

GA DNR 2008-2009 Supplemental Avian Conservation Grant Report

The early years of slow work at Panola Mountain State Park were largely the result of the lack of equipment. Herbicides were being applied a few acres at a time by backpack sprayer and seed was being collected by hand. Firebreaks at Panola and throughout Georgia were being installed at cost by contractors or GFC. During this time the Nongame Conservation Section was also becoming increasingly active in longleaf pine restoration and was contracting herbicide and planting work out at significant cost. Eventually supervisors listened to what a number of employees had been saying; to manage land on a significant scale we need equipment. The purchase of needed equipment was agreed to on the condition that declining nongame funds were not to be used in the purchase.

At the same time a number of expenses related to the 2008 and 2009 GOS grants were covered by other sections or agencies, including herbicide costs and seed costs on several projects originally funded by GOS. This left a combined windfall of \$26,028 of GOS funds that was not needed for its original requested purpose. In 2011 Nathan Klaus made contact with Bob Sargent and inquired about the possibility of using these funds to further the original intent of these grants, primarily native grassland restoration on state lands by buying needed equipment. We made the case that applying these funds toward the purchase of the tractor, trailer and some of the required implements we could accelerate our restoration programs. Soon after the GOS grant committee agreed. In late 2011 a tractor, trailer, herbicide tank, harrow and mower were purchased for a total cost of \$35,112 (the remainder was covered by a State Wildlife Grant).

Since then our restoration efforts have greatly accelerated. On Joe Kurz WMA and on Panola Mountain we have tackled about three times the number of acres per year as prior to this purchase. This tractor has been used to plant over 120,000 grass plugs on Fall Line Sandhills WMA. Having this equipment has bolstered our prescribed burn program by letting us put in firebreaks when and where we need them at little cost. In fact since this purchase every acre of Black Creek Natural Area and Fall Line Sandhills WMA, and over 90% of Sprewell Bluff have been burned. Beyond native grassland the tractor has also been used to restore other habitat types, including planting over 50,000 longleaf pine plugs on Sprewell Bluff and Fall Line Sandhills WMA, digging three artificial wetlands for gopher frogs on Fall Line Sandhills WMA, and restoring rail, bittern and crane stopover habitat on Conasauga Natural Area by controlling woody plants, clearing trees and replanting herbaceous wetland plants.

We are very appreciative of GOS for making this possible and especially appreciate the flexibility and faith of the grant committee to seize this opportunity. We hope that GOS sees the value in our ongoing habitat restoration efforts, many of which would not be possible without this purchase.

Fig 1. Long time GOS member and DNR employee Ashley Harrington is mowing a field of exotic pasture grasses in preparation for spraying and conversion to native grasses on Panola Mountain State Park using the GOS purchased tractor.



Fig 2. Nathan Klaus towing a tree planter (not visible) behind the tractor assisting the seasonal fire crew in planting 32,000 longleaf and shortleaf pine seedlings on Sprewell Bluff in February 2014.



Fig 3. The GOS tractor is often used to set heavy telephone poles into the ground on which kestrel boxes are placed. To date about 110 kestrel boxes have been placed in 5 Georgia counties to try to turn around declines in Southeastern Kestrel populations.



Figure 4. The GOS emblem is proudly displayed on the tractor and the trailer used to carry it. We want DNR employees and the public to know what an important role GOS has played in funding habitat restoration efforts throughout Georgia.

