

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT MONTHLY REPORT

March 21, 2021 to April 20, 2021

Jason Hearon, Bureau Chief
Lisa Carben, Senior Management Assistant
Melissa Woerner, Habitat Planner
Tyler Kinney, Habitat Planner

HABITAT PLANNING

Melissa Woerner

Northern Region

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner conducted a field visit to the South Branch Wildlife Management Area (WMA). A silo on the WMA is proposed for demolition along with some other buildings but has a barn owl box on it. With the help of the Endangered and Non-Game Species Program's (ENSP) Bill Pitts, it was confirmed that there were no conflicts with threatened and endangered species currently using the box. Three mourning dove chicks were present.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner met with a farmer at the Merck Tract to discuss upcoming in-kind work. The power line towers are in the process of being replaced with a wide access road going through multiple fields. It was decided to postpone planting native warm season grass in one of the fields until the power line replacement was completed.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner placed a hold on three dates in August for the northern farm lease auction that is being held at the Pequest WMA. The auction may need to be held outside due to Covid19 indoor gathering restrictions.

Central Region

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner conducted the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th (and final) round of barred owl surveys at the Colliers Mills WMA. Barred owls were recorded at 10 out of 18 survey points. Surveys were conducted in preparation for an upcoming Atlantic White Cedar restoration project.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner met with farm services contractor Carly Creamer to evaluate fields for planting at the Assunpink WMA. Carly provided a quote for field preparation and broadcast seeding of approximately 90 acres of fields. Fields will be planted with seed mixes that will serve as wildlife food plots, as well as prepare the fields for to be included in the next round of farm leases. A Preserve New Jersey (PNJ) funding request and purchase order was submitted for the work.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner placed a hold on three dates in August for the central farm lease auction that is being held at the Assunpink WMA. The auction may need to be held outside due to Covid19 indoor gathering restrictions.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner renewed efforts to assemble an internal stakeholder group for the Greenwood WMA Forest Stewardship Plan.

All Regions/Miscellaneous

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner presented on three Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) wetlands restoration projects for the third session of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) wetlands seminar. A summary of the Hyperhumus wetlands restoration at the Paulinskill River WMA, impoundment restoration at the Manahawkin WMA, and the Pond Creek Marsh restoration project at the Higbee Beach WMA were presented.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner attended a planning meeting and dry run virtual meeting in preparation for the seminar.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner attended the internal DEP meeting and separate public meeting for the Coastal Ecological Restoration and Adaptation Plan (CERAP). Several DFW coastal restoration projects were entered into the CERAP project nomination form online.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner attended a virtual meeting for DEP's Invasive Species Team. Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner will also be serving as a DFW representative for the steering committee.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner participated in the kickoff meeting for the Barnegat Bay Partnership Wetlands Working Group.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner gave a presentation of the Pond Creek Marsh Restoration project at the Higbee Beach WMA to the Fish and Game Council.

Habitat Planner Melissa Woerner attended the virtual meeting of the New Jersey Chapter of The Wildlife Society, attending talks on forest habitat management and the New Jersey State Forest Action Plan.

Tyler Kinney

Southern Region

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney updated southern region habitat management GIS shapefiles to reflect 2021 spring planting operations.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney applied for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grant. Funding would assist in the construction of a new boat ramp at Jake's Landing located in the Dennis Creek WMA.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney placed a purchase order and saw the delivery of 220 bags of 10-10-10 fertilizer and 12 tons of lime, to be spread in the new fields in the Winslow WMA. Fields will be planted in spring with forage/cover mix.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney is working with contracted foresters to complete draft management prescriptions for the Lenape Forest Stewardship Plan. The Atlantic white-cedar restoration planned for this tract is on hold due to timing restrictions. The forester intends to move forward with this work, plus additional forestry mowing, after timing restrictions lift on July 15th.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney met with Regional Superintended Nathan Figley and the Gloucester County Sportsmen Federation to discuss spring planting in the Winslow WMA.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney met with Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) and Rutgers University regarding the 070 Habitat Monitoring contract. OLA provided clarity to Rutgers on how the 070 contract is structured. With OLA approval, slight adjustments will be made to the contract template. We are awaiting word from Rutgers signatory to see if this alleviates their concerns.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney created several maps for upcoming activities at the Menantico Ponds WMA, including an event map for the Green Acres (GA) press event and contractor maps for the removal of brush piles.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney is in touch with the Department of Treasury regarding a re-solicitation of the DEP T2931 Farm Services Contract. Treasury indicated that a re-solicitation may occur as early as June.

