

The Nature Conservancy

Protecting nature. Preserving life.™



Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) © Giff Beaton, used with permission

Georgia Ornithological Society

Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant Fund

2010 Grant Report

Submitted by:

The Nature Conservancy in Georgia

January 2012

The Nature Conservancy gratefully received a \$50,000 grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society in January 2011 in support of our habitat restoration work through the application of prescribed fire. With this support, we had another record-breaking year in terms of acres burned, having surpassed last season's number by nearly 18 percent.

The Nature Conservancy is a leader in restoring habitat through the application of prescribed fire. Our fire program burns more acres than any other private organization and is the state of Georgia's primary partner for prescribed fire, bringing fire management to state parks, natural areas, wildlife management areas and other important sites. As part of our partnership with the state, The Nature Conservancy is part of an Interagency Burn Team. We share resources to burn sites that are ecological priorities as identified through the State Wildlife Management Plan as well as through an internal planning process. Having consistent, long-term fire management goals for identified sites is important since fire frequency is a primary factor in restoration. The Nature Conservancy and DNR have site-by-site prescriptions for fire that look toward the long-term stewardship and management of these properties.

Specifically, this grant from GOS for our fire program supported the cost of a seasonal burn crew that was assigned to burn ecologically significant Nature Conservancy preserves and managed lands, and to assist the state on parks and other public lands.

**Objectives:**

The habitat restoration objective was to apply prescribed fire to 18,000 acres of ecologically important fire-dependent habitat in Georgia to support vital avian and other wildlife populations. While a warm, dry season (La Niña weather cycle) was predicted for this fire season, there were, in fact, severe drought conditions which made conditions unsafe to burn for two entire months. Still, The Nature Conservancy was able to participate in prescribed burns on 16,111 acres. Additionally, because of the readiness of the seasonal fire crew funded through this grant, we were able to assist the state in containing three destructive wildfires.

Before each prescribed fire season begins, The Nature Conservancy develops a list of targeted habitats most in need of restoration through prescribed fire. Weather and other factors impact where fire is actually applied in any given season. Further, specifically in the Chattahoochee Fall Line project area, we have successfully acquired thousands of additional acres of land, resulting in more need for fire over a larger landscape with the same number of fire crew as last year. Below is a reporting on targeted sites, with a check mark next to sites burned.

Nature Conservancy sites = 8,700 acres targeted, 4,048 burned

✓ Ft. Benning area easements  
Blacks Bluff Preserve  
✓ Broxton Rocks Preserve  
✓ Camp Meeting Rock Preserve  
✓ Coosa Valley Prairies  
Dawson Forest  
✓ Fifteenmile Creek  
Flat Shoal Creek  
Heggies Rock Preserve  
Holly Creek Preserve

✓ Lewis Tract – Altamaha River  
Marshall Forest Preserve  
✓ Moody Forest Natural Area (co-managed with DNR)  
✓ Ochoopee Dunes Preserve  
✓ Williams Bluff Preserve

Winecup Tract

*Freeman Tract: private land in Mitchell County. This tract was a new opportunity not originally listed in the proposal and is prime red-cockaded woodpecker habitat*

Department of Natural Resources and Partner Sites:

The Nature Conservancy will assist= 9,800 acres targeted, 12,063 burned

✓ Big Hammock Natural Area  
✓ Black Creek Natural Area  
Brunswick Dredge Island  
Conasauga River Natural Area  
Doerun Natural Area  
Egg Island Bar Natural Area  
Fall Line Sandhills Natural Area  
Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area  
✓ Ochoopee Dunes Natural Area  
✓ Sprewell Bluff Natural Area  
Fort Mountain State Park  
✓ Tallulah Gorge State Park  
Tugaloo State Park  
Crooked River State Park  
George L. Smith State Park  
Laura Walker State Park  
Little Ocmulgee State Park  
Suwanee River  
George Bagby State Park  
FDR State Park

Indian Springs State Park  
Kolomoki Mounds State Historic Site  
Reed Bingham State Park  
Seminole State Park  
James Hamilton/Angie Johnson  
AH Stephens  
Fort Yargo State Park  
Hard Labor Creek State Park  
Mistletoe State Park  
Panola Mountain  
Red Top Mountain  
✓ Sweetwater Creek State Park  
Victoria Bryant State Park  
Watson Mill Bridge State Park  
✓ *Oconee National Forest – additional target not included in original proposal. We were successful in working more with the National Forest Service more this year than any other year*

<u>Budget Details</u>	<u>Proposed</u>	<u>Actuals</u>	<u>Variance</u>
Nature Conservancy Fire Staff	\$32,938	\$21,437	\$11,501
Lead Fire Technician (Seasonal)	\$18,000	\$11,500*	\$6,500
Seasonal Fire Crew	\$15,000	\$11,242	\$3,758
Travel Expenses:	\$15,725	\$2,532	\$13,193
Equipment/Supplies/Other Expenses (meetings)	<u>\$20,500</u>	<u>\$27,785</u>	<u>-\$7,285</u>
TOTAL BUDGET:	\$102,163	\$74,496	\$27,667

### CONCLUSION

While our stretch goal of acres restored through prescribed fire was not met, The Nature Conservancy had another record-breaking year for fire. We were able to adapt our restoration efforts in severe drought conditions, respond to destructive wildfires and continue to offer training for fire practitioners here in Georgia and beyond. Through these efforts, we are seeing critical habitat come back to life, enabling plants, birds and other wildlife to thrive. Support from the Georgia Ornithological Society for our prescribed fire program in 2010 and 2011 was critical to sustaining this program, and was used to as private matching funds to secure additional public funding. The Nature Conservancy is grateful to have the Georgia Ornithological Society as such a valued conservation partner, and we thank you once again for this generous grant.