

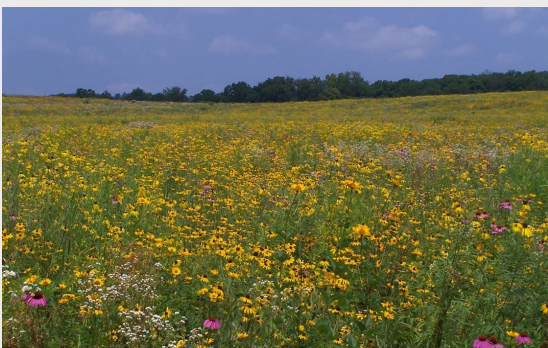
EAST GULF COASTAL PLAIN JOINT VENTURE

NEWSLETTER, Summer 2016



Competitive State Wildlife Grant Funding Awarded to Partners in Illinois & Kentucky

Kentucky Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife, Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, The Kentucky Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, and US Fish and Wildlife Service collaborated with multiple additional partners to develop a successful proposal funded by the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program. One main activity is the development of additional 'Fire Strike Teams' to increase restoration of high priority prairies, glades, barrens, and woodlands through prescribed fire. Activities will be monitored to evaluate impacts on the Rattlesnake-master Borer, a prairie-dependent moth species with a highly restricted range. In addition, multiple Species of Greatest Conservation Need such as Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrow will benefit from this effort.



Healthy prairies managed with regular fire support many Species of Greatest Conservation Need, Photo by Zak Danks

Sunni Carr, KDFWR's Wildlife Diversity Coordinator says, "We are hopeful that this project demonstrates that conservation success stories are made when partners come together for targeted management efforts. With targeted and measurable management and monitoring activities, we are confident that we can make improvements for wildlife and their habitats. Conservation seeds may be sown in the Board room but blossom when put on the ground. The Rattlesnake-master Borer Moth deserves our best conservation efforts."

Students Conduct Wintering Waterfowl Surveys to Fill Information Gaps

By Hillary Skowronski, University of West Florida (UWF) Graduate Student

In 2013, a collaboration was initiated between the East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (EGCPJV; Rob Holbrook) and the University of West Florida (UWF; Dr. Phil Darby, Biology) to conduct a wintering waterfowl survey in Pensacola regional estuaries. The overall objective is to fill a regional information gap on waterfowl occupancy and abundance as identified by EGCPJV and US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS).



Photo by H. Skowronski



Photo by H. Skowronski

The initial pilot study to identify possible study sites, methods, and equipment was completed in 2014-2015, led by graduate student Phil Coppola. Fifteen observation points were established in Santa Rosa Sound in 2014. In 2015-2016, 15 additional survey points were added in Perdido Key and Big Lagoon, and the survey was led by graduate student Hillary Skowronski.

Specific objectives of this study are to: 1) estimate waterfowl distribution and abundance; 2) identify critical habitat components and disturbances that appear to influence waterfowl; 3) create a partnership between the EGCPJV, USFWS, and UWF; and 4) provide avian field experience for UWF students. UWF graduate and undergraduate students have participated, and we have also had several volunteers from the local Audubon Society (Francis M. Weston Chapter). UWF students have had the opportunity to interact with bird experts from EGCPJV, USFWS and the Audubon Society.

Critical to this collaborative waterfowl survey has been the support from homeowners and private land management organizations that permitted access to private docks and roads on private islands and sites. Volunteers are encouraged to share their expertise and assist with this ongoing, collaborative wintering waterfowl survey. We hope this initial baseline data can be used to develop hypotheses that form the foundation of a thesis for a MS degree in biology at UWF. Those interested in volunteering should contact Dr. Phil Darby at pdarby@uwf.edu.

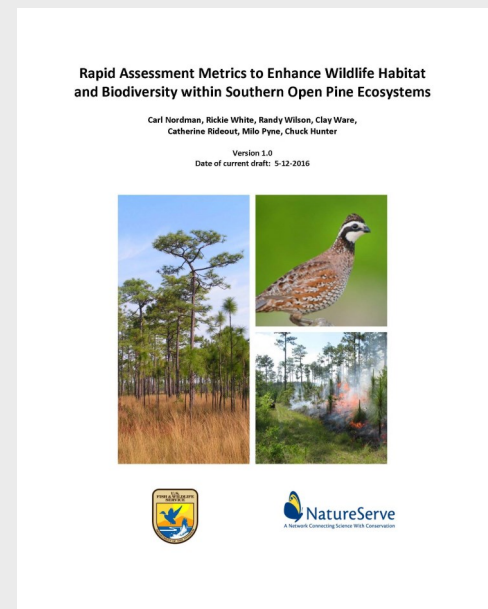
NEW REPORT! Providing Habitat for High Priority Wildlife in Southern Pine Ecosystems

EGCPJV staff and partners have worked the past two years in collaboration with US Fish & Wildlife and NatureServe on the development 'Desired Forest Conditions' to support wildlife in Southern Pine ecosystems. This project, funded by the Gulf Coastal Plains & Ozarks LCC, had two main objectives. The first was to develop a definitive, standardized, region-wide set of desired forest condition metrics to define wildlife needs and ecological integrity. The second was to develop an efficient protocol to use in assessing ecosystem integrity and wildlife habitat conditions. Multiple workshops were convened and input was solicited from a diversity of wildlife biologists, foresters, and prescribed fire experts. The Desired Forest Conditions report and field protocol can be viewed or downloaded here:

Report:

https://drive.google.com/a/fws.gov/file/d/0B_L0agRG2cxYQnBBMktXY2xwaDA/view

Protocol: https://drive.google.com/a/fws.gov/file/d/0B_L0agRG2cxYZnpfV1lwTEhRS1k/view



Partners in Flight to Release a New Continental Plan Revision

Partners in Flight was launched in 1990 in response to growing concerns about declines in the populations of many land bird species. The initial focus was on neotropical migrants but the mission has expanded to include all landbirds. The premise of the partnership is to coordinate efforts and leverage public and private resources to conserve bird populations through helping species at risk, keeping common birds common, and developing voluntary partnerships for birds, habitats, and people.

The PIF Continental Plan Revision will be released in early August 2016 and guides bird conservation activities over the next 10 years. The Plan Revision:

1. Uses the most up to date science to assess the vulnerability of all land birds and presents a "Watch List" comprised of 86 species of highest conservation concern.
2. Identifies common but steeply declining birds and promotes strategies to conserve these birds now.
3. Presents information on voluntary partnerships such as Joint Ventures, which deliver multiple aspects of effective bird conservation.



Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership Delivers Conservation Through New NFWF Grant

The Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) has been awarded a Longleaf Legacy Grant by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore this critical ecosystem through longleaf planting, implementation of prescribed fire, management and control of invasive species, and outreach and technical assistance to private landowners. The GCPEP was formed in 1996 to address the loss of longleaf pine ecosystems. Partners recognized that collaboration was key to success and a combination of protection, restoration, management, and work with private landowners would be required to reverse the decline of this system. Partners have acknowledged the importance of protection and replanting longleaf and have also had incredible success in improving longleaf through management. This NFWF grant will support the planting of 374 acres of longleaf in addition to the improvement of over 36,000 acres of public and private lands with prescribed fire and other critical management tools. These efforts are focused on the Yellow River Ravines, connecting Eglin Air Force Base to the larger Blackwater River State Forest and Conecuh National Forest complex. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Eastern Indigo Snake, Gopher Tortoise, and Eastern Indigo snake are rare species which will directly benefit from GCPEP's conservation efforts.



Prescribed Fire Use at Blackwater River State Forest, Photo by Vernon Compton