

2009 State Wildlife Grant Application Pre-Proposal

Project Title: Implementing State Wildlife Action Plan Strategies in the Arkansas River Valley Ecoregion's Damascus Quail Focal Area to Benefit CWCS Species of Concern

Project Summary: Participants will conduct oak and pine woodland and savanna restoration for Northern Bobwhite and other associated species to complement on-going projects within the Damascus Quail Focal Area. This project will also be used for public awareness of the AWAP, a demonstration model for private landowners and agency personnel, and opportunities for citizen science projects through the Boy Scouts of America and other groups.

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Budget Summary: Total Amount of Project Cost: \$124,512.80
Total Amount of SWG Requested: \$62,256.40 (50%)
Matching Funds from TNC and Partners: \$62,256.40(50%)

Funding Priority Addressed By Pre-proposal

This is a 2-year project and it addresses 2 priority implementation actions listed in Appendix A of the 2009 SWG Request for Proposals (RFP): 1) Habitat Management to maintain or increase quality oak woodlands, glades, and/or savanna, and 2) Habitat Management to maintain or increase quality native grasslands or prairies. Additionally, this project will integrate the Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan (AWAP) with other natural resource efforts at federal, state, and local levels. This project will address habitat needs of species of greatest conservation need while also benefiting other wildlife. This project will largely be accessible to the public and provide signage to raise the profile of the AWAP and the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) project with officials and the general public. On-the-ground implementation of AWAP priority actions in a visible arena, informative signage, and an opportunity for public exploration will allow this project to serve as a demonstration for other similar projects and further profile the AWAP, SWG, and project partners. This project will also provide opportunities for private citizens to engage in the implementation of educational and priority actions through partner-sponsored activities.

Ecoregion Where Project Will Be Conducted

The Damascus Quail Focal Area is located within the Arkansas Valley Hills section of the Arkansas Valley Ecoregion (Figure 1). Natural vegetation is oak-hickory forest and woodland, and oak-hickory-pine forest and woodland. Today, pastureland and hay fields dominate, but oak and pine forests occur along many small streams and in rugged or non-productive areas.

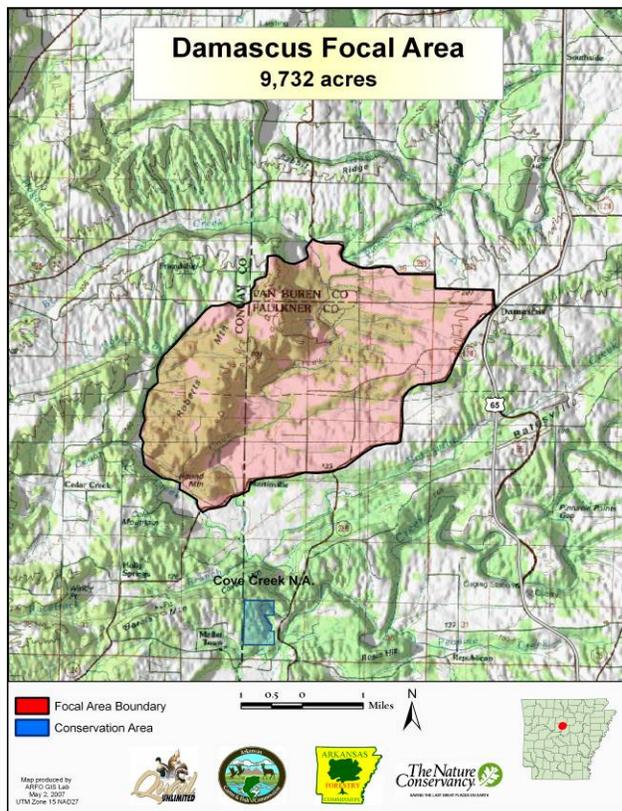


Figure 1. Damascus Quail Focal Area location in Arkansas.

