

ON THE WILD SIDE

USDA FOREST SERVICE
August 2003



Photo of the Month!

Thanks to the Pacific NW Region for this shot of the “Shasta-Trinity Wildlife Day Spa,” where they pride themselves in giving the finest in customer service. Relax in an informal atmosphere where every itch may be adequately scratched!

(photo courtesy of Gaylon Wilcox)



Elizabeth Caldwell, Oconee RD, Chattahoochee-Oconee NF, Receives the Distinguished Service Award from Quail Unlimited

Congratulations to Elizabeth Caldwell. On July 23, 2003 Elizabeth was presented the Distinguished Service Award during the Quail Unlimited Chapter/Corporate Awards Breakfast for the following:

- For the past twelve years Elizabeth has shown that partners really do make a difference. In spite of limited budgets, Elizabeth has improved quail habitat on the Oconee Ranger District of the Chattahoochee- Oconee National Forest.
- Elizabeth worked with the Piedmont Area Chapter in Georgia to develop a cooperative seed bank/sharing program that includes many local cooperators. Over 7,500 pounds of seed for quail and other wildlife has been distributed throughout 8 counties and planted in over 200 food plots.
- The endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and bobwhite quail benefit from the prescribed burns and fuel break grass plantings Elizabeth made happen.

Budget Update for 2004

Contact: Robert Glasgow, Budget Coordinator, WO, 202-205-0814

Congress began their summer recess the week of July 27. Both the House and Senate have made substantial progress in developing an appropriations bill that includes Forest Service funding. Currently the House and Senate marks are at or slightly above the Administration's requested wildlife and fisheries budget.

Bobcat With Agra-axe Cuts its Way Through Pinyon-Juniper Forest Restoring Arizona Grasslands

Contact: Paul Webber, Range Specialist, Kaibab National Forest, R3, 928-635-5621, pwebber@fs.fed.us

Over the past 100 years, many of the grasslands on the Kaibab National Forest, and throughout the Southwest, have been invaded by pinyon and juniper trees. Understory grasses, forbs, and shrubs plants are being out-competed by these trees, dramatically changing vegetation composition and providing less forage for wildlife and livestock. Using older aerial photos, it is estimated that 30-50 percent of the South Kaibab's grasslands have been encroached over this period by pinyon/juniper trees in the lower elevations and by ponderosa pine in the higher elevations.

Various techniques have been used over the past several decades to restore grasslands by reducing the number of these trees and allowing the understory plants to access necessary sunlight, moisture and nutrients.



Photograph 1: Bobcat machine with 'Agra-axe'

The "Agra-Axe" is a tool that has been very beneficial in restoring pinyon/juniper-invaded grasslands. The "Agra-Axe" is a hydraulic shear that is attached to a skid-steer, such as a "Bobcat". It uses hydraulic cutters to pinch trees at ground level with little to no disturbance to soils.

The benefits of using the "Agra-Axe" over other methods of juniper and pinyon control are as follows:

- The AXE is light on the land, causing minimal soil disturbance. In fact it is so light on the land that, after extensive testing and in consultation with SHPO, the Kaibab Forest Archaeologist has determined that many area of low archaeological site density, may not need 100% field survey. This has amounted to a large savings in dollars for these types of surveys.

- The AXE hydraulically pinches the trees at the surface resulting in little to no regeneration due to lack of photosynthetic material available for sprouting to take place. Due to this surface cut, there are no stumps left to create a negative visual impact.



Photograph 2: 'Agra-Axe' in action - shearing a small juniper

- The cost to operate the AXE is about half of what it costs to have these trees mechanically cut by chainsaw crews. With an 8-person fire crew in moderate to heavy pinyon/juniper woodland, the cost is approximately \$74.00 per acre. In the same type of area, the cost varies between \$20.00 to \$40.00 per acre with the AXE.
- The AXE will cut trees from one inch in diameter to fourteen inches in diameter with one cut. Even trees that are multi-limbed at the base require only one cut.
- The hydraulic shear pinches the trees in such a gentle manner that little regeneration of trees from seed planting, such as from chaining or pushing trees, has been observed.
- The AXE is a very safe machine to operate and requires minimal skill to operate. This machine can be operated for ten hours a day without causing fatigue to the operator, as opposed to chain-saw cutting.

The formation of partnerships involving the use of the AXE has been an ongoing process since the beginning of its use on the Kaibab National Forest. Poor range conditions on the Juan Tank Allotment focused attention on the expansion of junipers and pinyon into areas that were once grasslands. When confronted with the choice of either accepting permanent livestock reductions in the near future or tackling the invading juniper and pinyon problem head on, Juan Tank permittee Glen Reed decided to work with the Forest to bring the grasslands back to their previous vegetative condition, thus improving his chances to maintain his permitted numbers of livestock.

The idea of using a “Bobcat” skidsteer with a hydraulic pinching shear was proposed by Mr. Reed in hopes of reducing the time and cost of conducting archaeological surveys. Indeed, this happened: In areas of low archeological site density within previously treated pinyon/juniper, such as the Juan Tank allotment, the Forest Archaeologist determined that, since the AXE is so light on the land, intensive archaeological surveys were less common. This determination was supported by the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office. That this decision greatly reduced the time and dollars needed for archeological surveys on the Juan Tank Allotment and is, in a sense, an internal partnership between archeologists and range conservationists.

