



Georgia Ornithological Society  
Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant  
Fund  
2009 Grant Report

The Nature Conservancy in Georgia  
November 2010



Georgia Ornithological Society  
Bill Terrell Avian Conservation  
Grant Fund

The Nature Conservancy was grateful to receive a \$52,000 grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society's Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant Fund in January 2010 in support of habitat restoration through our prescribed fire program.

Specifically, this grant funded The Nature Conservancy's skilled fire practitioners in support of an Interagency Burn Team (IBT). Further, we were able to leverage the skills and experience of prescribed fire experts at both The Nature Conservancy and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with skilled volunteers and by hiring a seasonal crew to assist the IBT to manage Georgia's most ecologically valuable fire dependent habitats.



A red-cockaded woodpecker cavity on the Moody Forest Preserve Natural Area, co-managed by The Nature

Historically, periodic lightning and Native American-ignited fires swept across Georgia's landscape, resulting in the emergence of plants and animals dependent on such fires for their reproduction, growth and survival. Due to development and other factors, fire has been excluded from these areas, resulting in tremendous overgrowth in forests that threatens to increase the incidences of destructive wildfires. For birds, overgrowth negatively impacts understory nesting species and results in the proliferation of native and non-native invasive plant species that can push out traditional food sources. Lack of seasonal fire has negatively impacted the diversity and success of many of Georgia's native and seasonal wildlife.

The habitat restoration objective for the 2010 fire season was to apply prescribed fire to 15,000 acres of ecologically important fire-dependent habitat in Georgia to support vital avian and other wildlife populations. The Georgia Ornithological Society grant allowed us to reach significant success toward that goal. In Georgia, 13,661 acres were burned, nearly double the acres burned during the same period in 2009. This is a record year for our chapter and puts Georgia among the top 10 prescribed fire programs

for acres burned throughout the Conservancy nationally. Further, our primary partner, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, was able to burn more of their properties than ever before, a record breaking year for them as well.

In our proposal, we identified a suite of sites that were most in need of restoration through prescribed fire. Sites that were burned in 2010 are identified with a check mark. The diamond indicates sites that were not burned due to improper ecological or other hazardous conditions (i.e. too dry or too wet).

Longleaf Pine Forests:

- ✓ Blackjack Crossing tract (Columbus)
- ✓ Broxton Rocks Preserve
- ✓ Broxton Rocks Legacy Forest
- ✓ Charles Harrold Preserve
- ✓ Crooked River State Park
- ✓ Fall Line Sandhills NA
- ✓ Fifteenmile Creek easement (Candler County)
- ✓ General Coffee State Park
- ❖ George L. Smith State Park
- ❖ Hofwyl-Broadfield State Historic Site
- ✓ Laura Walker State Park
- ✓ Lewis tract (Altamaha River)
- ✓ Little Ocmulgee State Park
- ✓ Moody Forest Natural Area
- ✓ Ochoopee Dunes Preserve
- ✓ Ochoopee Dunes Natural Area
- ✓ Reed Bingham State Park
- ✓ Sprewell Bluff State Park
- ✓ Williams Bluffs Preserve
- ✓ Winecup Plantation easement (Worth County)

Mixed Pine Hardwood:

- ✓ Camp Meeting Rock Preserve
- ✓ Dawson Forest WMA
- ✓ FDR State Park
- ✓ Hard Labor Creek State Park
- ❖ Holly Creek Preserve
- ❖ Marshall Forest Preserve (Rome)
- ✓ Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge
- ✓ Tallulah Gorge State Park

Pitcherplant Bogs:

- ✓ Baker Bog
- ✓ Doerun Pitcherplant Bog Natural Area
- ❖ Manassas Bog
- ✓ Reed Branch Wet Meadow Preserve

Fire Dependent Wetlands:

- ❖ Big Dukes Pond Natural Area
- ✓ Big Hammock Natural Area
- ❖ Oakbin Pond Preserve
- ✓ Pipes easement (Columbus area)

Grasslands:

✓ Coosa Valley Prairies  
easement

❖ Panola Mountain State Park

Each of these sites supports a widespread suite of resident birds including raptors, woodpeckers and songbirds.

Other measures of success include:

- The reduction in duff and litter at each of these sites. It is important to control these potential “fuels” to minimize risk for wildfire.
- The Nature Conservancy hosted a Prescribed Fire Practicum for forestry students of the University of Montana. The Nature Conservancy leverages our staff time and expenses through use of the students as trained fire volunteers at a minimal cost.
- The Nature Conservancy continued to participate in the Southern Appalachian Fire Learning Network in partnership with the US Dept of the Interior, USDA Forest Services, and state agencies. This is outreach program to educate the public about the benefits of prescribed fire in the mountains, and to facilitate the use of prescribed fire.
- We conducted a series of prescribed fire safety refresher courses. Conservancy and partner agency staff participate in this annual training to receive up-to-date information on current initiatives, the upcoming fire season, and any policy/guidance changes.
- Moody Forest Natural Area, co-managed by The Nature Conservancy and the DNR, was the site of a field trip for the 4th International Fire Ecology and Management Congress, which was held in Savannah in early December. Nature Conservancy staff led fire ecologists and fire management professionals from around the world on a tour of the preserve focusing on the reintroduction of fire to old-growth longleaf forests.
- In July, we hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Interagency Burn Team meeting. This meeting had the greatest number of participants and higher level positions attend than previous years. Representatives



included staff from DNR Parks, DNR WRD, GFC, US Forest Service, NRCS, DOD, and The Nature Conservancy's Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, and Eastern Division programs. Regrettably, USFWS was unable to attend due to Gulf oil spill response duties. Nearly all participants reported a record number of acres burned this year and all attributed some of that success to the Interagency Burn Team framework.

- Nature Conservancy staff attended two classes at the USFS Southern Area Advance Fire and Aviation Academy, which will allow us to work in a greater capacity with Federal partners on fire issues across the southeast.

The Nature Conservancy is the only private organization in Georgia that has the capability, technical expertise, and staff to apply fire statewide. All funds for our conservation work in Georgia, including the fire program, are raised by our chapter. Without this grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society, applying fire at this scale would not have been possible. Thank you again for this generous grant to restore habitat for all of Georgia's wildlife.



<u>Budget Details</u>	Budget	Actual	Variance
<b>Nature Conservancy Fire Staff</b>	\$75,000	\$75,642	-\$642
Includes principals listed in grant request and other staff			
<b>Seasonal Fire Crew</b>		\$20,000	\$20,000
<b>Travel Expenses:</b>	\$12,000	\$8,472	
\$3,528			

Includes minimal expenses  
 for volunteer fire crew

<b>Equipment/Supplies</b>	<u>\$10,000</u>	<u>\$11,880</u>	<u>-1,880</u>
<b>TOTAL BUDGET:</b>	\$117,000	\$115,994	\$1,006