Project Methods:

Project partners will be working to complement on-going NRCS efforts on private land throughout the focal area, but will concentrate efforts within the Gus Blass Scout Reservation in order to capitalize on previously completed work and create a public relations and citizen science epicenter. Educational/PR efforts by BSA will consist of building and installing informational kiosks along the main entrance road (northern boundary of project area) to the Scout Reservation. Restoration efforts will consist of conducting prescribed burning, thinning forest stands, mid-story clearing, native grass seeding, and construction of firelines. Project signage highlighting the AWAP will be displayed outside the project area, and articles highlighting the AWAP and project objectives will be encouraged. Prescriptions for each treatment will be developed for use in demonstration, monitoring, and education purposes. Participating landowners and organizations will be allowed and encouraged to participate in prescribed burn planning and implementation, native grass restoration and

monitoring, and construction and implementation of educational kiosks along a highly visible portion of the project area. Maintenance of the project will be encouraged through partnership mentoring and continued use of prescribed fire by private landowners, and a better understanding of the benefits to restored woodland and grassland habitat. Post-burning, seeding and thinning treatment monitoring will be

conducted after each season or treatment to determine effectiveness. Post treatment monitoring reports will be developed to record progress.

Measureable Outcomes

The species-at-risk affected by this proposal occur in open and dry vegetation types typical of Arkansas woodland, savannas, prairies, and glades in the Arkansas Valley Hills of the Arkansas Valley Ecoregion. These species are dependent on open, herbaceous habitat maintained by periodic fire during their life cycles. As a result of fire suppression and conversion, most of their habitats have become either overstocked and encroached by surrounding vegetation, or converted from native grass to non-native grass monocultures. This condition plays a large part in the loss or degradation of habitat suitable for woodland and grassland-dependent species-at-risk in this area (Table 1).

Table 1. Targeted Species of Concern in the *Damascus Quail Focal Area* (CWCS Database).

Class	Common_Name	Scientific_Name	Common Name	Rank
Insecta	<i>Speyeria</i>	<i>diana</i>	Diana fritillary	G3S2
Reptilia	<i>Ophisaurus</i>	<i>attenuatus</i>	Western slender glass lizard	G5S3
Aves	<i>Aimophila</i>	<i>aestivalis</i>	Bachman’s Sparrow	G3S3
Aves	<i>Chondestes</i>	<i>grammacus</i>	Lark Sparrow	G5S3
Aves	<i>Ammodramus</i>	<i>lecontei</i>	Le Conte’s Sparrow	G4S3
Aves	<i>Sitta</i>	<i>pusilla</i>	Brown-headed Nuthatch	G4S2
Aves	<i>Ammodramus</i>	<i>savannarum</i>	Grasshopper Sparrow	G5S3
Aves	<i>Lanis</i>	<i>ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead Shrike	G4S3
Aves	<i>Pipilo</i>	<i>erythrophthalmus</i>	Eastern Towhee	G5S3
Aves	<i>Colinus</i>	<i>virginianus</i>	Northern Bobwhite	G5S5
Aves	<i>Dendroica</i>	<i>discolor</i>	Prairie Warbler	G5S4

To restore the open habitats that species identified by the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies (CWCS) utilize requires establishing a sustainable fire regime while reducing native and non-native encroachment in prairie, woodland, and glade habitat types. This project has selected 300 acres of pine-oak forest at the southeastern corner of the Gus Blass Scout Reservation (Figure 2). Thirty acres in the extreme southeast corner of this project area has been previously thinned to a savanna-model basal area, and will undergo intensive “pile and burn” mid-story removal treatment, followed by broadcast native grass inter-seeding, if money is available. The remaining 270 acres will receive a woodland prescription thinning and prescribed burn. Additional measureable outcomes include: Information kiosks along project’s northern boundary (gravel road from Scout Reservation main entrance to Reynolds Training Center), written thinning and burning plans for the project area and a repeatable protocol for establishing and maintaining native warm-season