Permittee Glen Reed purchased an “Agra-Axe” in 1996, followed soon thereafter by a purchase of an “Agra-Axe” by the Forest Service. Since that time, both machines have worked jointly on the Juan Tank Allotment to reduce the pinyon-juniper overstory. Since this partnership was formed between the permittee and the Forest Service, others have joined in to help with this project. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) and the Rocky Mountain Elk

Foundation, has contributed approximately 50% of the total funding for all of the grassland maintenance projects on the South Zone of the Kaibab National Forest, including 6,000 acres of treatment work accomplished so far on the Juan Tank allotment. The AGFD is also providing all fuel for permittee Glen Reed's operation through the auctioning of special hunt tags. Don Brackin, permittee on the adjoining Double A allotment, recently purchased an "Agra-Axe" and is hard at work restoring grasslands on his allotment. AGFD is in the process of approving a fuel payment plan similar to Glen Reed's. With three "Agra-Axes" in action, these partners are able to treat as many as 150 acres per day of invaded grasslands.

In 1997, between the Forest Service and Glen Reed, approximately 1000 acres of pinyon/juniper encroachment were treated. In 1998 this figure doubled to 2000 acres treated. From 1997 to 2002, with three machines working, a total of 14,865 acres of grassland maintenance using the "Agra-Axe" has been accomplished. In 2003, we anticipate that we will be able to treat about 2,300 for a grand total of 17,165 acres.



Photograph 3: Cooper Flat, 600 Acres of Restored Grasslands

COST TO OPERATE THE AGRA-AXE:

- LIGHT TREE DENSITY (15-35 TREES PER ACRE): \$20-\$35 PER ACRE
- MODERATE TREE DENSITY (35-50 TREES PER ACRE): \$25 - \$40 PER ACRE
- HEAVY TREE DENSITY (50-70 TREES PER ACRE): \$45-\$65 PER ACRE

COSTS INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

- COST FOR A WAGE-GRADE OPERATOR – WG-8
- COST FOR A WAGE-GRADE SWAMPER – WG-3
- COST FOR MONTHLY FOREST SERVICE RATE FOR THE "BOBCAT"
- ADMINISTRATION COST FOR NEPA, ETC.
- COST FOR HOURLY RATE FOR "BOBCAT"
- THE COST FOR ARCHAEOLOGY WORK IS VARIABLE BUT AN AVERAGE FIGURE IS INCLUDED IN THE COSTS ABOVE.
- This cost has been estimated in areas of 0-10% slope with low to moderate rock frequency.

Fishing Line – a Hazard to Bald Eagles

Contact: Steve Miller, 814-723-5150, July 10, 2003

The Allegheny National Forest is home to the Bald Eagle, a federally listed Threatened Species. At least three nests are known to occur along the side hills on the Pennsylvania side of the Allegheny Reservoir and three nests have been identified along the Allegheny River. The shorelines along these waterways are vital food foraging areas for the eagles. Fishing line,

discarded along the shoreline of Allegheny National Forest waterways, is a potential hazard to foraging bald eagles.

“Bald Eagles can be easily injured by getting their feet entangled in discarded fishing line along the Allegheny Reservoir or Allegheny River,” stated forest wildlife biologist, Brad Nelson. “When their feet become entangled, they struggle to fly, become stressed and exhausted and eventually die,” added Nelson.

Anglers can help ensure bald eagle safety by not discarding unwanted fishing line or lures on the shoreline. Anglers can take an additional step and pick up line and lures left behind by anglers using the area before them. Anglers are urged to dispose of unwanted line and lures in proper receptacles to not only keep the shores and waterways safe, but clean as well.

“Areas heavily fished by humans are also attractive to the eagles for foraging,” said Nelson. “Frequently, eagles search for live fish in the same waters that anglers find productive,” added Nelson. Eagles and a variety of other shore birds also scavenge for dead fish along the shoreline. Popular fishing areas are often heavily littered with discarded line which can jeopardize the safety of these birds.

The bald eagle is a large bird that can reach a height of approximately three feet with a wing span of up to eight feet. Eagles live almost exclusively around lakes, rivers, or seashores making their nests in large trees, cliffs or rock outcrops in remote areas along the shoreline. Eagle nests are expansive structures in the tops of large shoreline trees or rocks located within easy range of the shoreline for fishing. Eagles partner with their mate for life and often use the same nest structure year after year. The number of eagles’ nests in Northwestern PA has expanded in recent years.

Since the summer of 2000, Boy Scouts and other volunteers have been working with Scott Reitz, Bradford District Biologist, to clean up discarded fishing materials on the shoreline of heavily used fishing areas of the Allegheny Reservoir and Allegheny River.

