

Interagency Special Status/Sensitive Species Program FY2008 Inventory & Conservation Planning Status Report

PROJECT TITLE:

Crooked River National Grassland Pygmy Rabbit Burrow Trapping

PROJECT LEAD(S):

Anne Roberts, District Wildlife Biologist, Crooked River National Grassland, Ochoco N.F.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND BACKGROUND REVIEW:

The objectives of these surveys are to:

- Confirm the presence of pygmy rabbits on the Crooked River Grassland by monitoring the high probability burrows identified in the 2005 assessment.
- Use the information gathered from monitoring to aid restoration activities on the Grassland.

In 2005 I received an ISSSSP grant with the objectives of the project to assess the habitat on the Grassland for pygmy rabbits and to try to confirm presence as part of a multi-agency, statewide effort to learn more about pygmy rabbits in Oregon. Through that grant, 3,128 acres of high probability habitat were surveyed while we were able to dismiss 34,900 acres as either low probability habitat or non-habitat. Although we were not able to confirm pygmy rabbits on the Grassland, 35 rabbit burrows were identified, of which three were possibly being used by pygmy rabbits.

In September 2008 the burrows that were detected in the 2005 survey as possible pygmy rabbit burrows were trapped in an effort to confirm presence of pygmy rabbits. This part of the project was funded for 5 days so only priority sites were trapped. The three sites that were identified in the 2005 survey were re-evaluated and it was determined that only two of the previously identified 3 sites were suitable for trapping: Coyote Hills and Mud Springs. The burrows that were identified at Monner Springs were determined to not be suitable pygmy rabbit habitat any longer due to the burrows being dug out with rabbit carnage in the surrounding area. A bobcat den was also identified in the area near the dug out Monner Springs burrows.

The objective of this survey was to assess the habitat on the Grassland for pygmy rabbits and to try to confirm presence. This project is included in a multi-agency, statewide effort to learn more about pygmy rabbits in Oregon.

An additional objective of this proposal is to use the data generated to guide these restoration projects on the Grassland to not only prevent/slow further declines in pygmy rabbits, but to hopefully stabilize and even increase populations.

PROJECT PHASES

Burrow Trapping

Dede Steele (biologist on Lookout Mountain RD), Anne Roberts (biologist on Crooked River National Grasslands), and Jodie Jones (wildlife technician) spent one day looking at the 2005 identified sites and determined what burrows at the site should be trapped.

Two (Mud Springs and Coyote Hills) out of the three sites identified in 2005, were determined to be suitable to trap. The burrows at Monner Springs were determined to not be suitable to trap as the burrows had been dug out and there was presence of a bobcat den near the burrows. One site was trapped at the Coyote Hills and four sites were trapped at Mud Springs.

These sites were trapped using live traps baited with alfalfa that were set at the entrance of the burrows. The traps were then covered with burlap sacs. This is the same method used by Todd Forbes with the BLM in Lakeview. The Coyote Hills traps were set up in the afternoon of 9/22/2008 and were checked in the morning of 9/23/2008. The Mud Springs trap sites were set up the afternoon of 9/24/2010 and checked the morning of 9/25/2010.

Results

Area Surveyed

The CRNG covers a total of 110,000 acres, of which we surveyed 3,128 acres in 2005 of high probability habitat. Once we got on the ground and started surveying, not all of these acres ended up being identified as suitable, but they were all surveyed.

There are approximately 48,600 acres identified for either burning, juniper thinning or reseeding identified in the EIS. Of those acres not already identified as high probability habitat:

- approximately 28,700 acres were surveyed from the road and determined to be low probability habitat,
- approximately 6,200 acres were dismissed from the office as not pygmy rabbit habitat
- approximately 13,400 acres were not surveyed due to funding constraints.

