

IDNR Announces Spring 2019 Habitat Fund Project Grants

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SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) today announced the approval of more than \$1.9 million in grants for 13 wildlife habitat projects through the Illinois Habitat Fund Special Wildlife Funds Grant Program.

The program provides for enhancing game and non-game wildlife habitat through projects developed by not-for-profit organizations and governmental entities. Funding for the Illinois Habitat Fund Special Wildlife Funds Grant Program comes from the sale of Habitat Stamps to sportsmen and sportswomen.

The Illinois Habitat Fund Advisory Committee this spring approved \$1,941,000 in funding for the 13 projects, which are outlined below.

- National Wild Turkey Federation – A project to hire a habitat forester and provide funds for the local landowner incentive program 75% PLUS 10% for completed habitat improvements, expected to improve 2,000 acres at an average incentive of \$130 per acre in the counties of Jo Daviess, Stephenson Winnebago, Carroll, Union, Johnson, Pope, Hardin, Alexander, Pulaski, and Massac and the Kaskaskia and Illinois River valleys. \$409,999 in state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$480,805 in matching funds. <http://www.nwtf.org/about/state/illinois>
- Quail and Upland Game Alliance – A project statewide on private landowner and state lands to setback woody succession and brushy cover along field edges to provide more grassland habitat suitable for grassland birds. \$49,500 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$15,000 in matching funds. <http://quga.org/>
- Forest Preserve District of Will County (FPDWC) at Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve– This project will fund habitat restoration activities such as controlling non-native invasive species, the thinning of understory trees, over-seeding steep slopes

around ravines for erosion control, thinning native shrubs and performing prescribed burns to renew these natural areas. \$112,500 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$150,120 in matching funds. <https://www.reconnectwithnature.org/preserves-trails/preserves/goodenow-grove>

- Quail and Upland Game Alliance – A statewide project (but with a focus on southern Illinois) to convert more than 600 acres from fescue and brome grasses and replace it with high quality habitat for all upland game and non-game species. They will be planting prairie grasses and forbs on these acres that will have a diverse mix of all three blooming periods and at least one milkweed. This project's results will replace very poor habitat with a prairie landscape beneficial to quail, turkeys, deer, pheasants and grassland birds. The flowers blooming in all three seasons will benefit pollinator insects and the milkweed will benefit the Monarch butterfly. Priority will be given to areas that have public access. \$175,824 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$62,160 in matching funds. <http://quga.org/>

- National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC) Habitat Strike Team, East Alton, IL, Lewis and Clark Community College – A project to extend the equipment capacity and personnel capabilities of the NGRREC Habitat Strike Team to restore and improve habitat with stewardship management practices across 8,000 acres of the Great Rivers Confluence area within a 90-mile radius from East Alton, Illinois. This habitat stewardship area has five state parks and three nature preserves. \$283,632 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$300,442 in matching funds. <http://www.ngrrec.org/>

- Quail and Upland Game Alliance – A project to buy a Truax No-Till Planter for planting prairie grass seed and forbs in habitat restoration areas in the Grand Prairie Conservation Area. This 10-ft. Truax No-Till Drill will be used by the Logan County QUGA Chapter Habitat team in the Grand Prairie Natural Division Focus Conservation Area for habitat restoration, performing prairie restoration for private and public lands, replacing an old drill planter purchased in 2004 that has planted more than 10,000 acres. QUGA currently works with USDA and Soil and Water Conservation District field office personnel and landowners to promote and establish their conservation programs. The Logan County QUGA chapter averages planting more than 600 acres per year and is providing the matching funds. The drill will be used in Logan, Menard, Mason, Cass, McLean, DeWitt, Sangamon and other surrounding counties, and will help to restore native prairie grasses and forbs. \$25,694 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$9,085 in matching funds. <http://quga.org/>

- Clifftop NFP – A project to purchase a fire suppression pump skid unit to assist in the safety of the prescribed burns of nature preserve areas in Monroe, Randolph, and St. Clair counties. Clifftop conducts prescribed burns at White Rock Nature Preserve (306

acres) and Land and Water Reserve (169 acres) routinely, among others. Of the 535 acres included in the site, every year a third of the prairies and woodland will be burned. Prescribed burns help control several invasive species, including bush honeysuckle, Japanese honeysuckle, and Tree of Heaven and will prevent the establishment of woody species in the blufftop area prairies. \$10,500 of state Habitat funds were awarded.

