

LIVING LANDS

Helping Land Trusts Conserve Biodiversity



NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2009

IN THIS ISSUE

Highlights from Living Lands Grant Recipients:

- Restoring the Ghost of Big Savannah
- Defenders announces 2009 Biodiversity Grant Recipients
- Wildlife Volunteer Corps Partners with Land Conservancy of West Michigan
- Stimulus Funds Offer Restoration Opportunities
- Two Land Trusts Develop Strategic Conservation Plans
- Farm Bill Update
- Living Lands at Rally 2009
- Living Lands and Social Networking

Living Lands
*Helping Land Trusts
Conserve Biodiversity*

Contact:
Aimee Weldon
Telephone:
202.682.9400, ext. 165
E-mail:
livinglands@defenders.org
Website:
[www.defenders.org/
livinglands](http://www.defenders.org/livinglands)



Photo courtesy of David Blewitts

Barbara's Buttons (*Marshallia graminifolia*)

RESTORING THE GHOST OF BIG SAVANNAH

An update from a 2008 Living Lands Biodiversity Grant Recipient
By Janice Allen

In April 2002, the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust purchased a 117-acre parcel of land in Pender County and named it after one of the state's celebrated ecologists, the late Dr. B. W. Wells. The acquisition focus was a 10-to 12-acre wet-pine savannah (or grassland) habitat located within two power-line rights-of-way. Why all the fuss over a remnant wetland with utility lines in the overstory?

The story behind the significance of the B.W. Wells Savannah Preserve has all the markings of an American saga. Around 1920, a North Carolina State College (now North Carolina State University) ecologist by the name of Dr. Bertram Whittier Wells was traveling by train from Raleigh to Wilmington. As he neared the town of Burgaw in Pender County, he saw a vast

area treeless and covered with wild flowers and he made up his mind to see it again. Dr. Wells spent years documenting the flora and ecological significance of this spectacular natural garden known as the Big Savannah. Dr. Wells' time on the 1,500-acre Big Savannah, which he once dubbed the "Garden of God," transcended to a passion to preserve it.

In the 1930's, he campaigned to have the state purchase Big Savannah and designate it a state park. When the owner offered to sell the site for \$2/acre to a local garden club in the early 1950's, Dr. Wells encouraged the club to purchase it, but they declined thinking it was conserved defacto because of its wetness. The site was eventually sold to an Ohio farmer and by the late 1950's, the once spectacular parcel of

(continued)

Photos courtesy of David Blevins

Pale Grass-Pink (*Calopogon pallidus*) (left); Toothache Grass (*Ctenium aromaticum*) (right)

natural diversity had been reduced to a wheat field.

But there is a twist to this conservation story. 40 years after the loss of Big Savannah, ecologist Richard LeBlond of the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program discovered an interesting patch of wild flowers in a power line right-of-way along Pelham Road. LeBlond recognized that the site contained the same floral assemblage and unique fine textured and very wet soil type and was only a few miles from the site that was once Big Savannah (we would later learn through analysis of a 1938 aerial photo that there was a landscape connection between the sites). He noted that the site was for sale and contacted the Coastal Land Trust. LeBlond convinced the land trust that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to conserve the “Ghost of Big Savannah” and to use fire to restore more savannah habitat.

Periodic fire is critical in keeping wet-pine savannah habitats open and free from encroaching shrubs and trees. Soil type and hydroperiod are also important factors. At present, the best savannah habitat at the B.W. Wells Savannah Preserve is located under the Progress Energy and Four County Electric Membership’s power lines. Mowing under the power lines by the utility companies has replaced fire in maintaining the open grassland habitat. Thanks to botanists from the North Carolina State University Botany Department and North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, more than 200 native plant species have been recorded from this small savannah including rarities like Carolina goldenrod (*Solidago pulchra*) and bog bluestem (*Andropogon mohrii*) and some stunning orchids like the rosebud orchid (*Cleistes divaricata*) and pale grass pink (*Calopogon pallidus*).