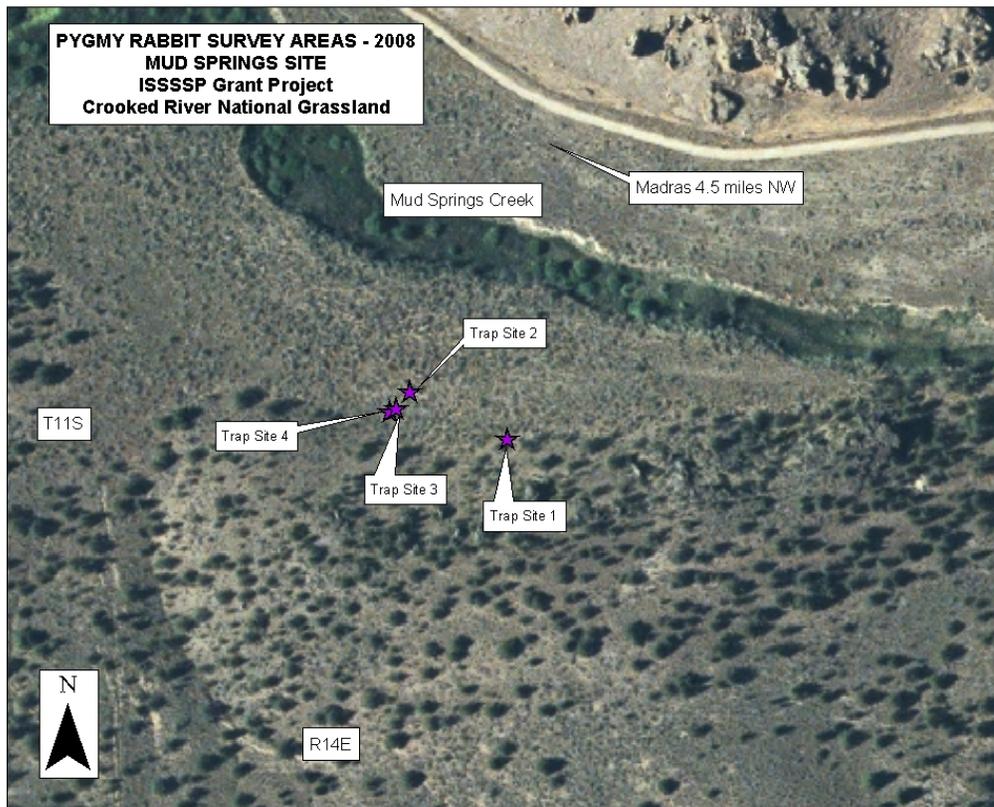
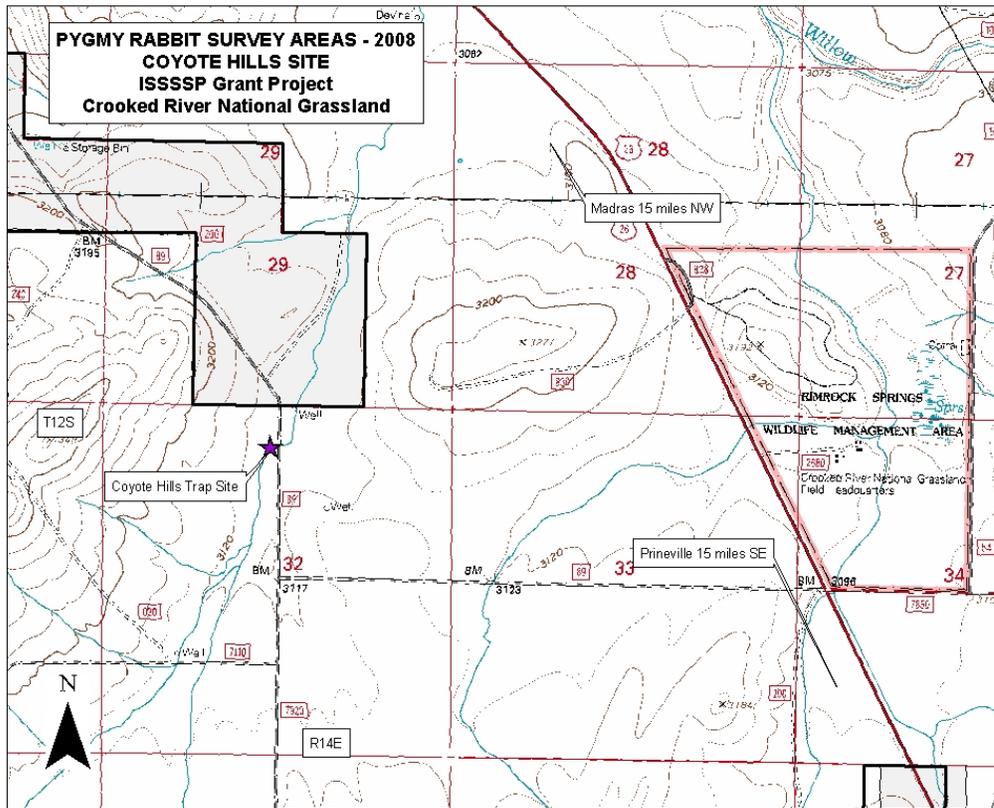
During our habitat surveys in 2005 there were 89 burrows GPSd. Of these, 50 were badger dens, 4 were coyote dens, and 35 were rabbit burrows. Although we found 35 rabbit burrows, we felt that there are only three sites with potentially active pygmy rabbits (Monner Springs, Mud Springs, Coyote Hills). Criteria used in this determination were: size of the burrow, presence of very small fecal pellets near the burrow and surrounding area, two entrances to the system, and side trails coming out of the burrows.

Of the three areas identified in the 2005 survey as high probability burrow sites (Monner Springs, Coyote Hills, Mud Springs) two were trapped in 2008. Coyote Hills traps were checked on 9/23/2008 and 2 cottontail rabbits were caught. Mud Springs had four sites that were trapped on 9/25/2010. Nothing was caught at these four sites at Mud Springs. Refer to the "Pygmy Rabbit Survey Forms" completed for the two trap sites for further information.

FUTURE WORK TO BE DONE

At this time I have not receive any additional funding for pygmy rabbit work, but listed below are the next steps I would like to take as soon as funding becomes available.

1. Return to rabbit burrows, in order of priority, and fill out the data sheets for pygmy rabbit surveys.
2. Survey rabbit burrows, in order of priority, for tracks and pellets after fresh snows.
3. Enter data into appropriate database(s).
4. Try to confirm presence of pygmy rabbits on the CRNG by conducting live trapping around priority burrows in the same year that burrows are identified.
5. Complete surveys of future project areas.
6. Continue to work with other agencies to add to the pygmy rabbit knowledge base in Oregon.





Coyote Hills Trap Site. Result of trapping was cottontail rabbits.



Mud Springs Trap Site. Traps were live traps set at the entrance of burrows and baited with alfalfa, then covered with burlap sacs. Nothing was trapped at the Mud Springs trap sites.