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Northeast Regional Conservation Quarterly Report

Grant Number: 2007-07

Grant Title: Proposal to Establish a Regional Initiative for Biomass Energy Development for Early Successional SGCNs in the Northeast

Grant Receipt: 6/11/2008

Grant Contact Name: Scott Klopfer

Report #: 2009-01

Were planned goals/objectives achieved last quarter?

Progress was made on all objectives.

Objective 1 - ongoing. We continue to identify opportunities to speak with constituents within State agencies and non-governmental organizations. The interest in participating in this effort has been lower than expected. This is likely due to the lack of knowledge related to how biomass plantings will be placed on the landscape and a hesitation on the part of biologists to advocate it without hard-data to suggest it will be beneficial.

Objective 2 – complete. The website is operational and is populated with information. We are continuing to update references to news items, facilities, etc.

Objective 3 – complete. The website has a map capability that shows biomass refineries on the landscape (planned or operational). It also allows other users to add refineries.

Objective 4 – ongoing. This process is nearly completed. We have taken lists of SGCNs for each of the Northeast states and consolidated them into a single regional list. Preliminary evaluations of all potential biomass application/impacts have been completed and are now under review.

Objective 5 – ongoing. Will be synthesized once the SGCN relationships have completed review.

Objective 6 – not initiated. Once the other objectives have been met, we will be able to package the information by state and post this to the website.

Regional Conservation Need Addressed: Regional Landscape-level habitat initiatives

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Progress Achieved:

1. Build a coalition of organizations and individuals working in each state in the Northeast (at least one group per state)

We have been participating in meetings to introduce the initiative and to enlist state biologists and managers in assisting with the initiative. We provided a presentation to the NE Habitat Technical Committee (by invitation) meeting. We now have individuals contacted and interested in further participation from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and Virginia.

We are presently identifying organizations and companies within each state that list biomass production interests as a primary objective of their mission. We are building a database of these companies and making initial contacts with them via phone or email.

2. Create Internet site to serve participant database, relevant materials, and communications

The Internet site is operational and is available at http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/nebiomass/. The site provides introductory information for both the biomass energy industry and wildlife biologists (Figure 1). We include definitions of common biomass terms, principals of basic habitat management, and a searchable database of recent articles on biomass activities in the Northeast and the US. We also provide links to external resources for those who wish to find more detailed information.

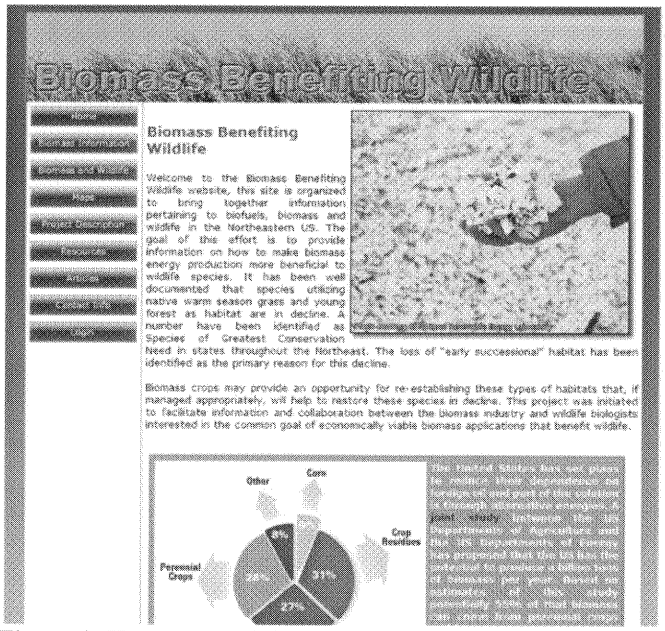

Figure 1. Homepage of the website created for this project.

3. Compile a list of ongoing/potential biomass energy development projects by state

We have identified over 100 facilities in the Northeast (Figure 2). These are mapped on the website. These can be easily grouped by state for the final reporting.

4. Use list along with SGCNs and SWAPs to assess potential impact of biomass development on these species

We consolidated state lists of SGCNs across major taxa for amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. We then identified 6 biomass energy applications with a high probability of implementation (or have already been implemented) in the Northeast. These are:

Native NWSG mix
Monoculture grass (dedicated)
Dedicated monoculture of deciduous woody plants
Dedicated monoculture of coniferous woody plants
Native early succesional woody plants
Thinned timber stand

Impacts on SGCNs were determined by considering the existing land cover and the resulting impact of conversion to one of these biomass systems. We used the general land cover types of:

Agriculture
Mature Deciduous
Mature Coniferous
Shrub land

We categorized the potential impacts to species as either positive (i.e., will provide more potential habitat), negative (i.e., will provide less potential habitat), or no impact (i.e., the interaction is either not applicable or is unlikely to impact the species positively or negatively). This was done in a matrix for each general species grouping.

Due to the sheer volume of work that would be required for this analysis (SGCN x biomass system x land cover), we elected to complete assessments for general habitat guilds (e.g, mature deciduous forest species) and then assign each SGCN to one of those groups. We used 9 habitat guild groups based on general land cover required by the species. These were:

Mature Deciduous Forest
Mature Coniferous Forest
Mature Mixed Forest
Deciduous Woodland
Coniferous Woodland
Mixed Woodland
Early successional
Grassland
Agricultural

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Other types, like wetland, were not included as they are unlikely to be directly utilized for implementing biomass systems for regulatory or logistical reasons.

5. Create database of SGCNs and biomass issues and post on website

Once all of the relationships have been identified and reviewed, we will post these data to the website. Work on design and interface for this capability has already begun and we anticipate full delivery of this functionality to the website in the next quarter.

6. Complete state-bundled information and supply to each state

Not yet initiated.

7. Convene a workshop outlining the results of this project, disseminating recommendations/opportunities identified, and allowing for wider engagement of the wildlife community in biomass related wildlife issues.

Initial plans were to convene this workshop at the 2009 NEAFWA meeting. This is unlikely given the need to submit symposia materials in the Fall of 2008. Therefore, we would like to modify this to a symposium during the 2010 NEAFWA meeting.

8. Complete a final report detailing all project activities, accomplishments, outcomes and recommendations for further action.

Not initiated.

Difficulties Encountered: We have had less success making contacts opportunistically at "other" meetings than we anticipated. This is likely due to reduced participation at these meetings from travel cutbacks and restrictions by state natural resource agencies. We will likely need to step up our efforts to visit many of these agencies directly in their agency headquarters to expedite the process. The additional travel costs for this endeavor will be supplied by CMI.

CMI experienced an unexpected change in our Executive Director. This impacted this project directly because the Executive Director will be providing support on this project along with salary as match. Our ability to move forward with further improvements was hampered by uncertainty as to how the new Executive Director would be able to work with this project and how much of their salary would be available as match.

Activities Anticipated Next Quarter:

During the next quarter we anticipate:

1. Completion of biomass impact assessments for all amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals SGCNs.
2. Continued update of the website with biomass articles and new information

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3. list of contacts made for each state including biologists and representatives from the biomass industry presently engaged in applications on the landscape (or in process)

Costs:

We are within our budget plan on all line items. We do expect to increase the costs related to travel (supplied as matching funds by CMI) in the next quarter and throughout the project.

We are within the ranges of our approved budget categories (see spreadsheet attached)

Signature:

Date: 6/18/09