

Another Conservation Success Story...

Liberty County, Georgia

June 2012

Shooting Preserve Owner Improves Wildlife Habitat

Hunting has always been a hobby for Chuck Gaskin. Eleven years ago, Gaskin and his father ventured into making that shared hobby a business.

"I started it with just one bird dog."

The Dorchester Shooting Preserve in Midway attracts visitors from all over the world who enjoy hunting quail, pheasant, deer, wild

"We went from having abundant animals to none because the habitat disappeared."—Chuck Gaskin

turkey and duck. The preserve covers 4,790 acres.

However, a few years into the venture, Gaskin noticed that the number of native animals spotted during each hunting season continued to dwindle.

"We went from having abundant animals to none because the habitat disappeared," Gaskin said. He immediately began working to improve the wildlife habitat on the preserve and after many years of perseverance, wildlife populations are now abundant at Dorchester. However, it didn't take Gaskin long to realize that wildlife management can be an expensive proposition and due to financial constraints he wasn't able to



Spraying the understory with herbicides has removed invasive plants that prevent wildlife sustainability.

expand his habitat management practices over the whole preserve.

After toughing it out, Gaskin finally took the advice of a local veterinarian and friend who suggested he contact the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for assistance.

"I didn't act as quick as I could have," Gaskin said.

District Conservationist, James Austin, visited the property and was able to explain how NRCS programs could provide financial assistance for many of the habitat management practices that Gaskin was interested in installing on the property.

In 2009, Gaskin was approved for a Wildlife Habitat Initiative Program (WHIP) agreement. Through this program, which provides technical and financial assistance, Gaskin has been able to continue the process of repairing the natural wildlife habitat on the preserve.

He has planted native warm season grasses on 33 acres for quail. This provides early successional habitat for the quail. The program also helped establish hedge rows for the quail habitat on 5,669 feet.

Timber thinning addressed forest stand improvement.

"It creates more habitat than what we would've had. It's worked really nice," Gaskin said.

A 2010 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) agreement addressed pest management concerns. Gall Berry and Sweet Gum trees were treated with herbicide in the understory where they are considered invasive and non-beneficial for wildlife habitat. A total of 120 acres were treated.

"It's much more important than I ever thought; the habitat is so much more important to



Chuck Gaskin has worked with NRCS District Conservationist James Austin over the last few years to restore wildlife habitat on his Midway preserve.

us and the proper cover is important for birds," Gaskin said. He added that without the EQIP and WHIP contracts he would not have been able to do as much work on the property to improve the wildlife habitat.



The Dorchester Shooting Preserve also provides lodging for visiting hunters.

Austin said that it was a big plus that Gaskin followed deadlines and was willing to contribute his resources to make the conservation plan a reality, "Sometimes you have to twist a landowner's arm to spend money. But, that isn't the case with these guys. They get it done."

Gaskin said that when the NRCS stepped in to help him with his conservation plan and improve the wildlife habitat on his property, he was impressed with how dependable they were.

"They are top notch. They respond like they should and do what they tell you that they're going to do," Gaskin said.

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