The remaining land has converted from what was likely savannah into a thick tangle of longleaf and pond pine woodland. The Coastal Land Trust launched restoration efforts with grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Natural

Resources Conservation Service’s Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program with the overall goal to restore most of the site to open savannah through the use of repeated prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. In May 2004, fire lines were constructed and approximately 10 acres of vegetation were treated using a brush grinder specifically designed to clear mid-story trees and not damage fragile wetland soils. Cool season or winter burns were conducted at the preserve in the winters of 2005, 2006 and 2007. While cool fire helped reduce dangerous fuel loads (the property had not burned in more than 30 years), a hotter fire is now needed to kill back encroaching woody vegetation. Thus, the Coastal Land Trust sought and received a Defenders of Wildlife Living Lands Biodiversity Grant in 2008 specifically to develop an overall conservation plan and to conduct the first-ever growing season burn on the property.



Photos courtesy of David Blevins

Rosebud orchid (*Cleistes divaricata*) (left); Bicolor Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera xicolor*) (right)

Pulling off a growing season burn in coastal North Carolina is daunting. The range of acceptable weather parameters (e.g., relative humidity, temperature, wind speed/direction) is narrow. Attempts to burn last summer were thwarted due to a wildfire on 40,000+ acres in eastern North Carolina and a concurrent statewide burn ban issued by the Division of Forestry. The Coastal Land Trust and Comprehensive Forestry, Inc., our burn contractors, continue to be vigilant for the right conditions. Thanks to Defenders of Wildlife and other partners, we hope by the end of this year’s growing season to report a hot, hot time on the savannah!

So, what are the lessons learned? First, preserving our natural diversity must translate into immediate action. The Big Savannah is gone forever. The discovery of the B.W. Wells savannah provided us with a second chance to preserve this remarkably diverse and unique ecosystem. Second, restoring natural diversity by recreating more of the natural gardens at the B.W. Wells Savannah Preserve requires great perspective and considerable patience to do it right.

Janice Allen is the deputy director of the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust. To learn more please visit www.coastallandtrust.org

DEFENDERS ANNOUNCES 2009 BIODIVERSITY GRANT RECIPIENTS

Six land trusts have recently been awarded Defenders of Wildlife Living Lands Biodiversity Grants. Thanks to generous support from the Biophilia Foundation, the Living Lands Project has offered these grants since 2007. The grants will enable land trusts to undertake projects to protect, enhance and restore native wildlife habitat and biodiversity. Projects highlight innovative conservation efforts in areas with exceptional biodiversity that also increase the capacity of land trusts to take on future projects.

The 2009 recipients and their projects are:

Blue Mountain Land Conservancy and Wallowa Land Trust, OR, will survey, map and monitor the threatened Columbia spotted frog on current and prospective easement properties. The trusts will jointly collect data on frog population levels, habitat requirements and distribution on private lands to better inform local and regional management of these populations. The grant funds will be used to purchase GPS equipment to map breeding locations and distributions, and to provide staff training on ArcGIS software.



Cluster of Columbia spotted frog eggs (*Rana luteiventris*)

Tar River Land Conservancy, NC, will protect four miles of high-quality riparian habitat and 798 acres of bottomland hardwood and cypress wetlands along the Tar River in North Carolina. The Tar River is designated as

a Nationally Significant Aquatic Habitat due to its value to several rare and endangered species of mussels. The grant will help pay for an appraisal, timber cruise and survey of the easement area. The project will enable the land trust to establish a presence in a very biologically diverse and rural area with few existing conservation easements while conserving imperiled and often overlooked aquatic invertebrates.



FoHVOS member removes invasive wisteria

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS), NJ, will identify and strategically remove emerging invasive plant populations on public and private lands in central New Jersey. FoHVOS formed an invasive species strike team with volunteers, agency and non government partners that will act as an early detection and rapid response network to eradicate, map and monitor emerging populations of invasive species. This project is New Jersey's first proactive effort toward invasive plant management.

Mount Grace Land Preservation Trust, MA, will conduct a bio-inventory and baseline to develop their first Forever Wild easement on a planned donation of 183 forested acres with regionally important biodiversity values and rare natural communities.

The tract is located within 1,000 acres of unfragmented forest. Grant funds will be used to match landowner contributions for administrative costs and for the development of the Forever Wild easement which will be used as a template for future projects.

Northern California Regional Land Trust, CA, will protect and enhance 7,130 acres of rangeland, farmland, riparian habitat, scenic open space and wildlife habitat in California that supports several federal and state at-risk species. This project will be used as a demonstration to educate ranchers about agricultural easements to help generate additional environmentally sensitive working land protection projects in the area. Grant funds will be used to develop a long-term adaptive habitat management and restoration plan for the property that will be ecologically and agriculturally sustainable.

