

LIVING LANDS

Helping Land Trusts Conserve Biodiversity



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IN THIS ISSUE

Highlights from the
2007 Biodiversity
Grant Recipients:

- *Teton Regional Land Trust: Restoring Biodiversity Along the Teton River*
- *Greenbelt Land Trust Prairies, Butterflies, and Cows*

Mudford Farm—
Restoring Habitat
for Wildlife and the
Chesapeake Bay

State Acres for
Wildlife
Enhancement—a
New Tool for Land
Trusts



Unstable bank is prime restoration location along the Teton River
Photo courtesy of Teton Regional Land Trust

RESTORING BIODIVERSITY ALONG THE TETON RIVER

An update from a 2007 Living Lands Biodiversity Grant Recipient

By Tamara Sperber

In spring 2007 Teton Regional Land Trust began an exciting large-scale restoration project on the Teton River. The Teton River Basin, located within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in southeastern Idaho, is the number one conservation priority for private lands in the 26 million-acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Basin contains irreplaceable aquatic, wetland, and riparian habitats that provide refuge for the embattled Yellowstone cutthroat trout, a species now lost from over 60% of its historic range. Rich in bird life, the expansive wetlands along the river corridor are home to many species, including

sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, and the globally-imperiled long-billed curlew.

Private landowners enthusiastic about conservation have recently protected over one mile of the Teton River corridor by placing a portion of their active cattle ranch under conservation easements. Their easements build on other private and state protection efforts in the area, which is now the longest contiguous protected reach of the Teton River.

Early on, the landowners expressed interest in improving wildlife habitat for priority species and, upon securing the easements, enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program

(continued on page 2)

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(Teton Regional Land Trust, continued from page 1)

(EQIP) through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Through the EQIP program, Teton Regional Land Trust staff are working with the landowners to restore 2,000 feet of severely impacted streambank. Through a Living Lands Biodiversity Grant, Teton Regional Land Trust was able to hire a nationally recognized restoration expert to help develop a resource inventory and restoration plan while providing mentoring and training on innovative riparian restoration techniques.

Meanwhile, the landowners have been working hard fencing both banks of approximately one mile of the Teton River corridor to exclude cattle and restore riparian vegetation. Together, the land trust and the landowners kicked off their restoration work with a two-day volunteer willow planting event in November. Between now and the Fall of 2008, they plan to plant even more willows and wetland sod, re-contour degraded banks, create floodplain terraces and install large woody debris to ultimately help the river reclaim its historical flow and wetland habitats.

This project has significantly increased the Teton Regional Land Trust's in-house capacity to complete large-scale restoration efforts through the continuous mentoring and feedback from an expert consultant. In addition, they have ensured the long-term stewardship of essential wildlife habitat by forging a cooperative partnership with the landowners of this property. Other local ranchers interested in restoration and enhancement can now look to this project for a demonstration of how working lands and conservation can go hand in hand. Teton Regional Land Trust intends to continue delivering effective, innovative, and long-term restoration services into the future.



Fencing to exclude uncontrolled cattle-grazing and restore riparian vegetation
Photos courtesy of Teton Regional Land Trust



Volunteers and staff at Teton Regional Land Trust working on the restoration project

For more information about Teton Regional Land Trust, please visit: www.tetonlandtrust.org



MUDFORD FARM – RESTORING HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE AND THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

BY CHRIS PUPKE

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage has a mission – to bring back habitat for wildlife and clean up the Chesapeake Bay in the process. Our nation’s largest estuary, the Chesapeake Bay spans 64,000 square miles of stunning aquatic, marsh, and upland habitats. Over 3,500 migratory and resident wildlife species depend on the estuary for food, cover, and nesting sites alongside a growing population of over 15 million people. Not surprisingly humans are having a big impact on the bay and despite concerted efforts by local, state, and regional groups, the bay’s health continues to decline. In short, we need to do more – much more.