Four of Elko High’s recent graduates are spending the summer “frogging” - looking for the Columbia spotted frog on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

Contact: June McMillen, Public Affairs, 775-738-5171 or William Amy, Wildlife Biologist, 775-752-3357

Lisa Gilbertson, Chantelle Heaton, Corrie Holmes, and Inga Schindler have opted for a summer of waders, insect repellent, and hiking boots in lieu of business wear, fax machines, and air conditioning, to help map the presence of this Federal “candidate” species on national forest system lands.



Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), a candidate species is one for which there is enough evidence to propose it for listing as endangered or threatened, but currently there are higher priorities that take precedence. At this “pre-listing” stage, conservation plans can be developed and implemented - if successful these efforts can prevent the future listing. A conservation plan for the Columbia spotted frog in northeastern Nevada is in draft stage now, and will probably be finalized in fall. The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and Elko County are all participating in this conservation effort.

As part of this effort, the frog crew is surveying probable habitat on the national forest, to locate existing frog populations. They begin their fieldwork by about 9:00 am. This is when frogs start stirring - earlier in the morning is too cool for much frog activity. The crew dons their waders, and while two members set out with nets to search for frogs, the other two begin collecting data on



the site, including water temperature, pH of the water, and the size of the pond. They also record the location of the pond, using both GPS coordinates and photo points, to help future researchers identify the same pond.

Recognizing a Columbia spotted frog is not too difficult. In addition to the spots, adults have a distinctive salmon colored underside, and no other spotted frogs are known to occupy the same habitat. Younger frogs may not have the same salmon coloration, but the spots are distinctive and their association with adults clearly establishes their identity.

When the crew finds a spotted frog, they record its size and gender, and keep a running total of the number of frogs in each pond. They set the recorded frogs loose in an area of the site already surveyed, to reduce the probability of counting the same frog twice.

Often the search does not produce any frogs and even when the crew does find some, there usually are only a few. Six or seven frogs would be an exceptional amount in one pond – finding just two or three is more common. But now, as the summer progresses, and this year's young start to mature, the crew is more likely to find a larger number of these young 'sub-adults'. Winter mortality, however, will remove many of these from the breeding population before next year.



After completing the survey and recording their findings, the crew exchanges waders for hiking boots, and moves on to the next pond. They will probably end this day by 6:00 pm, but some weeks they camp out for two or three days at a time, due to the remoteness of the ponds they are surveying.

While the mosquitoes are bothersome, and the young women are quick to comment on the amount of hiking they do in a day, the crewmembers agree that "frogging" is a great way to spend the summer.

New Website Called Avibase

Denis Lepage, Bird Studies Canada, created a new website called Avibase, which contains taxonomic and distribution information (including maps) for all 10,000 extant species and 22,000 subspecies of birds in the world, plus several extinct and ancient fossil species. The site also offers searching tools for internet sites and images, as well as links to other sites such as ITIS (Integrated Taxonomic Information Systems) and Birdlife, threatened birds of the World website. This site is the result of nearly 12 years of work on a database that now contain close to a million records, including 300,000 occurrence records and 180,000 synonyms in over a dozen languages.

Please have a look at: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/avibase/avibase.jsp>. Bird checklists of the world, which offers bird checklists for over 500 countries and regions, has now also been integrated into Avibase, but continues to be available directly from my other web site "Bird Links to the World".

Arizona Condor Update: Up To 20 Soaring Over Grand Canyon Village

Contact: Rory Aikens, AZ Game and Fish Dept (602) 789-3214, raikens@gf.state.az.us

It is fairly common to see 10 to 20 condors soaring in the Grand Canyon Village area of the South Rim. Other than the South Rim, birds are frequenting the North Kaibab Plateau, the Vermilion Cliffs and the river corridor in the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Biologists say they still do not have visual confirmation of a possible condor chick at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon but the adults still appear to be feeding something. The birds frequently feed at Vermilion cliffs or the South Rim, enter the cave with a full crop and leave with an empty one. "It may be another month before we know for certain but most folks involved with the project have a pretty positive outlook on the possibility of the first Arizona chick in nearly 100 years," says Andi Rogers, biologist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. A couple of weeks ago, biologists involved with the condor program began their semi-annual population trapping. "So far we have caught 26 of the 35 condors. Our goal in catching all the birds is to inoculate them with the West Nile Virus vaccination, take a blood sample and replace defunct transmitters," Rogers explains.

Conservation Organizations in the United States and Latin American Countries to Receive Funds for Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation

Contact: Nicholas Throckmorton, 202/208-5636, Nicholas_Throckmorton@fws.gov

Conservation organizations in 15 states and 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries will share \$3 million in grants for neotropical migratory bird conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. Partnering organizations will match these grants with \$13 million. There are 341 species of nearctic-neotropical migrants, birds that breed north of the Tropic of Cancer and winter south of that line. Examples of these birds include pelicans, vultures, falcons, cranes, owls, hummingbirds, bluebirds, and orioles.

"The conservation of neotropical migratory birds extends beyond our borders and depends on partnerships with other nations as well as states, conservation organizations and many others here at home," said Interior Secretary Gale Norton. "Through these grants, the Interior Department is contributing to on-the-ground conservation projects from Maine to Cape Horn."