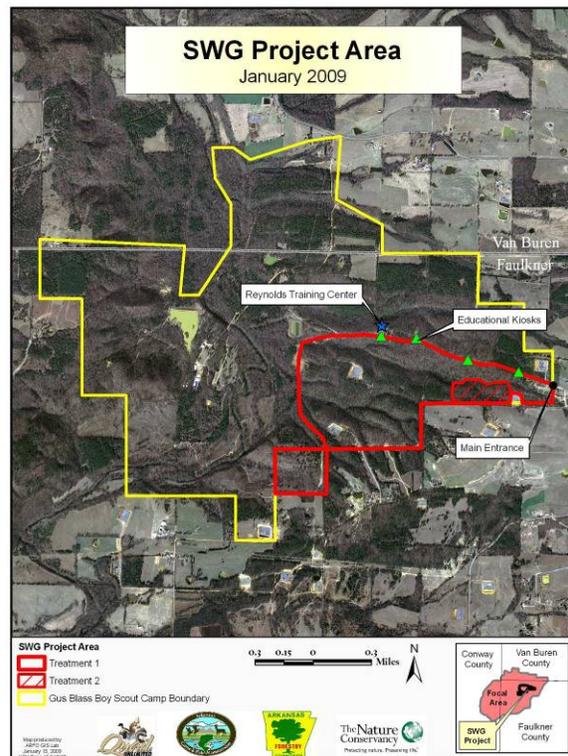


Figure 2. Proposed project area within the Gus Blass Scout Reservation. Treatment 1 refers to woodland thinning and burning, and treatment 2 refers to midstory clearing and seeding.

grass (NWSG) in the Arkansas Valley Hills region of the Arkansas Valley Ecoregion. Monitoring efforts will consist of tracking acres thinned, acres burned, lbs/acre of NWSG seeded, quantitative change of vegetation structure, and bird count route change before and after project ending.

Existing Resources and Partnerships

This project was selected because of the high potential at the Gus Blass Boy Scout Reservation within the Damascus Quail Focal Area to focus existing resources and partnerships within the Arkansas Quail Committee to an area with high publicity potential and long-term educational opportunities. The focal area has already received recognition as a partnership project between the AGFC and the NRCS. This partnership has initiated restoration projects throughout the focal area and particularly on the Scout camp through their Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) and the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP). Most of the restoration work has consisted of establishing native grasslands, and timber harvests to restore woodland stand structure. Further restoration efforts are needed to provide a contiguous block of restored habitat. This project aims to take advantage of the established partnerships and restoration progress in the focal area by filling some “gaps” like increased prescribed burning and providing a concentrated epicenter of restored habitat from which to demonstrate, educate, and replicate in the remainder of the quail focal area.

This project also represents an opportunity for the Arkansas Quail Committee participants to go into a joint venture with a common goal and highlight state-sponsored habitat restoration to the public (through all of its developmental stages), and the tools such as the AWAP and SWG that exist within the state to make those impacts. Members of the Arkansas Quail Committee such as TNC, NRCS, QU and others have enjoyed a partnership with the Gus Blass Scout Reservation since the creation of the Damascus Quail Focal Area. Previous projects include a Quail Media Day to promote Northern Bobwhite management efforts in Arkansas, an Arkansas Prescribed Fire Council (APFC) workshop to educate private landowners on the benefits and use of prescribed fire, and TNC sponsored a nationally-recognized Workshop on Ecological Burning (WEB) on the camp last May. The small, but dedicated staff at the Scout Reservation, along with CFS, has demonstrated through their encouragement and participation a lasting dedication to the sustainable and multi-use management of natural resources and to providing future opportunities for educational projects.

Proposed Budget

The estimated budget for this project is outlined in Table 2, and includes all divisions as requested by the RFP. All sources have been compiled for all partners. Salary/Benefits include all staff time, and value of donated labor from volunteer participation. Operating expenses includes expenses and materials purchased with a single value of less than \$5000.00.

