

2017 Bill Terrell Conservation Grant

In 2017, Georgia State Parks Resource Management Unit had requested \$31,191.00 for equipment to increase the capability of Georgia State Parks burn program. We received \$25,000 in funds from GOS in which will allow us to expand the ability of Georgia State Parks to burn, either in house or with partners, and enhance habitat's that occur on many of our parks. Some of these burn units identified may not have rare species associated with them, but they do have the potential to be biologically diverse areas, and important for our state park visitors to experience. These habitats include Oak and Shortleaf Pine Savannah, Montane Longleaf Pine- Shortleaf Pine-Oak Woodland, and native grass meadows. This past year may not reflect how important an impact the new equipment will be for our fire program as we had not received the equipment yet, but as an agency, we were able to implement prescribe fire on sites from Cloudland Canyon in the Northwest of the State, to Seminole State Park in the Southwest. Tallulah Gorge in the Northeast, to George L. Smith in the Southeast. Several burns this year were planned and implemented totally in-house. Others, we worked with as partners such as the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Conservation Section, the United States Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, and Georgia Forestry Commission. We also utilized several eco-volunteers who have been trained in wildland firefighting.

Fire Name/Location	Date	Acres Burned
Hard Labor Creek State Park Unit 14	2/1/18	60
Hard Labor Creek State Park Unit 9	2/15/18	5
Reed Bingham State Park	2/21/18	75
Sweetwater Creek	2/27/18	17
George L Smith	3/8/18	45
Sweetwater Creek	3/9/18	60
Sweetwater Creek	3/14/18	35
Panola Mountain	3/16/18	80
George Bagby	3/22/18	20
Hard Labor Creek Unit 6	3/28/18	50
Mistletoe Unit 2	Postponed until next season - tried several times.	
Mistletoe Unit 4	Postponed, ran out of time	
Cloudland Canyon Meadow	4/11/18	5
Tallulah	4/12/18	1300

Seminole	4/17/18	50
Seminole	4/18/18	90
Seminole	4/19/18	35
George L Smith	4/25/18	35
Totals		1962 acres burned.

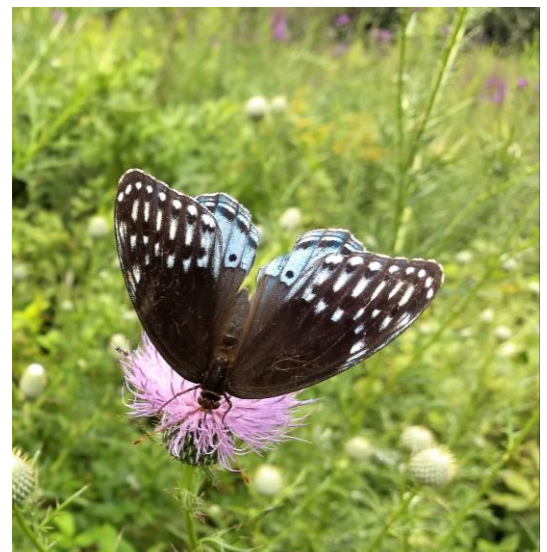
We estimated the cost of burning this acreage in parks as well. We couldn't ask folks for salary, but rather decided to break it down the pay rate by burn experience. New burners we estimated at \$12.25/hr., and burners with moderate experience we estimated at \$17.00/hr. Experienced burners who were crew leaders, or bosses, were estimated at \$19.00 per hour. This was based on pay rates for the USFS wildland firefighter pay rates.

https://www.glassdoor.com/Salaries/wildland-firefighter-salary-SRCH_KO0,20.htm

If we utilized fire resources, based on what DNR's Wildlife Resources Conservation Section have (Engine, UTV, 4-5 crew members), we estimated that at \$1,500 per day. We also included prep work on burn units. The total investment or our contribution was estimated at \$38, 661.25.

Variety of Habitats Burned.

1. **Meadow habitat**, Cloudland Canyon, Northwest Georgia. This is a great moist meadow with lots of native wildflowers. Native Thistle, Ironweed, and Goldenrods make this an important pollinator area. It is only 5 acres, but Indigo Buntings, a variety of sparrows, and hummingbirds have been sighted using this habitat. This is also a place where the Diana Fritillary Butterfly, a species declining across its range and a State Wildlife Action Plan Species (SWAP), was documented this past summer.



2. **Mountain Longleaf Pine/Shortleaf Pine/Oak Woodland**, Sweetwater Creek State Park, Piedmont.

This area was selectively thinned in 2011-12. Upland oaks such as Black Jack Oak, Chestnut Oak and Post Oak, as well as Shortleaf Pine, dominate the canopy. A bit further up the ridge from this burn site, is a small patch of Montane Longleaf Pine. Our goal is to one day add more Longleaf to the open areas of this 35-acre unit.



3. **Longleaf Wiregrass**, Southwest Georgia, Reed Bingham State Park. Some of the best Gopher Tortoise habitat in Georgia State Parks. Much work has been done at this park to keep the habitat open, several local areas of native grass and wildflower seed have been collected and added to the landscape.



4. **Grassland**, Panola Mountain State Park, Piedmont. This is a 200+ acre area that State Parks assists the Wildlife Conservation Section in burning half the area each year. This is a spectacular place to see grassland birds. White-Crowned Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, huge congregations of Western Palm Warblers during migrations, and a variety of Raptors can be seen in this special habitat site. It is also a spectacular pollinator site, and very rich in butterfly diversity. Approximately 100 acres of grassland habitat/pollinator habitat are undergoing restoration efforts at Sweetwater Creek State Park as well.