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 2000 establishes a matching grants program to fund projects that promote the conservation of neotropical migratory birds in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean. The money can be used to protect, research, monitor and manage these bird's populations and habitats as well as in areas of law enforcement and community outreach and education.

"Neotropical migratory birds are important for our ecosystems," said Norton. "They work as nature's pest controllers, pollinators and provide many hours of enjoyment for birdwatchers and outdoor enthusiasts." Project write-ups can be found at <http://birdhabitat.fws.gov>.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation takes Ownership of Double H Ranch, Assigns Conservation Easement to Mule Deer Foundation

Contact: To learn more, visit www.elkfoundation.org or call 1-800-CALL ELK

DATIL, N.M.—A deceased conservationist's grandest dream is one step closer to reality today. It took more than a year to settle the estate of the late Bob Torstenson, an Illinois family man and business owner with a remarkable wish of giving away his massive New Mexico ranch. But that wish was realized today when a Montana-based conservation organization, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, officially received a deed to most of Torstenson's 211 square-mile Double H Ranch, along with a gifted \$4 million cash endowment.



"We've known for some time that this day would come, yet we're still absolutely staggered by the generosity and conservation commitment of Mr. Torstenson and his family," said Peter J. Dart, president and CEO of the Elk Foundation. "They have given us a chance to showcase on a global scale our mission of conserving habitat for elk and other wildlife."

Torstenson's gift is among the largest ever given to any conservation organization, and the largest in Elk Foundation history. With the endowment, the total gift is \$21.5 million. The ranch, valued at \$17.5 million, consists of 95,696 deeded acres plus a 39,433-acre New Mexico State Land Office lease, for a total of 135,129 acres. Most of those acres are now owned by, and in the future will be formally known as, the Torstenson Family Wildlife Center, a new non-profit subordinate of the Elk Foundation. Remaining ranch lands will be transferred in separate transactions in the near future. A formal dedication ceremony is being planned for summer 2004. The ranch is located in the arid high-country between Magdalena and Datil, a two-hour drive southwest of Albuquerque. It has long been renowned for its large-antlered elk and mule deer. Other species present include pronghorn antelope, mourning dove, scaled quail, Gambel's quail, Mearns quail, Merriam's wild turkey, waterfowl and shorebirds.

As ranch ownership was being transferred, the Elk Foundation's existing conservation easement on the property, completed late in 2002, was assigned to the Mule Deer Foundation. This reassignment was necessary because Torstenson and the Elk Foundation felt a third party should hold the easement once ownership changed. The Nevada-based group readily agreed to take the easement and annually monitor the land-use restrictions mandated by the 80,000-acre agreement, ensuring that wildlife habitat is prioritized, agricultural practices are responsible, and the landscape remains unbroken.

Mule Deer Foundation President and CEO Terry Wayne Cloutier said, "This is indeed an honor. This kind of teamwork between organizations was part of Mr. Torstenson's vision for the future of conservation. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 3.2 million acres of rangeland in the West have been lost to development and subdivision since 1982. Mr. Torstenson felt that all conservationists must pull together if we're going to offset habitat loss in a meaningful way." Dart agreed. "I hope this gift becomes symbolic of America's urgent need to balance our growth, and leave some of the wild places and wild creatures that give the West its real character."

Together, the Elk Foundation and Mule Deer Foundation will lead a consortium of organizations in pooling resources, expertise and enthusiasm to fulfill Torstenson's dream. Many have already signed a proclamation expressing their commitment to the goals of the ranch. Over the next few years, the Double H Ranch is planned to become a world-class center for conservation education. It will be a place for outdoor learning, sustainable agriculture, a showplace for land-use practices, and a destination for experiences in wild country. Although public access is

restricted, plans are being developed to allow outdoors enthusiasts, especially youngsters, to visit, hunt and enjoy this unique land.

Rockford, Ill., attorney Jan Ohlander, a Torstenson family friend and estate executor, described the vision that led to the unusual gift. “Bob was an extraordinarily talented businessman with a knack for taking actions that have magnified impacts in the future. As a hunter he was proud of the contributions that American sportsmen have made to preserve wildlife habitat and our outdoor heritage. He believed large tracts of unbroken land are slipping away. He wanted other landowners to consider protecting wild landscapes for future generations. Bob wanted the Double H Ranch to be both an inspiration and a challenge for all who love wild places to expand their vision and capabilities for protecting larger and more critical chunks of habitat,” he said.

