



The UERP Report

A Newsletter of the Upland Ecosystem Restoration Project

January – March 2007

By Greg Hagan, Coordinator

Inaugural Newsletter

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter of the Upland Ecosystem Restoration Project (UERP). As many are aware, UERP is a cooperative partnership between Tall Timbers, numerous state and federal agencies, University of Florida, and conservation organizations. The project's goal is to coordinate upland ecosystem restoration programs within the state and to initiate on-the-ground projects that improve habitat conditions on public lands throughout Florida for upland species from bobwhites to gopher tortoises. The newsletter will be sent quarterly and its purpose is to keep those involved up-to-date on our progress, challenges, and important news.

Administrative Activities

- Since May 2006, we formed steering and technical committees to assist in guiding activities. The steering committee is composed of leaders from land management agencies and Tall Timbers. Its members (see page 2) assist the UERP Coordinator with establishing, funding, prioritizing, and approving projects.

The technical committee is composed of biologists and land managers with expertise in prescribed fire and upland ecosystems. Its members (see page 2) assist with formation of project goals and management actions to ensure the greatest conservation value is obtained for each project.

- Developed a working charter that defines the principles, functions, and organization of UERP. It clearly outlines how agencies, NOG's and other groups operate within UERP.
- Received outside funding from Monsanto Company's "Quail Conservation Consortium" to help support on-the-ground habitat management activities on UERP projects.

- Submitted a proposal to the Wildlife Conservation Society for funding of management activities on UERP projects.



On-the-ground Activities

- Received letters of support from agency leaders that officially designated UERP focal areas on 3 properties throughout the state to be managed with increased fire frequency and the appropriate timber management.
- The focal area on Blackwater River State Forest contains ~ 11,250 acres and is centrally located within the forest. Our immediate goal is to use dormant season fire (starting 2007) over the next two years to reduce heavy fuel loads. Upon completion, our project goal is to maintain the area with a 1-2 year fire frequency.
- The focal area on Three Lakes WMA contains ~ 15,000 acres and is located east of the Florida Turnpike. The immediate goal is to increase fire frequency and roller chopping to reduce saw palmetto coverage. Dormant and growing season burns will be used to create a mosaic landscape. The goal is to maintain the area with a 1-2 year fire frequency.
- The focal area on Myakka River State Park contains ~ 12,000 acres and is located south of State Road 72. The immediate goal is to increase the frequency of fire (1-2 year rotation) and increase roller chopping to help reduce saw palmetto.

- Started monitoring winter bird abundance and collect pre-treatment data on Three Lakes and Myakka with assistance from UGA graduate students (James Martin and Adam Butler).
- Are in the early stages of developing management plans and initiating on-the-ground activities within officially designated UERP focal areas. Projects are designed to provide the greatest possible conservation value to a broad suite of upland species.
- Actively working with staff from the US Forest Service to finalize official designation of UERP focal areas on the Ocala National Forest (~12,000 acres) and Apalachicola National Forest (~5,000 acres).

Comments from the Coordinator

In my travels throughout the state, several common themes are arising. First and foremost, the land managers charged with the stewardship of our public lands are deeply committed and passionate about enhancing the biodiversity of our natural resources. However, it appears managers are struggling to meet certain goals, in particular prescribed burning, because of budget and logistical constraints or other agency priorities. Furthermore, in an effort to burn predominantly during the growing season, burning opportunities are being lost due to poor weather conditions. This creates a yearly back log of unburned acreage, which gets carried over year-to-year. The key factor to restoring these upland habitats is simply that prescribed fire needs to be frequently applied to the landscape, regardless of season.

Second, the majority of upland ecosystems are burned on a 3-5 year frequency as part of a fuel reduction paradigm. These low frequency burning regimes are insufficient to sustain wildlife populations associated with fire-maintained uplands. Burn whenever possible!

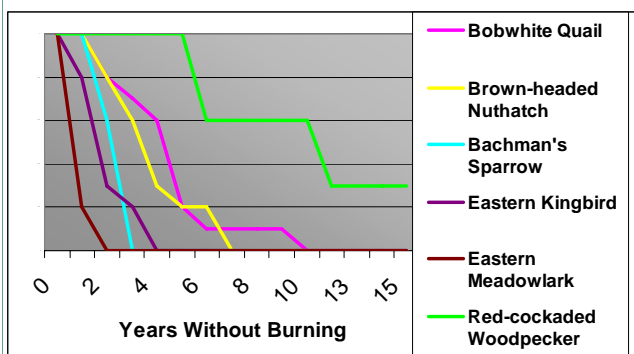
While considerable progress has been made these past months, there is still a long road ahead. Upland ecosystem restoration and management is expensive and requires long-term commitments. Without doubt, success is dependent upon a committed effort among all partners.

Important News

Dates are filling fast for participation in the Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Center's prescribed burning assistance. Agencies interested in receiving burn teams this winter to assist with completing burns can contact me or Hunter Wistrand, Operations Specialist at (850) 523-8622.

Funding for this project is provided by: Tall Timbers, the Division of Forestry, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Additional funding is provided by: Monsanto Company, Quail Forever, and Florida's State Wildlife Grants Program.

If you would like to participate in UERP or have any questions, please contact me at (850) 893-4153 (ext 340) or greg@ttrs.org. Please visit the Tall Timbers web site (www.talltimbers.org) for further information on UERP.



TTRS study showing dramatic decline in upland species without frequent fire.

Steering Committee Members: Tim Breault, FFWCC, Jim Karels, DOF; Mark Glisson, DEP; Parks Small, DEP; Carl Petrick, USFS; Kevin Love, SWFWMD; Bill Palmer, TTRS; Lane Green, TTRS.

Technical Committee: Mike Brooks, FFWCC; Tommy Hines, FFWCC; David Speake, DOF; Erik Johnson, DEP; Greg Titus, USFS; Bill Palmer, TTRS.