



2019 Annual Report to NorthWestern Energy

Date: December 2nd

Location: Montana Wild, Helena, MT

Brief Summary of Project

The Wood Bottom Recreational Area is a 2,250-acre subunit of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument located just outside of the town of Loma. The entire property is owned by the BLM. The unit is culturally significant in that it falls along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. It's a very popular recreational area for hunting, fishing, birding, hiking and camping. The property marks the location of the confluence of the Teton, Marias and Missouri Rivers, each of which provides critical riparian habitat for many of Montana's fish and wildlife species.

Approximately 670 acres of the Wood Bottom Unit falls immediately adjacent to the Missouri River (about four river-miles). Land cover is diverse. Existing habitat includes productive cropland (704 acres; 33%), native and introduced grassland (27%), cottonwood-shrub-dominated riparian areas (12%) and several remnant stream channels. Fluctuating water levels support a constantly changing wetland component as well.

Total, there are 930 acres of cropland on the property but 226 have already been retired from farming. Going forward, planned activities include retiring an additional 504 acres of cropland but also converting the formerly retired acres back to native plant species. Crested wheatgrass, an aggressive introduced grass species invaded these existing retired acres years ago and work is planned as part of this project to restore those acres back to a native plant community as well.

Over the next 6 years, approximately 200 acres of cropland will remain actively farmed as a part of the habitat management plan. Two cooperators have agreed to assist with the management activities in exchange for cost-share assistance, forage for grazing, and annual crop yields. One cooperator will do the farming and grass seeding work, the other will implement prescribed grazing. Farming activities include herbicide application for pre-planting weed control and then spot-shot weed control after seeding in crop fields. Grazing activities include targeted grazing on the crested wheatgrass acres to reduce seed production and to weaken existing crested wheatgrass plant health. Through an agreement with the Bureau of Land Management and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is overseeing management on the property until 2025.

Annual Summary of Activities and Expenses (2019)

In 2019, the plan was to build a new barbed-wire fence along the southern boundary of the property to accommodate the grazing plan designed to knock back the crested wheatgrass in the formerly retired cropland acres. This past summer, the fence was built as planned. In 2019, 106 acres of cropland were set aside to be planted back to grass and all 106 acres were seeded as planned this fall. The planned grass planting activities were delayed in the spring due to wet rainy weather but were eventually completed over multiple days in mid-September and early October. The remaining cropland acres were

planted or fallowed as planned. Herbicide application prior to planting the grass mixture occurred in the spring as planned, and the fields sat empty throughout the summer until they were eventually planted.

In total, \$21,498.84 was spent on the fence and grass seed for the grass planting in 2019. Of this total, \$4,514.35 were allocated WildTAC dollars. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks used \$16,984.49 dollars from the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program to cost-share the remaining expenses in 2019; the remainder of the allocated WildTAC dollars will be used over the next two years for future project expenses. The budget timeline was slightly off this year due paperwork processing time-lags involved with the fund/grant transfer; everything is now set up as expected. The budget will be back on schedule next year when additional expenses are accrued. Planned future expenses include herbicide, tractor fuel, grass seed and mileage reimbursements. The project was awarded \$97,000 last year, in 2018.

Attachments

Timeline
Expense Sheet
Project Activities Summary
Seed Mixture
Management Plan Habitat Map
Project Location Map

Primary Contact

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