“Mr. Torstenson’s dream is our dream, too. We’re committed to seeing it through so that future generations may see, know and understand wild country,” said Cloutier. Torstenson, who lived in Pecatonica, Ill., was an Elk Foundation member for several years. He had called upon the organization to help him develop a wildlife management plan for his ranch. Shortly after he succumbed to cancer in May 2002, leaving a wife and sons, the Torstenson family trust donated the conservation easement to the Elk Foundation, which has extensive experience in drafting permanent land-use agreements.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Helps Washington Acquire No. 1 Priority Lands for Steelhead, Elk, and other Wildlife

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http://www.elkfoundation.org/press_releases.php3?articleid=204



ELKHEAVEN PHOTO

CLARKSTON, Wash.—A host of fish and wildlife species, from threatened steelhead trout to huntable populations of Rocky Mountain elk, will benefit from a recent acquisition of 8,500 acres in southeast Washington. Several partners including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation helped with funding, and the property is now part of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area owned and managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

The scenic land ranges from pristine streams to steep slopes and ridges up to 4,220 feet in elevation. It is a seasonal home for bald eagles, mule deer, bighorn sheep, bears, cougars, chukars, hawks and neo-tropical songbirds, and it contains crucial wintering grounds for 300-400 elk. About 12 miles southwest of Clarkston, Wash., the Asotin Creek lands are adjacent to the Umatilla National Forest, bringing the total acreage of that management area to 22,315 acres. The property is a vital watershed for salmonid recovery, and affords protection for key conservation targets in the Blue Mountains ecoregion, including steppe flora and fauna communities, riparian areas, and wetlands.

“This property has been our No. 1 priority for strategic protection of both fish and wildlife for a long time,” said WDFW Director Jeff Koenings. “It helps us address the watershed management problems identified in the 1995 Asotin Creek Model Watershed Plan by connecting state and

federal lands so that we can manage the middle and upper reaches of this watershed more cohesively.”

The purchase was funded with federal, state and private dollars. Using Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) fish and wildlife mitigation funds, plus grants from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) of the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, WDFW teamed up with the nonprofit Elk Foundation to purchase the Smoothing Iron Ranch and George Creek parcels from J Bar S Inc. and the Schlee family of Asotin, Wash., for \$3.5 million.

“This land purchase will be key to helping WDFW reach its goal of increasing the Asotin elk herd from 700 to 1,000 animals, while at the same time providing ability to control elk-caused crop damage on neighboring agricultural lands,” said Rance Block, the Elk Foundation’s northwest regional vice president.

New NWTf Study Reveals Surprising Motivations, May Predict Future Hunting Trends

Contact: James Powell or Jonathan Harling, 803-637-3106

July 10, 2003, http://www.nwtf.org/nwtf_newsroom/press_releases.php?id=373



Assumptions can be misleading, and sometimes just plain wrong. For instance, hunters are primarily concerned with firearms safety education and providing hunting opportunities for youth — not harvesting game as is often believed. That’s just one of the significant findings in a recent hunter behavior and attitude study commissioned by the National Wild Turkey Federation.

The study, Behavioral, Attitudinal, and Demographic Characteristics of Spring Turkey Hunters in the U.S., was unveiled to a diverse group of writers, editors and communications professionals at a special presentation during the Outdoor Writers Association of America 2003 Conference in Columbia, Mo. Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director of Responsive Management and principal researcher for the study, noted that many of the results of the study were revealing.

“The study reinforced some of our ideas about what motivates and interests hunters, but it also showed that hunters are strongly motivated to hunt for reasons that aren’t as obvious. For instance, most hunters said that they hunted primarily for recreation and to spend time with family and friends. Harvesting turkeys wasn’t a top reason to hunt for most respondents.” The top reasons for “liking” to spring turkey hunt were for the challenge (42%) or to feel close to nature (37%).

Another interesting — but not necessarily surprising — finding was that protecting or enhancing habitat for other wildlife besides wild turkeys (78%) ranked high on hunters’ lists of priorities. The study results paint an interesting picture of the spring turkey hunter. A short list of other study findings reveals that:

- Turkey hunters are dedicated conservationists who want to share the outdoors with others.
- An overwhelming majority of turkey hunters rated the following state wildlife agency programs/efforts as very important:
 - Firearm use and safety (89%);
 - Providing wild turkey hunting opportunities for youth (81%);
 - Conservation projects, such as protecting or enhancing habitat for other wildlife besides wild turkeys (78%);
 - Protecting or enhancing habitat for wild turkeys (75%);
 - Providing wild turkey hunting opportunities for disabled hunters (73%).
- Turkey hunting is addictive. A majority (58%) of turkey hunters had hunted each spring for the past five years, the only exception being in the western region of the country.
- Most turkey hunters said that their level of turkey hunting has increased (36%) or remained about the same (49%) over the past five years.

Some of the findings were especially revealing and shed some much needed light on what the future of hunting may be. “One surprising finding was that the largest percentage of respondents (39%) said they were self-taught turkey hunters, or taught by a friend (26%), as opposed to other types of hunting in which they were typically introduced by their father,” said Tammy Bristow Sapp, NWTF’s vice-president of communications. “In fact, turkey hunters may be experiencing a role reversal where grown children are introducing their fathers to the sport.” Many of the findings in the study point the way to a bright future for spring turkey hunting and for passing on hunting traditions.

“Based on the study, spring turkey hunting appears to be the next big thing in hunting,” said Sapp. “The study shows that most spring turkey hunters have hunted turkeys for fewer than 12 years, a short time relative to how long most hunters have been hunting in general. This, and the fact that most hunters are spring turkey hunting an average of 7.6 days every year, suggests a young, dedicated hunting movement with lots of growth potential for the future.”