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, a land trust and habitat restoration group, is addressing this challenge in a big way. They’ve created a comprehensive program that combines habitat protection, restoration, landowner education and technical services to protect and restore the most important wildlife habitats in coastal Maryland.

Most recently, through a joint venture with the Biophilia Foundation, Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage has purchased Mudford Farm - a 275-acre gem of marsh, woodland and agricultural habitats at the headwaters of the Chester River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. They plan to restore 30 acres of wetlands, create 30 acres of warm-season grass meadows and plant 10 acres of trees on the property to restore essential wildlife habitats. The newly restored farm will be sold to a conservation buyer and protected with a conservation easement designed not only to protect the property’s open space but also to maintain essential wildlife habitat in perpetuity. Ninety acres of land possessing the most productive soils will be used for future farming activities.



Scarlet tanager, one of the species benefitting from habitat restoration done by CWH.
Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

“This farm will provide habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife, including waterfowl, turkeys and quail” said Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage’s Habitat Ecologist, Ned Gerber “but in addition to these popular game birds, other wildlife such as scarlet tanagers, grasshopper sparrows and even tree frogs, bats, fireflies and migrating monarch butterflies will benefit from our work.”

Such thoughtful use of the land maximizes benefits to both wildlife and water quality in the Chester River, which runs approximately 40 miles from its headwaters in Delaware to the Chesapeake Bay. Historically, the river has been recognized as one of the most important waterfowl areas in the Chesapeake Bay region and is home to nesting Bald Eagles and the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel.

Today, major portions of the river are on the Maryland Department of the Environment’s “Impaired Waters” list, leaving many to wonder why a rural river such as the Chester would have such a pollution problem. It turns out that agriculture is the primary culprit, with over 74% of the Chester River’s nitrogen, 72% of its

phosphorus and 88% of its sediment pollution resulting from agriculture.

With over 70% of the watershed’s land in agricultural production, it is clear that the future health of the Chester River depends on sound private lands management. Government agencies and regulators can improve water quality, but only private landowners’ efforts to restore and protect natural resources - especially wildlife habitat - will recover the living resources of the river.

The wetlands and buffers at Mudford Farm will help improve conditions in the Chester and ultimately the Bay. Each acre of riparian buffer will prevent 120 pounds of nitrogen, 10 pounds of phosphorus and 4,000 pounds of sediment from fouling the waters of the Chesapeake Bay annually. Furthermore, the restored wetlands trap 39% of the phosphorous and 23% of the nitrogen pollution that would otherwise reach the Bay. In dry years, the effectiveness of the wetlands in filtering pollutants can double.

For the Chester River and so many other rivers, preserving the status quo is not enough; we must work to change our land management regimen to reduce our impact on water quality and wildlife, both on site and downstream. A series of projects like Mudford Farm will not only benefit wildlife locally but, through improvements in water quality, will help to restore depleted fisheries in our nation’s largest estuary. One thing is clear – conserving biodiversity on private lands is both ecologically effective and financially viable and is a much needed complement to a working landscape.

Chris Pupke is the Director of Development at Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage. For more information on Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, please visit www.cheswildlife.org

STATE ACRES FOR WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT A NEW TOOL FOR LAND TRUSTS

In January 2008, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced the first 45 approved projects under a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practice specifically created to benefit wildlife. State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) focuses on projects that will benefit threatened, endangered and other high-priority species in specific geographic regions with significant wildlife value. Regions were selected based on proposals submitted to FSA by agency and non-profit conservation groups, including land trusts. Together, they represent some of the best places to conserve wildlife on working lands.

Approved projects currently total over 250,000 acres in 18 states. Additional projects could double the number of acres to the national goal of 500,000. Projects will restore habitat for lesser prairie chickens in Colorado, grass and shrubland birds in Iowa, Louisiana black bears in Mississippi, native pollinators in Michigan, and ocelots in Texas to name just a few of the many species that will benefit.

