

RGS Biological Program: The 2009 Annual Report Summary

Our biologists continued to be a crucial voice for RGS this year by providing their expertise to the state and federal national resource agencies, the media, our members and the general public. Their work as successful fundraisers for habitat projects has enabled RGS to extend our area of influence in 2009. Several of their most critical accomplishments at the national and state level are detailed below.

This list is a brief summary – for a more complete list please contact your regional biologist.

National/Regional Level Activities:

Media

Biological expertise was provided at the 2009 SHOT Show and the RGS National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt, as well as many various regional events.

RGS was represented at meetings for industry leaders: including the US Forest Service, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Lake States Resource Alliance, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association among others. Work was also completed on the Woodcock Initiative.

Along with participation in numerous media, television and radio interviews, RGS biologists served as expert resources for many newspaper and magazine articles in various publications throughout the year, resulting in a greater outreach of the RGS mission.

Habitat Work and Funds Raised

A combined total of \$359,000 in gifts and grants was raised for RGS habitat work in 2009, not including funds raised for projects occurring in Alaska.

Revised state maps, illustrating the locations of RGS habitat projects and the number of acres affected by projects, were provided at every banquet.

RGS habitat equipment was used to create grouse and woodcock habitat on 13,504 acres of land throughout the Midwest and Northeast.

Membership Interaction

Regional quarterly FAN (Forest Action Network) newsletters were e-mailed to members, and continue to be available on the website.

The 2009 regional grouse and woodcock forecasts were completed and available on our website this past July.

The biologists helped staff numerous chapter banquets and events throughout the regions, and provided biological expertise and presentations where appropriate.

Each biologist also responded on an individual basis to member and public inquiries for information, and provided consultations to private landowners.

Alaska

The Outdoor Heritage Foundation (OHF) for Grouse Ridge Rangers held an annual youth hunter safety and shotgun training program again this year and raised

\$6,000. The OHF for the Rabbit Creek Range held a similar event, and raised \$5,000. The event offered hunter safety training as well as sporting clays exercises.

A "Becoming an Outdoors Woman" RGS event helped to introduce participants to the outdoor lifestyle.

Under Broken Wings held another local pheasant hunt for youth this year and raised \$4,000.

The annual fun shoot raised over \$2,000 this year, and included sporting clays, raffles and lunch.

The Anchorage chapter provided financial support for the study being done by Alaska Pacific University and the University of Alaska regarding the transplanting of ruffed grouse in the Matanuska Valley. This is the second year they have provided a scholarship of \$2,000 to a biology graduate student.

A total of \$22,000 was raised in Alaska this year.

Georgia

The North Georgia RGS chapter, in partnership with the Department of National Resources and US Forest Service, conducted an annual grouse drumming survey in northern Georgia in April of 2009.

Volunteers were engaged in project planning on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Several early successional habitat projects have been closely monitored by the North Georgia Chapter volunteers, meeting an important need in the conservation community.

Illinois

A coverts workshop was promoted in conjunction with the coverts Coordinator for Illinois residents with landholdings in Wisconsin.

Assistance with a local chapter's youth day event was provided, along with aiding in preparations for the annual chapter banquet.

Indiana

RGS volunteers have been a very vocal part of renewed interest in early successional habitat. They attended a series of meetings held by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to formulate a plan to address the severe lack of habitat and dramatically reduced grouse numbers in the state.

Steve Backs, the longtime game bird biologist for the DNR, wrote an excellent piece entitled "The Other Silent Spring – Disappearing Birds of Young Forests", which RGS printed and developed into a widely-distributed publication. The article continues to enjoy marked success and has been reprinted in many publications throughout the Northeast.

Iowa

RGS support for two ongoing habitat projects on state lands in northeast Iowa was coordinated.

A presentation was given at a private landowner workshop, which was coordinated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). RGS also participated in meetings with Iowa DNR foresters and Area Wildlife Managers.

Maryland

RGS continues to collaborate with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Wildlife Management Institute to implement a woodcock management project. The project will be at the Mt. Nebo Wildlife Management Area in memory of Al Geis. RGS, along with Geis' family and friends, will be overseeing the long-term project.

Michigan

RGS acquired a new ASV PT-100 forestry machine with mulcher, along with a truck and trailer for hauling the equipment. Along with members, RGS facilitated effective operation of machines on state and private land management projects.

Grants for RGS equipment acquisition and habitat work projects were secured.

RGS is involved in four ongoing habitat management projects in the state.

RGS was represented on the Coordinating Council for Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative and the Upper Peninsula Department of Natural Resources Habitat Work Group.

Six on-site private land habitat consultations were conducted.

RGS participated in numerous meetings related to habitat management with local governmental and non-governmental organizations related to habitat management.

Minnesota

RGS provided approximately \$9,000 in funding to restore important shrubland habitats on the Sax-Zim Wildlife Management Area near Eveleth.

A coalition of wildlife conservation organizations, including RGS, continued to work with the Department of Natural Resources on a \$3.8 million proposal to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council to expand shrubland habitats in north-central Minnesota.

RGS continued to interact with various county land departments to expand public understanding of the RGS mission, including efforts to reach private landowners with forestlands adjacent to county lands.