The study compiled results from a telephone survey conducted by Responsive Management, Inc., of Harrisonburg, Va., whose research has been featured on CNN and in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and on the front page of USA Today. The telephone survey polled 1,410 spring turkey hunters identified in 9 states including California, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Texas and Washington. Hunters surveyed in 8 of the 9 states were taken from the hunting community in general and were identified through hunting license records, except in California, where NWTF member database records were used because state license records were not available.

The NWTF also has commissioned an economic impact study to compliment the behavioral and attitudinal study. Results from the second study conducted by Rob Southwick and the staff at Southwick Associates, a fish and wildlife economics and business consulting firm, should be available by late summer 2003.

“By combining the two studies, we’ll have a detailed view on who a spring turkey hunter is, what their wants and needs are, and what they bring to the table as an economic and political force,” said Duda. “I commend the NWTF for being farsighted and going after this type of data. These studies will support conservation and hunting heritage efforts for many years to come.”

The National Wild Turkey Federation Super Fund Manual Is Available for Download

Contact: Jared Felkins, Web Editor, <http://www.nwtf.org/staff>

The NWTF Super Fund Manual is now available for download on the NWTF Web site as a PDF document. It is available in both the staff and volunteers sections of the site. You can access the staff section by going to <http://www.nwtf.org/staff>. Use staff as your username and heritage as the password. You can let chapter volunteers know about the manual download by having them go to <http://www.nwtf.org/volunteers>. The username for this section is volunteers and the password is conservation. This will hopefully cut down on printing costs and postage.

U.S. Forest Service Steps Up Partnership with Joint Ventures

Contact: Debbie F. Slobe, (303) 926-0777, debbie.slobe@pljv.org

The U.S. Forest Service is looking to enhance its involvement with Joint Ventures, and recently invited Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) board member Ross Melinchuk to present information about joint ventures to top USFS officials June 12 in Washington, D.C. Melinchuk, along with three USFS representatives, presented information to the USFS National Leadership Team about bird conservation efforts in the U.S. and abroad, encouraged increased USFS involvement in bird conservation and promoted joint ventures as avenues to increase involvement. "We set the stage for enhanced USFS involvement in other joint ventures around the US," said Melinchuk, who is the director of state and federal coordination for the southeast regional office of Ducks Unlimited. The PLJV already benefits from a strong partnership with the USFS. Representatives from the USFS sit on the PLJV Management Board and on the Joint Venture's science team. For more information on the PLJV, visit www.pljv.org.

Fish and Wildlife Service Releases Draft Environmental Assessment of the Management of Mute Swans in the Atlantic Flyway

Contact: Nicholas Throckmorton, (202) 208-5636, <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today (7/02/03) released a draft environmental assessment for the management of mute swans in the Atlantic flyway. The assessment analyzes the consequences of actions to minimize the damage caused by the increasing numbers of mute swans. Implementation of the management plan will protect resources such as wetlands, native fish and wildlife populations, personal property, agricultural resources, and address human health and safety issues.

"Wildlife biologists and refuge managers have significant concerns about the impacts of growing populations of non-native mute swans on native birds and their habitats," said Service Director Steve Williams. "Mute swans can cause extensive habitat degradation in wetland habitats that are extremely important to native birds, particularly waterfowl. The Service is working closely with wildlife managers to ensure a flyway wide mute swan management plan."

Because of its graceful form and beauty, the mute swan is a frequent subject of stories, but it is not native to the United States. Alarmed by recent rapid growth of the population and detrimental impacts caused by exotic species such as the mute swans, wildlife professionals have argued for a coordinated and cooperative program to reduce mute swan populations to predetermined and manageable levels designed to minimize ecological impacts.

In a court case decided in December 2001, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that a swan in a family “Anatidae” is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Native swans in this family were already protected in the United States’ treaties with Mexico and Canada.

The current population of Chesapeake Bay mute swans consumes almost 10 percent of the total biomass of submerged aquatic vegetation in the bay. This reduces the habitat and food source that would otherwise be available to provide shelter and food for a wide variety of wildlife.

Mute swans occupy and defend 15-acre parcels of wetland and some pairs will vigorously defend nest or brood sites from intrusion by other species of waterfowl. Not only can they attack and displace native waterfowl from breeding and staging areas, they have also been known to kill intruding birds of other species and their young. Mute Swans have reportedly been responsible for several thousand dollars worth of damage to commercial cranberry crops in New Jersey and Massachusetts.

The alternatives outlined in the assessment are ‘no action’, the proposed action of ‘lethal control’, ‘egg addling’, or other types of ‘non-lethal control’.

Mute swans were unknown in the United States until sometime prior to 1900. The original introductions probably occurred as semi-domestic birds in eastern North America. Some 26 birds established along the lower Hudson River and Long Island in a semi-wild state by 1928. Through the first half of the twentieth century, there were several more releases of birds along the Eastern Seaboard and Great Lakes. In 2002, the Atlantic Coast population is the largest in North America with an estimated population of 14,313 birds.

