



NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT **PROJECT NUMBER T-26-D-1**

PROJECT TITLE: T-26 D1

Open Grasslands Project – Shawnee National Forest

PROPOSED OBJECTIVES:

To combat the grassland bird species decline in Illinois, this native grassland restoration project was proposed to convert existing open lands dominated by tall fescue back to native warm-season grasses (NWSG). National Wild Turkey Federation and its partners used a combination of tillage and prescribed fire on the Shawnee National Forest (SNF) over two years to improve over 500 acres of habitat as grasslands with foraging areas.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Shawnee National Forest (SNF) is the single largest landholder in the state with approximately 285,000 acres and an estimated 500,000 visitors annually. The Forest provides some of the largest and most diverse blocks of mature hardwood forest, forest interior habitat, and public openland habitats in Illinois. Recent studies have shown that grasslands as large as 250 acres are required to have a 50% chance of attracting area sensitive grassland species. However, the restoration of any amount of grassland is important in Illinois and will contribute to the overall goal of 1 million acres. Many of the grassland-dependent bird species are area sensitive, requiring contiguous blocks of grassland 75 acres or larger, so CP33 buffers and smaller blocks do not meet these specialized needs. Large tracts of grassland also have a high ratio of interior to edge, thus minimizing the negative edge effects, which can reduce nest productivity on small habitat blocks. These large blocks of grasslands should accommodate area-sensitive species and provide ideal nesting and brood-rearing habitat for wild turkeys.

Most of the “openlands” restored through this project are significant because they exceed the minimum size required by area-sensitive species. This project was limited to the 500-acre project size due to budgetary and funding constraints. The project is expected to expand to cover the entire 2,640+ acres through future project phases when additional funds are acquired.

Because the Shawnee National Forest has over 2,600 acres of potential openland habitat, this project will help meet the CWCP goal of increasing the use by migratory grassland bird species by 20%. (Section III,C. - Statewide Overview, Desired Conditions for Wildlife & Habitat Resources – Birds p. 42) and creating/restoring an additional 1 million acres of grassland in Illinois. (Section III,C. - Statewide Overview, Desired Conditions for Wildlife & Habitat Resources – Grasslands p. 47). Managing large tracts of grassland habitat, as this project proposes, may be the best strategy for supporting viable populations of these various species of grassland birds.



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The Shawnee National Forest has approximately 2,640 acres of large nonforested areas that will be managed as openlands. Many of these areas are fescue-dominated pasturelands and old abandoned farm fields. The long-term goal is to convert the fescue dominated pasturelands and old farm fields to NWSG. Conversion to NWSG will minimize long term maintenance costs and improve habitat for both non-game and game species such as bobwhite quail and Henslow's sparrow, whose populations have declined as much as 80% since 1966. Most of these acres have not been managed in the last 10 years and are becoming early successional stands of brush and saplings.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Through this project on the Shawnee National Forest, NWTF and its partners converted existing openlands dominated by tall fescue back to native warm-season grasses (NWSG). We achieved our project goals, which were to plant at least 100 acres in food plots and at least 150 acres in NWSG during each year of the grant period. As part of this two-year project, more than 500 acres were managed as grasslands with foraging areas. This project serves as one phase of a multi-phased approach to restoring the 2,640 acres of openlands on the Shawnee National Forest.

The project period for this grant became effective on April 3, 2007 and ended on April 30, 2009. Due to a delay in receiving the grant agreement from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, grant activities did not commence as originally planned; and due to the delay in receiving the grant agreement, a grant extension was required for the two-year project activities to be accomplished.

To combat the grassland bird species decline in Illinois, the completed native grassland restoration project activities converted existing openlands dominated by tall fescue back to native warm-season grasses. A combination of tillage and prescribed fire was used on the SNF to improve 500+ acres of habitat as grasslands with foraging areas over the two-year period.

We have completed project goals associated with Year 1 and Year 2 of the grant. NWTF and its partners planted 152.7 acres of NWSG and 116.6 acres of annuals in Year 1. NWTF and its partners planted 150.2 acres of NWSG and 100.5 acres of annuals in Year 2. These numbers meet the yearly target of 150 acres of NWSG and 100 acres of annuals, as well as the 2-year target of 300 acres of NWSG and 200 acres of annuals.

The following charts provide a detailed report of the acres planted:



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Year 1 Acreage Totals

<u>TRACT</u>	<u>SIDE OF FOREST</u>	<u>NWSG ACRES</u>	<u>ANNUAL ACRES</u>
Pennant Bar	East	33.5	48.1
Turpen	East	24.5	15.5
McConnell	East	43.7	3.0
Rohomell	East	8.0	18.0
State of IL east	West	21.0	14.0
State of IL west	West	22.0	2.0
White	West	0.0	10.0
TPL	West	0.0	6.0
Totals:		152.7	116.6

Year 2 Acreage Totals

<u>TRACT</u>	<u>SIDE OF FOREST</u>	<u>NWSG ACRES</u>	<u>ANNUAL ACRES</u>
Pennant Bar	East	42.3	20.4
Turpen	East	4.1	17.7
Walters	East	16.0	22.0
Rothomell	East	31.2	8.2
State of IL east	West	37.0	20.0
State of IL west	West	19.6	12.2
Totals:		150.2	100.5