

ENDANGERED SPECIES RECOVERY ON MILITARY LANDS

THE ISSUE

Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), military bases have a responsibility in the recovery of endangered species that may also restrict training activities in areas of important habitat. In many cases the military's mission of training soldiers for battle is challenged and training opportunities lost. Several installations with service-wide strategic training missions are faced with restrictions that result in reduced training capability.



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missions are faced with restrictions that result in reduced training capability.

SOLUTIONS

This challenge is being met with an innovative program being tested on private lands near Fort Hood. The Texas Watershed Management Foundation has teamed up with scientists at Texas A&M to develop and test an endangered species Recovery Credit System (RCS). An RCS program can be used to offset the temporary modification to the habitat for use by infantry brigades with 25 year recovery credits from offsite contracts with private landowners. The program is funded by the Department of Defense, USDA, and private foundations. In partnership with Fort Hood, Environmental Defense Fund and several state agencies in Texas, the program has been successfully established as a proof-of-concept. Through incentive contracts with private landowners, the program has already secured over 1,400 acres of habitat for the endangered golden-cheeked warbler.

HOW IT WORKS

By conserving and enhancing habitat on private lands, the program generates recovery credits. This makes possible a market-based system for landowners to conserve and improve endangered species habitats in return for financial assistance for land management and annual rent payments. As credits accumulate, Fort Hood gains greater training flexibility and protection against future loss of training time should they experience habitat loss on their training grounds. In addition, this tool simplifies administrative actions by creating a

consistent process for implementing the Army's obligations under the ESA.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

At the end of this 3 year proof of concept, 20 landowners with 13,858 acres in Bell, Bosque, and Coryell counties were enrolled in the Recover Credit System.

- Total Investment to Date: \$1,954,666
- Landowner Cost Share: \$451,295
- Area Under Contract (\$141/ac): 13,782 acres
- Existing Occupied GCWA Habitat under contract (\$888/ac): 2,201 acres
- Contract Length: 10-25 years*
- Cost for similar impact under alternative method : \$16.5 Million

*Note: 50% of contracts are for 25 years.



THIRD PARTY REVIEW

An independent evaluation team from Robertson Consulting Group, Inc. was designated in 2009 to provide a 3rd party review of the RCS. The evaluation included a peer review panel of three independent scientists, evaluation of all successful and unsuccessful landowner bids, review of program documents, habitat assessments on 8 contracted sites, 17 interviews with participating landowners, and 24 interviews with program operators, military personnel, and other stakeholders. The review focused on 7 questions and generated 3 levels of recommendations: the RCS may be applied in other locations or for other species; the RCS as applied to the golden-cheeked warbler; and for the proof of concept applied at Fort Hood Military Reservation. The review concluded the RCS demonstrated its viability to create a market mechanism for trading credits, engaging landowners, and increasing competitiveness.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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