Mute swans are sedentary, rarely moving more than 30 miles. The swan requires habitats with shallow vegetated shorelines. In the Northeast, it prefers coastal ponds, estuaries, backwaters and tributaries. It occupies these habitats year-round. As their population grew, some birds began to occupy inland freshwater wetlands. Mute swans are almost totally herbivorous, feeding on a variety of aquatic vegetation. Males weigh about 24 pounds and females weigh about 18 pounds.

2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

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A PDF copy of the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, can be downloaded for particular states using the following link:

http://fa.r9.fws.gov/surveys/surveys.html#survey_reports

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Releases Wind Turbine Guidance

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently published in the Federal Register voluntary interim guidelines to help energy companies avoid and minimize wildlife impacts from wind turbines. These guidelines will help energy companies locate and design wind energy facilities in a manner that ensures protection of wildlife resources, while streamlining the site selection and facility design process and avoiding unanticipated conflicts after construction.

The guidelines focus on three key areas; the proper evaluation and selection of potential wind energy development sites, the proper location and design of turbines and associated structures within sites selected for development, and research and monitoring to identify and assess impacts to wildlife. The guidance is intended for land-based wind turbines and wind farms on all Federal, State, and private lands within the United States.

“Clean renewable energy is very important for America; however, improperly sited or designed wind energy facilities can adversely impact wildlife, especially birds and bats, and their habitats,” said Service Director Steve Williams. “With voluntary cooperation from the wind industry in implementing these guidelines, we can avoid impacts to wildlife, streamline the environmental review process, and increase the availability of renewable energy resources.”

The Service encourages immediate use of the guidelines by the wind energy industry and solicits comments on guideline effectiveness. The guidelines will be evaluated over a two-year period, and then modified as necessary based on their performance in the field and on the latest scientific and technical discoveries developed in coordination with industry, states, academic researchers, other federal agencies and the public.

Examples of the guidelines include avoiding the placement of turbines in documented locations of any species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act; avoiding fragmentation of large, contiguous tracts habitat; using tubular supports with pointed tops to minimize bird perching; and avoiding solid red or pulsating red incandescent lights as they appear to attract night-migrating birds.

The Service created a Wind Turbine Siting Working Group in January 2002 to develop these guidelines, in response to the Secretary of the Interior’s Renewable Energy on Public Lands Initiative which endorses wind energy development on Federal lands.

The Department of the Interior has been re-evaluating its existing renewable energy programs on its lands. It is also assessing current limitations on industry access to Federal lands. These actions are intended to both increase the Department’s use of renewable energy and to assist industry in increasing renewable energy production, in an environmentally friendly manner, on Department managed lands. Development of wind energy is a significant component of this initiative.

Commercial wind energy facilities have been constructed in 29 States, with developments planned for several other states, as well as coastal and offshore areas. As more facilities with larger turbines are built, the cumulative effects of this rapidly growing industry could potentially contribute to the decline of some wildlife populations. The potential harm to these populations makes careful evaluation of proposed facilities essential. Due to local differences in wildlife concentration and movement patterns, habitat types, geography, facility design, and weather, each proposed development site is unique and requires detailed, individual evaluation. The guidelines will also assist all Interior Department agencies in providing technical assistance to the wind energy industry.

Anti-Bear Hunting Legislation Withdrawn Before House Resources Committee Vote

Contact: Jodi Stemler, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, 202-543-6850, www.sportsmenslink.org

Washington, DC: Sponsors of H.R. 1472, the “Don’t Feed the Bears” legislation that would prohibit the practice of regulated use of bait in hunting bears on federal public lands, withdrew

the legislation from consideration by the House Resources Committee July 15. The withdrawal of the bill was a victory for sportsmen, led by the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, SCI and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, who have worked against the legislation because of the implications to state-based wildlife management. Sponsors of the bill may look to amend another bill on the House floor with H.R. 1472, but CSF and its partners will work against this effort.

After the bill was pulled, Caucus members on the committee, Reps. Don Young (R-AK), Ron Kind (D-WI), Jim Saxton (R-NJ), and Barbara Cubin (R-WY), spoke in opposition to the bill stating their strong concerns about the precedent it would set for wildlife management. The Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus worked to defeat this legislation through Dear Colleague letters and targeted meetings with committee members.

"The Don't Feed the Bears Act is an affront to state's rights, contrary to sound wildlife management practices, and an insult to law abiding sportsmen across the country," stated Congressman Richard Pombo, Chairman of the House Resources Committee and a member of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus. "These constituencies have spoken and Congress is listening, but we must continue to guard against measures in the future that would seek to undermine our rights."

Congress specifically and repeatedly has affirmed the states' rights to manage non-migratory wildlife, including on most federal lands except for National Parks. H.R. 1472 would have preempted these rights and removed science and professional wildlife management as the cornerstone of America's successful wildlife management program. Recent studies have shown that black bear populations in the U.S. are increasing, and that the major problem facing black bears is the growing number of conflicts with humans. Keeping black bear populations in check is a primary goal of bear management for most states and they must be permitted the latitude to manage their resident populations in the manner that their state wildlife agencies deem appropriate. The biologists and professionals from the state wildlife authorities in the nine states that allow regulated baiting have determined that baiting for bears is an appropriate method of harvest, and in some cases virtually the only viable means to manage population densities. "At no time in its history has Congress selected an individual species for federal management, and it should not start now," stated CSF Director of Policy, Jeff Crane.

