouse
Rock Island	Lindahl Hill Prairies aka Milan So. Geological	15	private	NP	Moorehouse
Winnebago	Harlem Hills		IDNR	NP	Semel
Area 2					
LaSalle	Marseilles SFWA (INAI# 1520)	73	IDNR /USArmy	IDNR-INAI	Simone
Marshall	Marshall County Hill Prairies	70	IDNR & private	LWR,NHL	Simone
Marshall	Wier Hill Prairie NP	3	private	NP	Simone
Peoria	Mossville Road Hill Prairie	5	private	NHL	Moorehouse
Peoria	Robinson Park Hill Prairie -PPD	50	public	NP	Moorehouse

<u>County</u>	<u>site name</u>	<u>Approx. Acres*</u>	<u>owner</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>primary contact person</u>
Peoria	Singing Woods-PPD	50	public	NP	Moorehouse
Peoria	St. Mary Cemetery Hill Prairie	4	private	NHL	Moorehouse
Peoria	Wokanda Camp-PPD	36	public	pot. NHL	Moorehouse
Tazewell	Parklands	10	IDNR	INAI	Simone
Woodford	Mackinaw River Hill Prairie NA	12	private	NHL	Lerczak
Woodford	Ridgetop Hill Prairie	18	private	NP	Lerczak
<u>Area 3</u>					
Brown	Snyder Hill Prairie	4	private	pot. NHL	Corgiat/Moorehouse
Cass	Chandlerville Cemetery hill prairie	3	private	LWR	Lerczak
Cass	Cox Creek Hill Prairie and JEPC	770	IDNR	L&WR	Kelley
Cass	Panther Creek Hill Prairie	77	IDNR	L&WR	Kelley
Hancock	Cecil White Prairie	67	IDNR	LWR/IDNR	Corgiat
Hancock	Mississippi River Sand Hills	47	IDNR	NP/IDNR	Corgiat
Jersey	Pere Marquette	745	IDNR	INAI, NP, LWR	Phipps
Jersey	Principia HP East and West NA	600	private	INAI	Phipps
Macoupin	Bouillon glacial till hill prairie	65	private		Phipps
Macoupin	Glow/Beaver Dam glacial drift	27	IDNR/private	INAI/IDNR	Phipps
Morgan	Meredosia Hill Prairie	28	IDNR	NP	Kelley

<u>County</u>	<u>site name</u>	<u>Approx. Acres*</u>	<u>owner</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>primary contact person</u>
Mason	Revis Hill prairie	420	IDNR	NP	Kelley
Pike	Grubb Hollow INAI	50	IDNR	N.P.	Corgiat
Pike	Housen-hill prairie	47	IDNR	INA	Corgiat
Area 4	8				
Monroe	Columbia Quarry-White Rock (Monroe City INAI)	505	private	LWR	Newman
Monroe	Columbia Quarry-White Rock (Potato Hill INAI)	Part of above	private	LWR	Newman
Monroe	Fults Hill Prairie NP	750	IDNR/private	NP	Kemper
Monroe	Harry's Prairie	280	private	NHL	Newman
Monroe	Martha & Michelle Prairies	25	private	LWR	Newman
Monroe	Salt Lick Point LWR	500	public	LWR	Newman
St. Clair	Dupo Prairie	8	private	LWR	Newman
St. Clair	Sugar Loaf Prairie	60	private	LWR	Newman
<u>Additional Areas outside of Contract Project Area (separate contract needed)</u>					
Vermilion	Windfall Prairie	60	Public	NP	Jansen