

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
South Carolina State Wildlife Grants Project T-40-L and T-50-L
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
October 1, 2009 – September 30, 2010

NOTE: This was a land acquisition-only grant. This narrative covers both phases/grants.

Project Title: Conservation of Belfast Plantation

Type: Implementation

Problem and Need

Commonly known as Belfast Plantation, this 4,664.41 acre tract in Laurens and Newberry counties was previously owned by International Paper. IP recently decided to divest of all land-holdings and therefore placed this tract on the market for sale. The tract represents one of the largest blocks of forestland in the Piedmont and has a well-stocked forest that has been under active timber management. Adjoining parcels also present the opportunity to add onto this tract in the future. The tract is located between the Enoree and Long Cane Ranger Districts of the Sumter National Forest. Acquisition of this tract would work toward creating a greenspace link between these two conservation areas and help to ensure the continuation of management practices such as prescribed burning on the National Forest.

The Belfast tract has long been managed to support a diverse range of wildlife species. The hardwood drains, creeks, and beaver ponds have been managed and protected to support waterfowl management. In addition, the age-class diversity of the pine stands provides valuable wildlife habitat. The property supports excellent populations of deer and turkey, and the uplands provide excellent habitat for bobwhite quail. Improved timber thinning and a more aggressive prescribed burning regime will increase the already existing quail population. This will expand the ongoing efforts on the nearby Sumter National Forest to increase the Piedmont quail population. Mudlick Creek, the beaver ponds, and the man-made pond provide many fishing opportunities for sunfish and bass. The property provides habitat for many priority bird species such as Acadian flycatcher, American woodcock, great blue heron, Kentucky warbler, little blue heron, Louisiana waterthrush, rusty blackbird, wood duck, wood thrush, and yellow-crowned night heron. The wetlands associated with the river corridor and its tributaries provide habitat for many reptiles and amphibians including but not limited to the black swamp snake, common snapping turtle, and yellow-belly turtle. Little River, which traverses the Belfast tract and is the Southern boundary for Phase I, is comprised of Carolina Slatebelt geology. This specific geology is known to be associated with the federally-endangered Carolina Heelsplitter. While initial survey work has not detected the heelsplitter on the Belfast tract, it has been located in the nearby area. Further survey work could find the heelsplitter on the tract and the tract may also serve as a restoration/reintroduction area for the heelsplitter. In addition, several rare species of burrowing crayfish have been found in nearby areas.

Objectives

The objective of this project is for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to acquire fee simple interest to 4,664.41 acres of wildlife habitat that would protect over 20 miles of river frontage along Little River, Mudlick Creek, and their tributaries.

Expected Results and Benefits

SCDNR currently owns very little land in the Piedmont. The Belfast acquisition provides the ideal opportunity for SCDNR to increase public recreation opportunities for this region. This site will increase outdoor recreation opportunities for local citizens of Laurens, Newberry, and Greenwood Counties as well as larger metropolitan areas such as Columbia, Greenville, and Spartanburg. Once acquired, the property will become part of the Wildlife Management Area program and be open to the public for traditional outdoor recreation opportunities. Additionally, the South Carolina Department of Education has expressed interest in working with SCDNR to implement a comprehensive education program centered on hunting, fishing, boating, kayaking, and natural resource conservation. Belfast provides an ideal location to create outdoor classroom opportunities for students in the Piedmont and Midlands of South Carolina.

Approach

- On October 18, 2008 SCDNR took title to 2,227.775 acres known as Belfast Phase I (northern half). Funding for Phase I was provided through a \$1,485,000 Forest Legacy grant from the U.S. Forest Service, a \$2,000,000 SC Conservation Bank grant, \$58,000 from the Turkey Superfund (NWTF), \$50,000 from a State Wildlife Grant, \$150,000 from existing timber revenue and \$4,405,560 from the Heritage Land Trust Fund, yielding a total land acquisition cost of \$8,148,560.
- SCDNR contracted with TCF to purchase Phase II (2,436.635 acres; southern half) with the intention of closing as soon as sufficient funding was secure. The purchase price for this parcel is expected to be \$7,710,440.
- For Phase II, SCDNR expects to receive a \$3,250,000 grant through the Forest Legacy Program. This funding (if awarded) would be available through the FY 2010 appropriations. Other funding sources include: \$2,602,000 from the Heritage Land Trust Fund, \$700,000 from timber revenue, \$100,000 deer project revenue, \$933,440 Pittman-Robertson funding and \$125,000 from this State Wildlife Grant.

Schedule and Cost

The project will be conducted over one year beginning on October 1, 2009 and concluding on September 30, 2010. The federal cost for this project will be \$125,000 in FY 2010 which will be applied to the Phase II purchase.

Match

Match totaling \$125,000 will be provided through SCDNR Heritage Land Trust Fund dollars of this acquisition.

Location

Laurens and Newberry counties

Personnel

No personnel will be paid from this grant. All grant dollars will go directly toward land acquisition.