



MA Early Successional Habitat Project Grant Source: Wildlife Management Institute

BACKGROUND

Among early-successional habitats, grasslands in the northeastern United States have declined the most significantly in the past one hundred years. One study found that of those ecosystems in eastern North America that have been nearly wiped out (e.g., experienced greater than 98% decline) 55% are grassland communities. Few wildlife-friendly grassland communities exist in Massachusetts today. They have been mostly replaced by forest, intensive agriculture, or commercial or residential development. The grasslands that do remain are typically fragmented, isolated, and too small to be of significant use by many wildlife species. Populations of grassland birds adapted to agricultural landscapes are now diminishing as farmlands are left idle, revert to forests, or are replaced by housing and business developments.

By the 1800s, grasslands were widespread in the Northeast, as land was cleared for pastures and hayfields, and grassland birds undoubtedly benefited from this expanded habitat.

Historically, the large grasslands in the Northeast provided habitat for many grassland birds, particularly the Grasshopper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper, Eastern Meadowlark, and Bobolink. In the early 20th century, changes in agricultural technology, movement of farms to the west, and an increase in human population in the Northeast caused a decline in the quantity and quality of grasslands for wildlife.

LOCATION

Massachusetts

ISSUES BEING ADDRESSED

Most of the 664 acre Poland Brook WMA was used as a dairy farm prior to acquisition by Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife). Many of the farm fields are maintained either via mowing by MassWildlife personnel or via cooperative farm agreements with local farmers. However, for various reasons, many of the farm fields were left abandoned and had succeeded to young forest.

Approximately, twenty-five acres of these abandoned fields will be cleared of invading woody trees and shrubs. Most trees and shrubs except valuable food and cover producing plants (e.g., wild apple, cherry, serviceberry, blueberry, hawthorn and viburnum) will be mulched using a Brontosaurus or similar mechanical treatment (cutters/mulchers). Invasive exotic vegetation will be specifically targeted for removal (e.g., glossy buckthorn, Japanese barberry, bush honeysuckles, etc.).

OBJECTIVES

1. Restore approximately 25 acres of early-successional habitat on the Poland Brook WMA.
2. Create brood habitat for wild turkeys and habitat for grassland bird species such as Song Sparrows, Bobolinks, American Woodcock and Eastern Meadowlarks. Ruffed grouse will also benefit from the project.
3. Increase awareness of the need for early-successional habitat through a media event hosted at the Poland Brook WMA during project activities.

PARTNERS

NWTF

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

FUTURE PLANS

Project is just starting.

TIMEFRAME

Project Start Date:

August 2007

Project End Date:

October 2008