

## **Report on 2013 GOS Grant Project**

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### **Project Goal:**

Help The Nature Conservancy restore plant communities in the pine woodlands and river forests of the Chattahoochee River basin, Georgia. Several natural areas in southwest Georgia require hands-on management to restore natural plant communities, and to help protect rare plants and animals in a dynamic natural landscape.

### **Project Objectives:**

Treat invasive non-native plants over 500 acres of protected natural areas. Restore populations of 5 rare plants and animals via clearing and population augmentation. Build and place 25 nest boxes for SE American Kestrels.

### **Project sites:**

TNC- and state-owned tracts in Early, Marion and Talbot counties, Georgia

### **Project Description:**

Team of 2 interns will work on plant community restoration projects at several localities in the Chattahoochee River basin in southwest Georgia. Job will be based at Kolomoki Mounds State Park in Early Co., GA, for 7 weeks, and at a TNC-owned site west of Columbus, GA, for 5 weeks. Work will be conducted at TNC and state-owned tracts. Work will consist of invasive plant control (incl. Chinese privet, Chinaberry, Japanese climbing fern, sand pine, etc.), controlling native invasive trees to restore natural community composition and make fire management possible, augment/manipulate populations of rare plants and animals, and other duties as required. Interns will be required to keep detailed project records and to document the project. Interns will work with TNC staff, GA-DNR staff, and volunteers, and work independently as a team when familiar with projects. A TNC-owned vehicle will be assigned to the team for project travel.

### **Grant amount requested:**

\$40,000 (received: \$20,000)

### **SCA Interns hired:**

Suen Wan Ki, worked entire 12 weeks, 19 August – 8 November 2013

Hilary Sasso-Schley, 19 August – 11 September 2013

Martin Holdrege, 30 September – 8 November 2013

### **Project Accomplishments:**

- Interns treated the following invasive plants over approximately 350 acres of protected lands: Chinaberry, Chinese privet, tree of heaven, bicolor lespedeza, heavenly bamboo, kudzu and Japanese climbing fern; interns were instructed in safe and proper use of herbicides, and used foliar applications, cut-and-spray method, and basal-bark applications of triclopyr.
- Interns were taught safe and proper use of chainsaws and their maintenance, and used this skill to cut sand pines across approximately 150 acres of protected lands. They also used chainsaws to clear felled trees from roads and to maintain approximately 3 miles of hiking trails at Kolomoki Mounds State Park.
- Interns built 12 American Kestrel nest boxes according to published specifications, and mounted them in appropriate nesting habitats in protected tracts in 3 project counties.
- Interns baited and maintained a trap for feral hogs.
- Interns worked intensively to control all hardwood growth in a 2-acre powerline right-of-way marked as a no-spray zone by Georgia Power at a TNC preserve in Early County. This area harbors populations of the following rare plants and animals: Florida willow, swamp black-eyed-Susan, white-topped pitcherplant (being safeguarded here), Chamberlain's dwarf salamander, and a rare dragonfly (*Ophiogomphus australis*). Interns trimmed Florida willows to less than 5 feet in height, and planted cuttings outside the powerline.

### **Summary:**

The project was a great success. We were able to get a start on several invasive plant control projects on TNC lands and Kolomoki Mounds SP. One intern did not like the work and left early, but Suen and Holdrege successfully completed the project, and both stayed on to become certified as Type-2 Firefighters and served on fire crews with DNR NCS (Holdrege) and TNC (Suen). We did not assess nesting of kestrels in mounted boxes during the 2014 season, but hope to visit the boxes in summer 2015.