Table 2. Proposed budget allocation as outlined in the 2009 SWG RFP.

Category	Total	Partnership (Match)	SWG
Salary / Benefits	\$83,300	\$44,000	\$39,300
Operating Expenses	\$17,700	\$6500	\$11,200
Capital Expenses	0	0	0
Subtotal	\$101,000	\$50,500	\$50,500
Indirect Costs (23.28%)*	\$23,512	\$11,756	\$11,756
<i>Totals</i>	<i>\$124,512</i>	<i>\$62,256</i>	<i>\$62,256</i>

***Indirect Costs:** The Nature Conservancy has a federal negotiated indirect cost rate (NICRA) of 23.28%, which is accepted by USFWS.

Qualifications of Partnership

As the private lands project manager for TNC, **Jason Milks** has established a working track record with partners in the Arkansas Quail Committee and has a good relationship with the Gus Blass Scout Reservation manager and Cormier Forestry Services staff. As a member of a diverse staff of science and conservation managers, Jason is trained in planning and implementing ecological restoration including burning on glade, woodland, and prairie ecosystems. The Arkansas Chapter of TNC annually employs seasonal burn crews and conducts prescribed burns and other stewardship and restoration tasks on private, state and federal properties. In addition to burning expertise, TNC employs a staff that is responsible for planning and oversight of forestry, monitoring, and stewardship-related projects.

As AGFC state Quail Program Director, **Steve Fowler** chairs the Arkansas Quail Committee, and oversees the AGFC efforts in all of Arkansas's quail focal areas including in Damascus. He has years of professional experience as a private lands and state quail biologist for the AGFC. He has served as AGFC's LIP program contact and coordinator since becoming AGFC Quail Program Coordinator in February 2006, and has led AGFC's efforts to promote restoration of quail habitat across the state through the AWAP's SWG and other state and federally-funded resources.

The AFC has been involved in habitat restoration in the Damascus Focal Area as a technical service provider (TSP) on many of the practices successfully administered on the Scout Reservation. The district office in Greenbrier is headed by **Scott Youngblood**, and is instrumental in insuring adequate fire breaks are installed on the project areas. The AFC has also conducted prescribed burning on the Scout Reservation, and has been a lead partner on the prescribed fire workshops for private landowners conducted on the Scout Reservation and throughout the state.

QU is a membership-based organization that consists of members-at-large as well as members affiliated with local chapters. Local chapters conduct annual fundraisers to have funds available for local projects. Since population declines are directly related to landscape changes that have occurred over the past decades and since habitat loss is the major contributing factor, most local projects are designed to improve habitat conditions. **Matt Finley**, the Regional Director for Arkansas is instrumental in obtaining state and chapter funds to be used for on-the-ground projects on private and public lands. QU contributes council funds, to become a participant in the restoration process, and to secure a long-term stewardship role for the benefit of youth and member sporting events

BSA not only provides the core habitat for the Damascus Quail Focal Area's habitat restoration projects, but also can provide unequal opportunities for youth boys to become familiar with conservation actions by providing exposure to the restoration efforts and allowing groups to become involved in the maintenance and study of the projects as they evolve over the years. **T. J. Jones** manages the 3,100 ac area for the Quapaw Area Council BSA. This includes oversight of all operations involving forestry, grasslands, control burning, participation in quail focal area practices, wildlife management, and educational programs.

Kent Cormier of CFS is a registered forester in the state of Arkansas with 23 years of forestry experience and performs all of the forestry contracting for the Gus Blass Scout Reservation. Kent has been instrumental in designing and implementing a sustainable forestry plan for the Scout Reservation in complete cooperation with and in the spirit of the Damascus Quail Focal Area. His company will provide the necessary thinning and clearing services involved in this project. His dedication to multi-use conservation forestry provides an important demonstration to many other private landowners in Arkansas who may be concerned with how to manage for forest and wildlife health at the same time.