5. **Open Meadow, mixed pine**, George Bagby Golf Course (Georgia Birding Trail). Sections of this golf course are part of the Georgia's Southern Rivers Birding Trail. Rough areas in the golf course are burned periodically to maintain some natural landscape and provide habitat for wildlife.



6. **Table Mountain Pine/Pitch Pine/Shortleaf Pine/ Oak Woodland**, Tallulah Gorge State Park, Upper Piedmont/lower Blue Ridge. This is the largest burn on State Park land. This year, State Parks assisted the Wildlife Conservation Section of DNR, The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Forest Service in burning this challenging landscape. The end goal is to create a more open forest and increase the Pitch Pine and Table Mountain Pine populations in this community. This area is about the most Southern Extent of these pine species.



7. **Oak/Shortleaf Pine Woodland**, Hard Labor Creek State Park, Piedmont. There are some open woodland habitats at Hard Labor Creek State Park, with a grassy understory (mainly Black Seeded Needle Grass, *Piptochaetium avenaceum*). Upland Oak such as Post Oak, Black Oak, and Shortleaf Pine are the dominant trees in this habitat. The terrain is hilly and rocky in this burn unit.



Conclusion

In 2003, Georgia State Parks joined the interagency burn team. In 2011, Georgia Department of Natural Resources formed the Resource Management Unit, which took on the responsibility of coordinating burns in our State Parks. However, lack of equipment limited the amount of work state parks could do without partners assisting (bringing equipment, crew). In 2015-16, state parks received two UTV's and engines as part of a grant through the Wildlife Conservation Section of DNR. We also received a grant for an AmeriCorps crew (a three-year commitment, each team working a cycle). In 2017, 2018 we were able to fire train the AmeriCorps crew and have them participate on burns. Since 2015, with a bit more resources available, and following the next two years with AmeriCorps, we were able to do lead several burns on parks. This coming burn season (2018-19), state parks no longer has an AmeriCorps crew. However, because of the progress we made with the burn trained AmeriCorps team, we will be hiring a seasonal crew that will assist in all types of ecological work on state parks, but primarily be involved with burning. The new equipment we received from the GOS grant will increase our ability to burn our state park habitats with out as much reliance on outside agencies.



The Gravelly Atlas UTV and QTAC engine (named 'Oriole'), purchased with funds made available through the GOS Bill Terrell Grant. Parks had the landscape frame modified for burning, and added drip torch holders, a cooler holder, a chainsaw holder, and baskets on top and in the front. Tool racks were modified on the side for carrying rakes, and shovels on the fire line. This new addition of a mobile, all terrain fire vehicle, will increase State Parks ability to not just participate in prescribe fires but lead burns on Georgia State Park lands.

2019

Since we had the opportunity to get another burn season accomplished, and utilized the equipment purchased with the grant funding, we will include some highlights from the 2019 burn season.

In House Fire Name/Location	Park Fire led by WCS	IBT partner Burn	Date	Acres Burned	NCS/TNC - BurnBoss, Fire Crew, equipment
	George L Smith			130	WCS
Cloudland Canyon			2/25/19	5	
Sweetwater Creek State Park			2/26/19	10	WCS, TNC NW crew (5)
		USFS Oconee	3/6/19	2000+	USFS
Mistletoe Unit 2			3/12/19	130	
Mistletoe Unit 4			3/13/19	107	
	Tallulah Gorge		3/18/19	800	WCS, TNC, USFS
Pickett's Mill State Park			3/27/19	17	
Panola Mountain Lake Bottom			3/29/19	21	
Chattahoochee Bend			4/2/19	41	
Chattahoochee Bend			4/2/19	5	
	Reed Bingham		4/10/19	30	WCS
Chattahoochee Bend			4/17/19	34	
Chattahoochee Bend			4/17/19	8	
	Panola Mountain Power of Flight		4/18/19	70	WCS
		USFS Oconee	4/25/19	300	USFS
		USFS Oconee	4/30/19	230	USFS
		USFS Oconee	5/1/19	240	USFS

State Park acreage Burned in 2019 – 1,378

Acreage of State Park Assists w/ IBT partners in 2019 – 2,770

Habitat types included in our 2019 burns

1. Open Woodland (Oak or Pine Dominated) - This open forest habitat type is used by several species. Indigo Bunting, Prairie Warbler, Red-Headed Woodpecker, Brown-Headed Nuthatch. At



Chattahoochee Bend, and Hard Labor Creek, Herbicide was used in the summer of 2018 to assist us in opening up understory potentially dominated by Sweetgum.

2. Grassland/Meadow Habitat –

This habitat type is used by several grassland species of birds. Several species of sparrow including Field Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Common Yellowthroat, Blue Grosbeak.

Also, a population of Tree Swallows using bluebird boxes here.



3. Longleaf Pine/Wiregrass - Reed Bingham and George L. Smith have great open Pine Habitat. These areas are important for several species of woodpecker, open woodland birds like Prairie Warbler, Brown-Headed Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebirds. These are also important habitats for Gopher Tortoise and Indigo Snakes, and some of these sites like Reed Bingham have associated Pitcher Plant bogs.



4. Partner Burns. This year, State Parks had help from a variety of Interagency Burn Team (IBT) partners. This included Wildlife Conservation Section of DNR, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Atlanta Botanical Gardens (ABG), and we helped the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on several burns. On the USFS burns, most covered the area known as Hitchiti Woods Experimental Forest, primarily for Red Cockaded Woodpecker Habitat.



The GOS Grant helped State Parks purchase the Gravelly UTV, and Water Pump combo. This, plus the existing Polaris and engine, allowed State Parks to take on many more in-house burns, as well as help our partners with support.