All Regions

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney will be attending the upcoming 76th Northeast Annual Fish and Wildlife Association (NEAFWA) conference from a virtual setting. A travel request was submitted.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney attended a "Ecological Forestry for Migratory Birds" Webinar. Information was shared regarding how forestry can have positive impacts on migratory birds.

Habitat Planner Tyler Kinney presented habitat management regimes in the Tuckahoe WMA coastal impoundments at the DEP Wetlands Seminar.

NORTHERN REGION

Susan Predl, Regional Superintendent
Jim Hartobey, Crew Supervisor
Christopher Murphy, Crew Supervisor

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl met with GA staff at a potential property acquisition bordering the Buckhorn Creek WMA to confirm which buildings and building remnants the Division would want to see removed prior to acquisition. Regional Superintendent Susan Predl also met GA staff at a site along the Capoolong Creek WMA to see if it would provide parking and river access. The site owned by the Township would not be suitable for that purpose. Another potential acquisition adjoining the Musconetcong River WMA was viewed to determine if the Division would need or want road access for maintenance or emergency access and what that access would mean in terms of property value and public access.

Land Management staff continued stocking trout every day through April 8th.

WMA fields were mowed on trout stocking days, as time allowed after runs.

Two Special Use Permits were issued to the Appalachian Bowmen of Sussex County. One permit was issued for the Annual Spring 3-D shoot, when the Executive Order raised the outdoor gathering limit to 200 people. No camping was permitted at this event this year. Another permit was issued to the Appalachian Bowmen of Sussex County allowing for three days of mowing Whittingham WMA fields and two days for placing the targets in the WMA fields.

One Special Use Permit application for a running event with approximately 200 participants through the Ken Lockwood Gorge WMA during trout fishing season was denied.

Land Management staff met with Assistant Director Lisa Barno at the Clinton WMA to show her the new sinkholes that had opened in the fields. Land Management staff also drove through the Ken Lockwood Gorge WMA with Assistant Director Barno to view sections of the road that had eroded into the river. After a conference call with Law Enforcement, all agreed that the road to the middle parking lot (accessed from the north) would be closed to public parking, indefinitely. The spring stocking locations will be adjusted in the future, as needed.

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl met with Musconetcong Watershed Association staff to look at a trail that they propose to construct along both sides of the Musconetcong River between Asbury and Shurts Roads. Several foot bridges are proposed for crossing wet areas. The Musconetcong Watershed Association is applying for the appropriate Land Use Permits. DFW would not be opposed to the trail, as it would provide access to the river for fishermen.

Complaints of litter, graffiti and a broken bench at the Wildcat Ridge WMA were investigated. Garbage was picked up. The graffiti is in a location that would require professional climbing gear to access, so the graffiti was not painted over. Volunteers who staff the hawk watch at Wildcat Ridge offered to repair the broken bench at that location.

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl viewed the prescribed burn at the Pequest WMA. Besides the removal of leaf litter that could fuel an uncontrolled burn, the prescribed burn will remove some invasive plant species in the understory and create conditions for a healthier forest.

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl met with the Bureau of Law Enforcement (BLE) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff at the Belvidere boat ramp. Law Enforcement is proposing a split rail fence be constructed to prevent haphazard parking that leads to cars being blocked in. A secondary entrance to the Belvidere boat ramp will also be closed off.

An uncontrolled burn occurred at the Beaver Brook WMA. New Jersey Forest Fire Service (NJFFS) responded and was able to restrict the burn to one field. Division staff will take advantage of these field conditions to plant warm season grasses at this site.

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl attended a meeting at the Kenco site located in the Pequest WMA. This 90-acre tract was a sod farm that has been restored to wetland habitat. In stream options for improving fish habitat were discussed.

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl took pictures of a house at the South Branch WMA that might be put on the demolition list. ENSP was contacted to determine if endangered or threatened species were using the silo or the nest box on the silo before the request for demolition is submitted. A clogged grate in a pond on the Merck tract of the South Branch WMA was cleared of debris. Attempts were made to locate a concrete property corner marker, so that the location of a family plot could be marked. The family cemetery was excluded from acquisition when the Division acquired this land. An inquiry was received from the family as to who has responsibility for maintaining the cemetery.