New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC), NM, will develop a conservation plan for riparian and wetland habitats along the southern portion of the Rio Grande River and the surrounding grasslands. This region has been identified as a priority in a number of state and regional conservation plans, but no specific plan or strategy exists yet that identifies areas in need of protection or restoration. NMLC will use the Living Lands grant to develop a GIS-based plan that will serve as a tool for land protection and parcel identification in this biologically significant yet under-protected area.



Riparian habitat along the Rio Grande

WILDLIFE VOLUNTEER CORPS PARTNERS WITH LAND CONSERVANCY OF WEST MICHIGAN—By *Melanie Good*

On an overcast morning in late July, 22 Defenders of Wildlife members donated their time, sweat and passion to help restore rare wildlife habitat in western Michigan. The Lambertson Lake Fen Preserve is a unique ecological jewel in Grand Rapids' city limits that provides rare fen habitat for imperiled box turtles, spotted turtles and several rare plants including the threatened small white lady's slipper. This preserve was donated in 1994 to the Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) to forever protect the habitat of the rare plants and animals that live there.



Volunteers remove invasive Buckthorn from the Lambertson Lake Fen

Unfortunately, the nearby urban environs and years of disturbance have resulted in degradation of the wetland and the many rare species that depend on it. Years ago, LCWM realized that preventing development was only the first step in preserving the conservation values on the land. Invasive species, in particular, can destroy wildlife habitat just as easily as a backhoe. In response, and with help from Defenders of Wildlife's Wildlife Volunteer Corps (WVC), LCWM organized a volunteer workday to help tackle an eradication effort of the wetland's greatest threat common

and glossy buckthorn. Buckthorn is a highly invasive woody plant that, left unchecked, forms monocultures that outcompete native plant species and habitats, the Conservancy has been

working for almost a decade to remove it.

The volunteers worked for four hours to clear a formidable stand of buckthorn from the preserve, clearing twice as much of the woody invader as expected. LCWM is grateful for this project because it not only brought in new volunteers to help with eradication efforts, but it also introduced the organization to a group of

local people who were largely unfamiliar with LCWM, some who lived right down the road! Many of the volunteers expressed interest in participating in future LCWM events hopefully opening the door to new education, restoration and even land protection opportunities in the region.

Melanie Good is the stewardship coordinator at the Land Conservancy of West Michigan. To learn more about the organization visit: www.naturenearby.org To learn more about Defenders' Wildlife Volunteer Corps or to request volunteers for a project, visit: www.defenders.org/take_action/wvc

STIMULUS FUNDS OFFER RESTORATION OPPORTUNITIES

The American Recovery Investment Act of 2009 has provided up to \$1.4 billion in new funding to the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), creating new opportunities for habitat restoration on private lands. The FWS will distribute small grants of up to \$25,000 to land trusts and other conservation organizations for habitat restoration projects that will benefit threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, inter-jurisdictional fish and species of international conservation concern (i.e. Federal Trust species). Grants will be issued through the FWS Coastal Program and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Under both programs, funds must support habitat restoration projects in high-priority wetlands, uplands and riparian habitats, that will directly benefit Federal Trust species. Matching dollars of up to 50 percent of the project cost are



Coastal Marsh Restoration Photo Courtesy USFWS

not required but highly encouraged. Interested applicants should contact their local Coastal Program or Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program coordinator for information about eligibility, funding and technical assistance opportunities.

Time is limited as the application deadline is September 30, 2009.

A listing of all Coastal Program coordinators is available at: <http://www.fws.gov/coastal> and of all Partners for Fish and Wildlife coordinators at <http://www.fws.gov/partners/>.

To access the grant application and announcement for the Coastal Program, visit: <http://bit.ly/CYG3s> and for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program visit: <http://bit.ly/6PWE2>

TWO LAND TRUSTS DEVELOP STRATEGIC CONSERVATION PLANS

Defenders of Wildlife, in partnership with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program, recently hosted the first of a series of strategic planning and partnership workshops for two land trusts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed – the Lower Shore Land Trust in eastern Maryland and the Capital Region Land Conservancy in central Virginia.

Over a three-day workshop, each land trust developed a strategic land protection plan for their region. The process was driven by land trust board and staff with guidance from a wide range of experts and stakeholders including state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, scientists and landowners among many others. Because the process incorporated perspectives from the full diversity of stakeholders and outside experts, the resulting plans not only reflected the highest biodiversity priorities for each region, but also the unique cultural values that deserve protection. GIS professionals from Defenders and West Virginia University

worked busily behind the scenes to map and prioritize the criteria outlined by each group to produce a series of prioritized maps highlighting the most important lands to protect.