<http://www.clifftopalliance.org/>

- Ducks Unlimited Inc. – A project that funds restoration of wetlands in at least six sites identified with private landowners in Marshall, Woodford, Adams, and Pike counties. \$224,630 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$58,339 in matching funds. <https://www.ducks.org/>

- Quail and Upland Game Alliance – A project to buy an updated tractor, replacing an older tractor that is primarily used by the Habitat Specialist working with private landowners on habitat restoration programs for planting prairie grass seed and forbs in habitat restoration areas. The tractor is used in counties south of I-70, primarily used in the Southern Till Plain natural division, is stored in Sesser, Illinois, will be used by the Habitat Specialist, and will also be available for habitat restoration use by the public upon request. \$44,980 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$20,145 in matching funds. <http://quga.org/>

- Pheasants Forever – A project to hire a fulltime, two-year term wetland biologist position to help manage the project “Creating Habitat Diversity in Northeast Illinois,” which will restore approximately 20 wetland basins totaling approximately 100 acres of wetland restoration. This position will help manage existing projects in Ford, Iroquois, Will, Champaign, Livingston, Kankakee, Vermillion, Grundy, Kendall, and LaSalle counties, and seek out additional projects with landowners and resource professionals within the project area. This wetland biologist position will serve as a local contact to be onsite with contractors and will search for field tiles, assist with construction management, seeding and as-built surveys. The biologist hired for this position will also monitor vegetation to ensure invasive species are controlled. During storm events, or predicted storm events, the wetland biologist can more readily assist landowners to avoid levee failures and help pull boards out of structures if a historic storm is predicted. The wetland biologist will be an additive value to the PFW biologists who are conducting the survey, designing, and monitoring. \$143,970.27 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$20,000 in matching funds.

<https://pheasantsforever.org/>

- Shawnee RC&D - The Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development Area Inc. (RC&D), River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), IDNR, and Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA) are partnering to reduce the threat of invasive species invasions from the surrounding private properties. This

partnership seeks to provide landowner cost-share assistance on approximately 200 acres of privately-owned forestland infested with bush honeysuckle surrounding the Trail of Tears State Forest. The RC&D will use their existing CWMA coordinator, an invasive species specialist, to implement the project plans for outreach, surveys, monitoring, determining priority treatments sites and methods, landowner contacts, prescribed burn plans, and cost-share administration within the Trail of Tears Forest Stewardship Cluster. Land surveys of bush honeysuckle infestations will be conducted by the CWMA to determine actual levels of infestation on each property. A conservation drone will be used to acquire aerial images to be used for infestation assessments. After the assessments are completed, the coordinator will develop treatment agreements with each landowner to be scheduled for the late fall and winter of 2019 and 2020. Landowner outreach will include density determinations for cost-share rates. Landowners will be personally contacted and offered opportunities to learn more about forest management, develop forest management plans, and given the opportunity to manage their forest land at a landscape-level. During the winter of 2021, a landowner outreach and education day will be scheduled to teach how to properly identify bush honeysuckle on their property but also promote current cost-share programs already in place and available. On the same day, landowners will be encouraged to participate in a bush honeysuckle pull within the state forest in an area designated by a district forester that is being actively managed. Trail of Tears State Forest is open to the public for hunting and recreation with more than 5,000 acres of high-quality forest. The proposed 200 acres surrounding the state forest are on private land and are not open to the public. \$38,133.75 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$10,000 in matching funds. <http://shawneercd.org/>

- U.S. Forest Service at Shawnee – A project to boost the Shawnee Forest Strike Team – this project would provide a larger, interagency strike team crew for the Shawnee National Forest. Funding would primarily be used for additional field crewmembers to join an established crew and most of the requested funds will translate directly to more treatments on the ground. The project will extend one permanent employee from 6 months per year to 11.5 months per year, add two six-month positions, and add two other new employees, all to construct fire lines, do burns, remove exotic species, purchase new chainsaws and maintain equipment. \$192,006 of state Habitat funds were awarded, with the grantee providing \$293,860 in matching funds. <https://www.facebook.com/shawneenatlforest>

- Shawnee RC& D - The Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development Area Inc. (RC&D), along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW), U.S Forest Service (USFS), IDNR, River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA), University of Illinois (U of I), Pope County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), Forest Restoration Support Team (FRST), National Wild Turkey Federation

(NWF), and several private landowners are working together in order to enhance and recover the historical upland oak-hickory forest ecosystem. Current forest conditions harbor a nearly closed tree canopy, which discourages oak recruitment and the growth of wildflowers and grasses on the forest floor. Opening up the tree canopy allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor to help sustain pollinators, songbirds, and wildlife that depend on these wildflowers and native grasses. It is expected that improving this habitat will benefit state/federal threatened and endangered species, species of concern, migratory birds, and pollinators, as well as, improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, and lessen the risk of wildfire for the surrounding communities. The resources made available through this grant will go toward restoration activities such as removing undesirable and invasive vegetation (mechanical removal and chemical application), forest stand improvement following the recommendations in each landowner's unique Forest Management Plan (FMP), the creation of fire breaks, and prescribed fire. The sites they have identified are on private land, enrolled in the Illinois Forestry Development Act (FDA) program, and are located within two separate Conservation Opportunity Areas as described in the IDNR Wildlife Action Plan: LaRue – Pine Hills and Eastern Shawnee. A land selection prioritizing process, developed by the CWMA and various partners, will be used to identify high quality habitat sites in strategic locations. The prioritization ranking process considers if a property is privately owned, if the parcel is touching publicly owned/managed land, if a threatened or endangered species has been documented onsite, and if the property is already enrolled in the FDA program. The project was awarded \$230,200.00 in Habitat funds to restore approximately 1,500 to 2,250 acres, with the grantee providing \$118,687.35 in matching funds.