SAFE works just like other CRP practices in that landowners enroll eligible farmland in project areas for 10-15 year contracts. Enrolled landowners will receive soil rental payments and 50% cost-share on restoration practices similar to traditional CRP enrollment. However,

SAFE participants are also eligible for additional incentives that can total more than 90% of restoration costs - a significant incentive to landowners. Land trusts working within SAFE project areas now have a valuable tool to engage private landowners in restoring wildlife habitat.



Attwater's prairie chicken—one of the SAFE beneficiaries
Photo courtesy of USFWS

For a list of projects in each state, check out the project fact sheet at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/safep08.pdf. To learn more about a project in your state, contact your state FSA office. For general SAFE information see: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/safe08.pdf.

PRAIRIES, BUTTERFLIES, AND COWS *By Karlene McCabe*

The Greenbelt Land Trust is successfully blending the needs of both wildlife and working ranches in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. With help from a Living Lands grant, the Greenbelt Land Trust is securing a conservation easement on a ranch in the valley that will conserve rare oak woodland, oak savannah and upland prairie habitats. The ranch is located within a priority conservation area identified in the Oregon Habitat Joint Venture Willamette Valley Plan and Oregon's Wildlife Conservation Strategy adopted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Upland prairie habitat, in particular, is critical to the survival of imperiled species such as the Fender's blue butterfly and its host plant - Kincaid's lupine. The Fender's blue



Upland prairie habitat on the ranch—photo by Karlene McCabe

has lost all but one tenth of one percent of its original prairie habitat. In the absence of a historic fire regime, the ranch owners have been using rotational grazing to maintain the upland prairie habitats on their property. Considering that less than 1000 acres of this precious habitat remain on the landscape today, these simple efforts amount to a significant conservation return.

The Greenbelt Land Trust's next big project is to continue its partnership with the landowner and other partners to further restore the upland prairie habitats on the site and reintroduce Kincaid's lupine to the property. The hope is that the Fender's blue butterfly will follow. The landowners will continue to do their part for the prairie and the species that depend on it, using grazing as a tool to reduce non native plants within the upland prairie habitats.

NEW BIODIVERSITY WORKSHOPS OFFERED



It's that time of year again—conference season—and Defenders of Wildlife will be traveling the Land Trust Alliance's regional conference circuit and other regional venues with a new suite of biodiversity workshops. As always, workshops will feature a mix of land trust case studies and other conservation presentations. Check out the schedule below to see what workshops are being offered in your area:

March 6-8 Midwest:

Case Studies and Tools for Restoring Habitat on Private Land

March 27-29 Southeast:

Daylong workshop series covering biodiversity basics, strategic planning, tools, and restoration

April 5 Connecticut Land Conservation Council:

State and Local Wildlife Plans—a Resource for Land Trusts

April 10-12 Northeast:

Collaborations for Biodiversity Conservation

May 1-3 Northwest:

1. Tapping into the 2008 Farm Bill
2. Conservation Registry—Promoting Strategic Investment in Conservation

May 15-17 Southwest:

Making the Farm Bill Work for You

We look forward to seeing you there!

Living Lands—Helping Land Trusts Conserve Biodiversity

Living Lands is a Defenders of Wildlife project working to increase the capacity of local land trusts to protect, enhance and restore native wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

The Living Lands project assists local land trusts in making strategic decisions about “where to work” to conserve high-priority native habitats and species and “how to work” to use effective land stewardship to restore and manage native habitats for their long-term benefits.

Defenders of Wildlife is collaborating with the Land Trust Alliance to assist local land trusts

through a variety of approaches, including technical and financial assistance.

The Living Lands project also involves individual land trusts, state and federal agencies, conservation groups and other groups and individuals that support land trusts in their habitat conservation efforts.



If you would like to be removed from our e-mail list, please send an e-mail to livinglands@defenders.org

Vision: A network of land trusts, working with private and public partners, to protect, restore and manage our living lands for biodiversity.

Mission: To support and increase the capacity of the land trust community to conserve biodiversity on private lands through financial and technical assistance

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