CRLC workshop

Photo courtesy of Aimee Weldon

Mapping and planning activities were complemented by training on a variety of conservation topics of relevance to plan development and implementation. Topics included managing land under climate change, accessing the federal farm bill, communicating with local communities and using green infrastructure to set priorities.

In the next phase of the workshop series, participating land trusts will receive professional assistance in developing a long-term financing and implementation strategy for their plans as well as small grants to catalyze implementation. Stay tuned for further updates.

This project is supported through grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Biophilia Foundation.

FARM BILL UPDATE: CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM NOW OPEN!

The first farmer sign up period for the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is officially open as of August 10, 2009. The CSP makes payments to farmers for maintaining existing conservation practices and for adopting additional practices on agricultural and non-industrial private forestland. This is the only Farm Bill program that rewards landowners for the good work that they are already doing *while* incentivizing additional improvements.

CSP targets practices that conserve or improve soil, water, air, energy, biodiversity and wildlife habitat as well as that sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gasses. Among the more than 70 activities covered are prairie restoration, pollinator habitat, cover cropping, rotational grazing, organic cropping and a variety of nutrient management and water and energy conservation techniques.

Any agricultural landowner that meets some basic eligibility requirements can apply, presenting a great opportunity for land trusts to reach out to landowners to inform them of this opportunity and to connect them with staff at the

Natural Resource Conservation Service. Becoming a resource on the Farm Bill is another service that land trusts can provide to their communities that builds relationships while increasing the landscape quality of the region.

Application Details

CSP applicants must demonstrate that they are already addressing at least one priority resource concern and that they will address at least one additional concern during the five-year contract period.

CSP payment rates are expected to average \$18 per acre nationwide but this rate will vary by land type and the environmental benefits of each contract. Payments will be made in the fall of each year beginning in 2010.

The application period is open until September 30, 2009 and farmers nationwide can submit applications at their Natural Resource Conservation District offices.

To learn more about CSP visit: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html or contact Aimee Weldon at 202-772-3265.



Pollinator habitat

Photo Courtesy of NRCS

JOIN US AT RALLY!



Join us again for the biodiversity track at Rally this October 11, to 14. Defenders and many partners have teamed to provide a suite of basic to advanced wildlife and habitat conservation workshops that we hope you will find useful to your work. Below is a sampling of some of the sessions in the tract:

A02- Working With the joint Ventures: Habitat Conservation Through Regional Partnerships Model will examine the Joint Venture model of successful landscape-scale habitat restoration including creative use of major funding sources.

B01- Local Action To Implement State Wildlife Action Plans will discuss the benefits of partnering to

Jersey.

B02- Conserving Land In A Climate Changed World will focus on climate change is impacting our natural world and how land trusts can begin to make strategic land protection and management decisions to address it.

E11- Understanding And Accessing Ecosystem Service Markets will provide background on ecosystem service markets, current status of efforts across the U.S. and how land trusts can get involved.

E24-Online Mapping Tools for Land Trusts: will acquaint

implement State Wildlife Action Plans and how such a partnership led to new conservation opportunities for groups in New

participants with a variety of free online mapping tools. For GIS and

facebook



Living Lands is Now on Facebook!

Well, we've done it. Living Lands has officially jumped on the social networking bandwagon with the launch of our new Facebook fan page!

The fan page will allow us to more quickly disseminate grant and technical assistance opportunities, share land trust stories and case studies. It will also serve as a discussion forum for land trusts to share experiences and ask questions of Defenders staff and other land trust peers on a variety of topics. Become fan today at

<http://bit.ly/40jM4>

and be instantly connected with a community of other land trusts and partners engaging in habitat conservation.

Living Lands—Helping Land Trusts Conserve Biodiversity

Living Lands is a Defenders of Wildlife project to support the work of local land trusts interested in protecting, enhancing and restoring native wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

Funded through generous support from the Biophilia Foundation, 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 habitats for long-term benefits. We also help land trusts secure funding for projects that benefit wildlife and habitat.

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



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.

Contact: Aimee Weldon

Telephone:

202.682.9400, ext. 165

E-mail:

livinglands@defenders.org

Web site:

www.defenders.org/livinglands