Regional Superintendent Susan Predl participated in a conference call with ENSP staff regarding a Department of Transportation (DOT) bridge replacement project along Route 206 in the Flatbrook WMA. Land Management has no concerns with the bridge replacement nor with maintaining travel corridors for threatened and endangered species. There is ample fishing access to the Flatbrook River both north and south of the Route 206 bridge.

CENTRAL REGION

Pete Winkler, Regional Superintendent
Mike Haines, Crew Supervisor Equipment Operations
Bill Torry, Crew Supervisor WMAs

The Stafford Forge and Colliers Mills rifle, and shotgun range upgrades have been completed. They were opened on 3/22/2021. Upgrades include new covered shooting stations, parking access and handicap access.

Staff continue to issue Field Trial and Special Use Permits consistent with the latest State issued Covid-19 related Executive Orders.

Crews continue to work on 3 CBT-M access projects to improve parking areas, ramps and roads at Swan Bay, Manahawkin, and Great Bay Blvd. WMAs.

Field creation was completed at the Stafford Forge WMA.

Crews are working with the NJFFS to prepare areas for prescribed burning and conducting prescribed burns. Due to the wet field conditions areas that cannot be burned will be mowed.

Crews continue stocking trout following the condensed stocking plan.

Coordinating with BLE, staff are cleaning up many illegal dumping incidents within the Central Region WMAs.

Regional Superintendent Pete Winkler and Bureau Chief Jason Hearon attended the public meeting for the Central Jersey Rifle and Pistol Club land swap public meeting.

Regional Superintendent Pete Winkler attended 3 NJDEP Solar Siting working group meetings.

The following groups and activities utilized the Assunpink Conservation Center and the Central Office Meeting Room during this reporting period:

NA – COVID 19

SOUTHERN REGION

Nathan Figley, Regional Superintendent
Brad Heffley, Crew Supervisor
Dan Baker, Crew Supervisor
Mason Reeves, Crew Supervisor

Southern region crews have continued performing routine trash clean-up at boat ramps, shooting ranges, and other high use WMAs.

The Sheppard's Mill boating/fishing access is complete, a new WMA is being made and will be installed to cap off the project.

The Road Crew completed work at the DOD Ponds WMA. In addition to grading roads and parking areas, they worked with BLE to strategically place material to make patrolling the area easier and reduce illegal activities.

The Road Crew have moved on to the Tuckahoe WMA and are expected to be here for 2-3 weeks, during which time they will grade the roads, dikes, and boat ramps in the Corbin City, Tuckahoe, and Lenape Farms Sections. Upon completion they will move to Lake Audrey.

Hunter Training Ranges: A concrete parking pad and shooting lane was installed at the Winslow WMA. All archery ranges in the southern region now have one shooting lane accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The deteriorating split rail fence was replaced with guard rail at the Tuckahoe WMA range. The next range project will be to improve the parking areas. Crushed concrete or DGA will be placed in the parking areas of Winslow, Millville, and Tuckahoe WMAs.

Staff met with a paving contractor to discuss the possibility of paving or tar and chipping the Millville Range. The contractor did not feel it would be a good fit for the location and that crushed concrete or stone would be better suited.

Staff met with a paving contractor at the Holly Farm, Menantico Ponds, Jakes Landing, and Millville WMAs to discuss road improvement options.

Staff continue to issue Field Trial and Special Use Permits consistent with the latest State issued Covid-19 related Executive Orders.

Staff continue to prepare fields for planting. Seed has arrived and was distributed among the three crews.

Staff completed trout stocking.

Senior Repairer Jeff Wettstein constructed two new garbage can holders and refurbished two older can holders for Higbee Beach WMA. One receptacle was burned along with portable toilets in this area. He also made repairs to the observation platform.

The Harrisonville Lake dam water control structure hydraulic system was repaired, and a new hasp and lock were installed on the control box.

Staff unloaded and temporarily placed blinds to be used for the R3 Managed Waterfowl Hunt at the Tuckahoe WMA. Blinds will be installed to floating docks and placed in the impoundments.

Meetings Attended: BLM Staff Weekly, BLM/BLE monthly, Holly Farm Architect, GA/BLM, Cumberland County Federation Meeting, State Federation Game Committee meeting

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SECTION

LAND ACQUISITIONS

Lisa Carben, Senior Management Assistant

Nothing to report this period.