

Wildlife Habitat Committee
Newsletter

May 2007

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Notes From
The Chair 1

Patch Burn
Grazing
Working
Group 2

Comment
From the
Editor 4

Notes From The Chair

Ted Toombs

Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2007

In February, a new bill was introduced that creates tax incentives to conserve endangered species that live on private lands. The *Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2007* was introduced by Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT), Finance Committee Ranking Member Charles Grassley ((R-IA) and 14 other Senate co-sponsors.

“Most of the rare species in America live on privately-owned lands; very few occur only in our national parks or forests,” said Michael Bean, senior attorney for Environmental Defense. “Conserving those species often requires active habitat management that is costly for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. For too long now, we’ve been relying exclusively on regulations that had the unintended consequence of pitting landowners and environmentalists against each other. This bipartisan bill

would use tax incentives to help us reach our mutual goals of conserving wildlife. This is an innovative approach that will help us make real progress for our endangered species.” Bean spoke at the news conference on behalf of Environmental Defense, the National Wildlife Federation, and Defenders of Wildlife who are all backing the bill.

The bill would provide tax credits (not tax deduction), plus additional deductions and exclusions, for private landowners who take steps to help any endangered, threatened or official candidate species on their property.

The bill uses a tiered approach whereby landowners offering permanent easements will receive 100% tax credit, those agreeing to a 30-year agreement will receive a 75% credit, and those agreeing to a 15 year agreement, 50% credit. Tax credits are allowed to be carried over into future years indefinitely if not used immediately, but they are not transferable.

(Continued on page 2)

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Notes From The Chair

(continued from page 1)

The bill could be a powerful tool for any of us working with private landowners on these species. It will effectively raise cost-share for habitat projects by allowing landowners to receive tax credits for their portion of the cost. When offered in conjunction with regulatory incentives like Safe Harbor and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, it could provide technical service providers with a strong selling point to further encourage private landowners to engage in habitat projects.

No news yet on when the bill will be voted upon, but it has received broad support from both sides of the isle and therefore stands a good chance of passing.

See the link for full text of the bill.

<http://environmentaldefense.org/article.cfm?contentID=6297>

Patch Burn Grazing Working Group

Sherry Leis

Who belongs to the working group?

Professionals and producers in at least seven states who are interested in learning more about patch burn grazing and other ways to increase heterogeneity in grasslands have joined the Working Group. Members belong to universities, state and federal agencies, and private organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and Environmental Defense. The group has a list serve hosted by Kansas State University and plans an annual field meeting to share information. The next field meeting will be held in Nevada, Missouri September 27-28th, 2007.

At the first meeting of the Working Group in early 2005, a mission and set of objectives were decided upon. Generally speaking, it was hoped that formation of the group would facilitate sharing of information and data as well as to enhance individual re-

search programs by avoiding redundancy and answering questions of importance to other members of the group. Another important function of belonging to the Working Group was to share information about grant opportunities or other funding and labor resources needed to get work done.

The Working Group agreed patch burn grazing is an important tool because it can enhance ecological heterogeneity in grasslands while maintaining economic opportunities. Furthermore, research programs should focus on questions that lead to a better understanding of the ecological processes with an eye on economic constraints. The following subheadings outline priority topics the Working Group determined would best enhance our understanding of the potential of management tools for increasing heterogeneity.

Patch Burn Grazing Working Group

(Continued from page 2)

Why study patch burn grazing (PBG)?

- Method is designed to mimic historical disturbance patterns of fire and large grazers.
- Improve habitat heterogeneity for wildlife, especially grassland birds.
- Increase or maintain plant and animal diversity on a landscape scale.
- Investigate impacts on livestock production (animal health and economics).

Working Group objectives:

- Provide intellectual support for research on heterogeneity management tools. Current emphasis is on Patch Burn Grazing.
- Pool resources to obtain funding and share information on resources.
- Potentially fund, train, and manage a temporary labor crew to do vegetation and wildlife monitoring through the region.
- Disseminate information to extension and field personnel.

Priority Patch Burn Graze Research questions

1. Document and compare monetary inputs and profits of using PBG as compared to other systems. (Economics are critical for exporting patch burn to private lands).
2. What happens to conservative plants using PBG?

3. Response of birds, insects, and structure to PBG.
4. How does insect biomass and diversity change through a PBG cycle and as compared to other management systems?
5. Can PBG improve structure for introduced grass systems ie fescue, brome, and CRP?
6. How would PBG affect production of over-seeded prairies?
7. Does seedling recruitment differ under PBG as compared to other systems?
8. How can PBG affect management of sericea and invasive species (especially woodies)?
9. What are the long term impacts of using PBG? Define recovery and recovery rates.
10. Is there a functional difference between PGB and patch haying?
11. Define stocking rate (develop a rule of thumb for stocking PBG systems).
12. Effect of PBG on cool season species, for example, percent change of dominance of exotic or native cool season species.

Many of these questions are currently under investigation, but others remain to be addressed. A proposal has been submitted for the 2008 SRM meeting in Louisville to discuss patch burn grazing and other methods of managing for heterogeneity.

Comments From The Editor

If you have information that you would like posted or an article that you would like to share with the Wildlife Habitat Committee, consider this newsletter an excellent forum for exchanging ideas and experience. The next issue will come out in September. Please send information by e-mail to:

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The notes from our last committee meeting in Reno are posted on the SRM WHC website. You can also find this and every past newsletter on this site as well (http://www.rangelands.org/wildlifehabitat/whc_newsletters.shtml)