Coordinated Management, Monitoring, and Research Program for the Rio Peñasco Watershed Project, Lincoln National Forest, New Mexico

Contacts: Dr. James P. Ward, 505-434-7211, pward@fs.fed.us and Dr. Joseph L. Ganey, 928-556-2156, jganey@fs.fed.us

ISSUE: Forests in much of the Southwestern Region of the U. S. Forest Service are dominated by overstocked stands resulting from years of fire suppression. The risk of catastrophic fire is unacceptably high in these stands, particularly near the wildland-urban interface. Forest thinning is urgently needed to protect private lands and other resource values in these areas. However, information on the effects of forest thinning on threatened and endangered wildlife species and their habitat is limited. This uncertainty can hamper the ability of managers to accomplish the necessary thinning.

COORDINATED PROBLEM SOLVING: This problem can be alleviated by proactive approaches aimed at reducing the uncertainty over effects of thinning on threatened species. The cooperative Rio Peñasco Watershed Project is an example of such an approach. Scientists from the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) worked with managers from the Lincoln National

Forest (LNF), New Mexico, to design and implement a program to evaluate the effects of forest thinning on the threatened Mexican spotted owl and other resources. This program will evaluate both standard thinning treatments and more intensive experimental treatments designed cooperatively by managers and researchers. These experimental treatments have the potential to improve owl habitat and simultaneously reduce fire risk. As an added benefit, the program will provide data on microclimate and fuel conditions useful for evaluating the effectiveness of different prescriptions in reducing fire risk.

PROGRESS:

In FY 2002, RMRS conducted a pilot study to collect preliminary data needed to refine the experimental design and to field-test proposed methods. Full program implementation began in FY 2003. Work to date has been jointly funded by the Southwestern Region, RMRS, and LNF.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES:

- Improved understanding of ecological responses of owls and their prey to forest thinning.
- Development of mitigation strategies allowing thinning of forests occupied by Mexican spotted owls while protecting owl habitat.
- Improved ability to conduct thinning in forests occupied by Mexican spotted owls.
- Improved ability to evaluate effects of different thinning prescriptions in reducing fire risk.
- Improved ability to avoid (or successfully defend against) litigation and appeals over thinning projects.
- Program satisfies Region-wide monitoring requirements mandated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Vacancies

The following job announcements are just a sample of the job opportunities that can be found at <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/>

Title	Grade/Series	Deadline	Vacancy #	Location
Assistant Resource Staff	GS-0486-7/9	Aug 14, 2003	R507-1427-03G	Santa Maria, CA
Wildlife Biologist	GS-0486-9	Dec 31, 2003	R505NP-035DP-03T	Northern CA
Wildlife Biologist	GS-0486-11	Aug 15, 2003	R19-177-03G	S. Lake Tahoe, CA
Supervisory Wildlife Biologist	GS-0486-11	Aug 21, 2003	R10-03-1198	Juneau & Auke Bay, AK
Wildlife Biologist	GS-0486-11	Aug 4, 2003	R807-93-03G	Mississippi
Fisheries Biologist	GS-0486-12	Aug 18, 2003	R506-019-03	Alturas, CA

Hotlinks!

- Wildlife, Fish and Rare Plants: <http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/wildlife/>
- 2003 News Releases: <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/2003/releases.shtml>
- FS Today Newsletter: http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/pao/fs_today/
- National Fire Plan: <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/nfp/>
- Roadless Area Conservation: <http://roadless.fs.fed.us/>
- Large-Scale Watershed Restoration Projects: <http://www.fs.fed.us/largewatershedprojects/>

- Land and Resource Management Plans: <http://www.fs.fed.us/forum/nepa/nfmalrmp.html>
- Watershed and Air Management: <http://www.fs.fed.us/clean/>
- Lands and Realty Management: <http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/>
- Road Management: <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/roads/>
- Recreation, Wilderness and Heritage Resources: <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/>
- Forest Management: <http://www.fs.fed.us/land/fm/>
- International Programs: <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/>
- Research: <http://www.fe.fed.us/research/scientific.html>
- Healthy Forests Initiative: <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/HFI.shtml>
- Partners in Planning: <http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/planning/guide/index.html>

IMPORTANT NOTE: Once you select a link, please be sure to hit the “Refresh” button to ensure that you are loading the most current version of the web page!

On The Wild Side is a monthly update of activities of the National Forest System Terrestrial Wildlife and Ecology Program of the USDA Forest Service. All information presented is subject to change as projects evolve, opportunities arise and issues unfold. Contributions are welcome and should be submitted to Debbie Pressman at dpressman@fs.fed.us no later than the 25th of each month. We reserve the right to edit contributions for clarity and brevity.

Positions listed are for outreach purposes only and are not full announcements. Interested individuals should contact the forests referenced or consult the USAJOBS website.

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