

Healthy Forests, Woodlands and Waters in the Illinois and Kaskaskia River Basins
Grant Agreement T-69-D-1
Final Report

Project Start Date: October 1, 2010

Project End Date: December 31, 2013

Budget: \$199,500

Objectives for this project are listed below, along with the performance measures to be included in all quarterly, annual and final reports. This report covers the entire project.

OBJECTIVES: 1) Re-forest floodplains and riparian corridors of the lower Illinois and upper Kaskaskia Rivers and their tributaries. IDNR projected that 10,708 acres of new tree plantings would be enrolled in each of the Kaskaskia and Illinois River watersheds. The 2 NWTF foresters would each meet with at least 50 landowners per year to develop plans for 1,000 acres of tree plantings in each watershed per year. Over 3 years, a total of 3,000 acres of new tree plantings would be planned in each forester's area of responsibility.

2) Improve the quality of existing private forest land in the lower Illinois and upper Kaskaskia River watersheds. Each NWTF forester would meet with at least 25 forest landowners per year to provide technical assistance and write management plans that qualify for EQIP and/or FDA cost share assistance. A total of 75 forest landowners in each watershed would receive technical assistance, accounting for about 2,250 acres of planned forest improvement practices.

3) NWTF foresters, along with the Regional Biologist, would conduct 2 public information/habitat workshops per year to inform landowners of available programs and educate potential CREP and EQIP participants. The attendance goal was 40 participants per meeting.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND REPORTING: From the onset of the project it became apparent that modifications would be required to address challenges and new opportunities to provide forest management expertise for the agency. This report captures accomplishments based on these modifications from the original contract that more accurately capture progress for objectives 1 and 2 and reflect the full range of assistance requested by IDNR and NRCS. Performance measures for objective 1 originally included the number of landowner CREP consultations, the number of tree planting plans written, and the number of reforestation acres planned in the designated CREP counties. We have also reported new assistance measures, including the number and acres of CRP tree planting plans, along with the acres of previously written tree plantings that we site reviewed and certified.

Performance measures for objective 2 originally included the number of forest management plans written and the number of acres affected by those plans. We have also reported new assistance measures, including the number and acres of EQIP forest management reviews, the number of landowner consultations on forest management, and the number and acres of CREP

easement reviews. We also included the acres of forest inventories we performed. This shows the forest management plans we expect to be completed in the next few months.

Objective 3 performance measures originally included the number of attendees at the informational meetings/workshops and the resulting number of new CREP applications. However, we subsequently found that the number of CREP applications cannot be reported due to concerns about confidentiality. Therefore only the number of field days/workshops and number of participants are reported below.

REPORT:

We encountered a number of challenges during this project, but we feel that we successfully addressed them and provided significant benefit to the Citizens of Illinois as well as to our agency partners.

Project initiation was delayed until March 21, 2011 because Illinois CREP sign up re-opening did not occur in the fall of 2010 as expected. NWTF could not begin the hiring process until we were certain that the program would become available. The NWTF hired two excellent candidates when CREP was eventually re-opened in 2011. Unfortunately this three month delay significantly reduced the time available to deliver conservation achievements in the first year. We then lost one of the foresters a little more than half way through the project when he accepted a permanent job opportunity. Due to the limited time remaining in the project, and the high productivity level of the remaining forester, the NWTF decided to not fill the vacant position. We were confident that we could meet plan goals within the established timeframe with one forester.

High crop prices and other factors resulted in lower than expected public participation in the CREP program, which negatively impacted objective 1 accomplishments. The foresters completed every CREP tree planting plan and consultation available, even going outside the original project counties when necessary. As a direct result of this situation, IDNR foresters and NRCS District Conservationists referred CRP tree planting plans, reviews of past tree planting plans, and other reforestation programs to our foresters. When these reviews of completed plantings revealed that they did not meet the minimum specifications and standards set by NRCS we performed additional site visits and consultations with contractors to bring them into compliance. We also assisted NRCS with CRP/CREP re-enrollments by reviewing sites and determining if they met the minimum specification and standards prior to being re-enrolled. If the site did not meet minimum standards the forester notified NRCS what needed to be done to bring them up to standard. This allowed for higher quality habitat within established CRP/CREP sites.

EQIP funding for plan implementation was significantly reduced shortly after we began project implementation. As a result the NRCS offices dramatically reduced promoting forest management EQIP practices, which in turn reduced public interest in forest management plans in the focus areas. We then began reviewing proposed CREP easements and certifying that all

previously completed EQIP forestry practices met standards. This ensured that forests on those lands were adequately managed to provide high quality wildlife habitat and timber value. The resulting management recommendations on CREP easements were reported to IDNR.

Relevant to objective 3, we assisted/hosted 12 field days to teach landowners about forest management and opportunities for USDA and state assistance programs. We easily surpassed our stated goal by reaching an additional 180 landowners.

While we encountered numerous obstacles to the successful completion of this grant as originally written, we feel that in the end we exceeded expectations and provided excellent forest management services to our agency partners and citizens. NWTf foresters met unexpected challenges by actively seeking out other means to employ their expertise to provide services required by the partners. The resulting collaboration between our foresters, IDNR and NRCS focused on much-needed technical field reviews for completed CRP, CREP and EQIP forestry practices. These reviews revealed many implemented practices that did not meet NRCS standards. Contractors then brought these implemented practices up to standard. The net result was an additional 9,482 unanticipated acres of assured quality habitat in the lower Illinois and upper Kaskaskia River watershed focus areas from 163 technical reviews. This was in addition to 4,942 prescribed tree planting and forest management plans that were planned under the original agreement.

Objective 1

CREP/CRP Tree Planting Site Visits: 239
Tree Planting Plans: 123
Tree Planting Acres: 1,570 acres planned
Tree Planting Acres reviewed/certified: 3026

Objective 2

Forest Management Plans Written (EQIP and FDA): 62 plans
Acres of Forest Management Planned: 3,372
Acres of Forest Inventories: 5,731
Forest Landowner Consultations: 323
EQIP Forest Management Practice Reviews: 120
EQIP Forest Management Acres Reviewed/Certified: 3,298 acres
CREP Easement Reviews: 51
CREP Easement Forested Acres Protected: 3,158

Objective 3

Outreach Field Day Events Attended: 12
Field Day Public Attendance: 783

EXPENSES:

APPROVED PROJECT COMPONENTS	GRANT EXPENSES	TOTAL EXPENSES
Salaries & Wages	\$85,444.88	\$170,889.74
Fringe Benefits	\$14,016.87	\$28,033.76
Travel	\$14,861.15	\$29,722.13
Equipment	\$41.99	\$83.98
Supplies/Commodities	\$2,787.03	\$5,574.06
Indirect Costs	\$12,283.04	\$24,561.09
TOTALS	\$129,434.96	\$258,864.76