Missouri

Grants were secured for the financial support of the ongoing River Hills project, and payments to project cooperators were coordinated. Since the onset of the River Hills Project in 2003, \$190,000 has been raised to support young forest management activities on approximately 3,200 acres in the project area.

A chapter sponsored private landowner workshop was arranged, along with an annual chapter banquet.

Participated in meetings with state and federal representatives regarding habitat projects.

New Jersey

In conjunction with the New Jersey Early Successional Habitat Alliance RGS worked to advance management and monitoring of woodcock in the southern part of the state. RGS is taking on the role of coordinator for the BCR 30, the Mid-Atlantic Coast

component of the Woodcock Initiative under the auspices of the Wildlife Management Institute.

Chapters continued to take the lead on habitat management initiatives on public lands throughout the state, including the Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge, the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and most recently the Manahawkin Wildlife Management Area.

North Carolina

The Jerry Smathers Memorial Project at Cold Mountain State Game Lands continues to progress.

The Asheville Chapter, in conjunction with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, worked to complete a road project that provides access to hundreds of acres of forest. A 140-acre timber sale has been marked and is ready to be cut.

The Franklin Chapter worked with the US Forest Service to seed openings and trails with RGS Trail Mix. Volunteers and staff attended meetings and wrote letters to support timber and wildlife projects on the National Forests in the western part of the state.

Ohio

A second year of contract work to clear exotic shrubs from reclaimed mine lands in favor of native shrubs and grasses on the Wayne National Forest was completed. The total project will impact more than 800 acres.

The Cincinnati chapter funded a clover seeding project on the Shawnee State Forest.

Pennsylvania

RGS continued to oversee major projects throughout the state, including projects on game lands, state forests, Corps of Engineers land and private lands, and has impacted tens of thousands of acres.

RGS anticipates it will be managing forestlands owned by CONSOL Energy for grouse and woodcock habitat in southwestern Pennsylvania on two tracts of land totaling nearly 7,000 acres.

Grouse and woodcock habitat management is now approaching 2,000 acres at Raystown Lake. Two chapters combined funds to install another logging road at SGL 110 in Berks County, helping to extend an already large and lengthy project on that game lands.

Two timber sales have been let on the 2,300 acres where RGS was granted timber rights, and the cutting is intended to serve as a forest management model. Proceeds will go into the RUFF (Restoring Upland Forests' Future) endowment for the biologists.

Tennessee

A cooperative effort with the University of Tennessee is underway to improve education and research on oak management and prescribed burning. This includes RGS authoring a chapter focused on early successional oak forests in a manual aimed at private landowners who wish to maintain oak on their land.

RGS volunteers and staff continue to work proactively with the Forest Service to support timber and wildlife management projects on the Cherokee National Forest.

Virginia

Cooperative efforts with the George Washington National Forest staff and other public and private partners to develop the Wallace Tract Woodcock Project progressed this year. The project, which includes nearly 800 acres of land, will likely utilize a stewardship agreement where the value of harvested timber pays for other non-commercial habitat work adjacent to the Cowpasture River in Bath County.

A new chapter near Richmond has started planning grouse and woodcock educational workshops to be held in 2010.

West Virginia

RGS is working with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Monongahela National Forest to develop a stewardship agreement on the Buzkirk Tract near White Sulphur Springs. Timber value would be used to pay for additional non-commercial management such as pole-timber regeneration and seeding and day-lighting of roads.

RGS also signed a Master Stewardship Agreement with the Forest Service Regions 8 and 9, which will facilitate the supplemental agreements for forest specific projects.

In conjunction with the West Virginia DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, RGS continued a 72-acre alder and aspen management project on private lands adjacent to the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. An additional 15 to 20 acres of alder and aspen regeneration were completed in 2009, making the 10-year project about 25% complete.

Wisconsin

The acquisition of a new ASV PT-100 forestry machine with mulcher and a truck and trailer for hauling the equipment was coordinated. Operation of the machine on state and federal land management projects was planned, and future private land projects were organized with the help of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Grants were secured for equipment acquisition, habitat work projects and program support.

RGS conducted field reviews of nine existing or proposed Management Area Projects. RGS involvement in six ongoing habitat management projects and five on-site private land habitat consultations were coordinated.

RGS provided comments on proposals of numerous state and federal wildlife agencies, as well as attending many of the different organizations' meetings relating to habitat management.

Oral testimony at a Congressional Hearing on Forest Issues in Northern Wisconsin was presented by RGS. A Cost Share Agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for woodcock management work was finalized.

In partnership with federal and state agencies, RGS completed annual ruffed grouse drumming and breeding bird surveys.

Northeast Regional Report:

In 2009 RGS was in process of filling the open biologist position in the Northeast area. Biologist Andy Weik, woodcock biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in Maine, joined RGS in January, 2010. A detailed report of the states in his region –Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont – along with Canada, will be covered in entirety in next year's biological program annual report. Read more about Andy in the Ruffed Grouse Society magazine's Spring 2010 issue *Staff and Board Updates*.

RGS biologists are:

Mark Banker, Senior Regional Biologist, Southern Appalachians

Dan Dessecker, Director of Conservation Policy, Minnesota

Andrew Weik, Northeast Regional Biologist

Gary Zimmer, Sally B. Searle Senior Regional Biologist, Western Great Lakes

The Eastern Great Lakes biologist position is vacant at this time.