United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

2013 Ranking Period 1

Animal Enhancement Activity – ANM 21 – Prairie restoration for grazing and wildlife habitat

Enhancement Description
This activity consists of restoring/renovating prairie habitat by establishing native vegetation and managing the restored plant community.

Land Use Applicability
Cropland, Pastureland, Rangeland

Benefits
Establishing and managing native prairie vegetation will provide food, cover, and nesting habitat for adapted species, especially grassland nesting birds.

Conditions Where Enhancement Applies
This enhancement applies to sites that have soils that indicate it was once a prairie or can sustain native prairie species.

NOTE: this enhancement can only be initiated in the 1st or 2nd year of the contract to ensure the activity has time to establish before the end of the contract.

Criteria
1. The resulting plant community will consist of at least 4 species of native perennial grasses and at least 4 species of native forbs adapted to the soils. In areas where seed availability and site adaptability is an issue, the NRCS State Office can modify the seeding combinations to meet local conditions.
2. Seeding must be done in a properly prepared seed bed as determined by the NRCS State Office.
3. Species appropriate fungal and microbial inoculants will be used during establishment where appropriate. Additional planting conditions may be specified if an ecological site description has been developed for the area.
4. During the establishment phase, weeds shall be controlled on the site.
5. After establishment:
   a. The site will be protected from grazing and disturbance during the primary nesting and fawning season as defined by the NRCS State Office.
   b. The site will be deferred from use for up to 3 years.
6. A grazing management plan will be developed and implemented.

Adoption Requirements
This enhancement is considered adopted when the applicant has successfully established the minimum number of native perennial grasses and forbs to the subject area.

Documentation Requirements

Following implementation of this activity, the participant must:

1. Document the list of the species planted,
2. Maintain the receipts for the seeds purchased,
3. Document the seeding dates,
4. Document the area (acres) restored by delineating the location of the restored prairie on a map or aerial photograph, and
5. Document the grazing management plan was implemented.

References

Fuhlendorf, S.D., H. Zhang, T.R. Tunnell, D.M. Engle and A.F. Cross. 2002. Effects of Grazing on Restorations of Southern Mixed Prairie Soils. Restoration Ecology Vol. 10, Issue 2: 401-407.

Packard, S. 1997. The Tallgrass Restoration Handbook: For Prairies, Savannas, and Woodlands. Island Press.

Schramm, P. 1990. Prairie Restoration: A Twenty Five year Perspective on Establishment and Management. Proceeding of the Twelfth North American Prairie Conference.

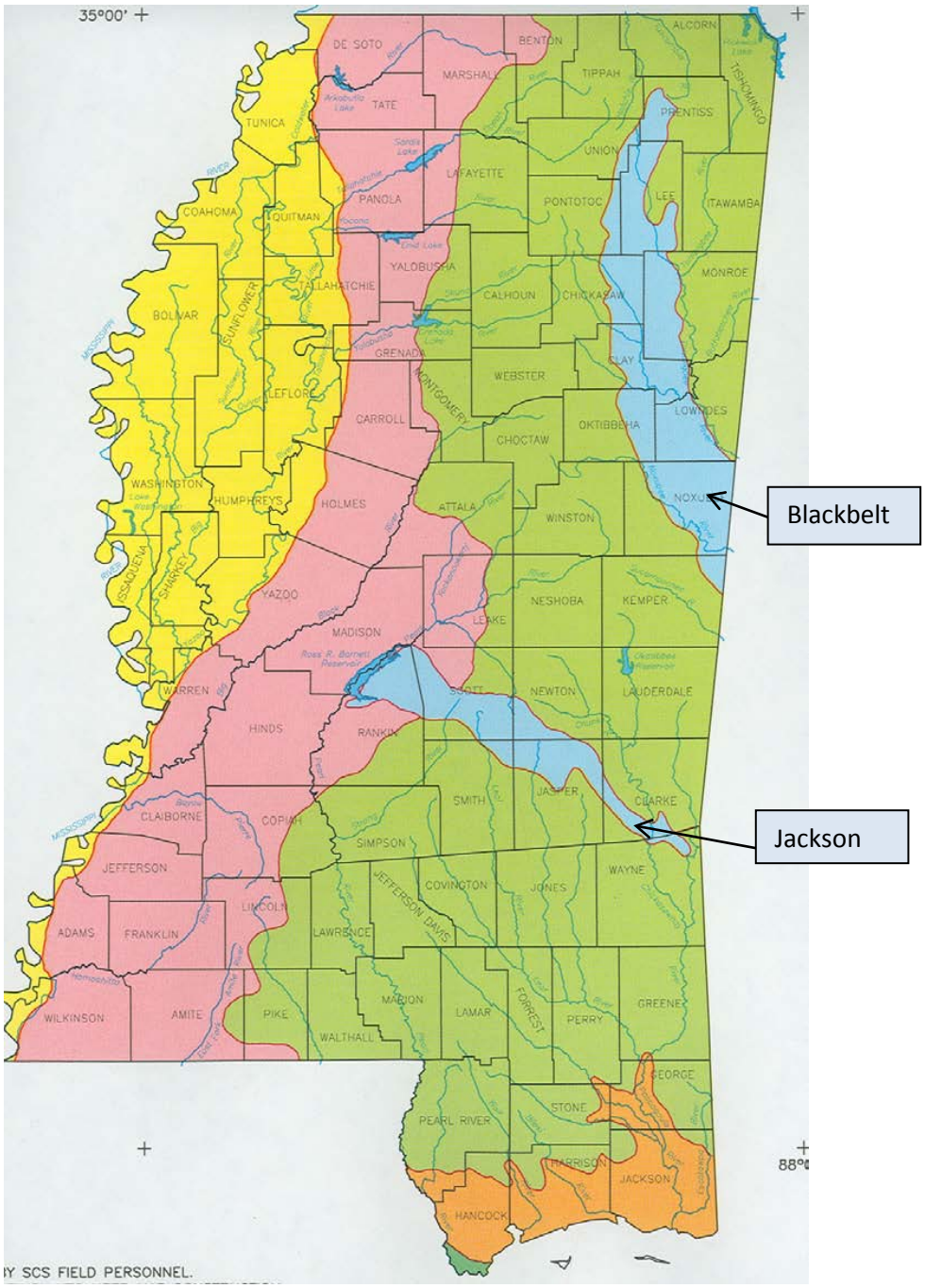
USDA-NRCS. 2010. Conservation Practice Standard: Prescribed Grazing-Code 528.

There are no accurate records of historical acreage for the **Blackland Prairies** of Mississippi; however, estimates suggest that approximately 100,000 acres once existed in the northeastern blackbelt region of Mississippi. Jackson Prairie is small in size and extent covering less than 1,000 acres, possibly five to ten percent of the prairie that once existed in the region. Historically, the prairies were converted to agriculture uses by the early settlers. A majority of the Blackbelt and Jackson prairies are still used as cropland and pasture, or have been abandoned and degraded into cedar glades or grassy fields. Blackland prairies within Mississippi are **critically imperiled** because of extreme rarity and its vulnerability to additional decline. Implementation of certain conservation practices will benefit many national and state species of concern by helping to increase native prairie habitat and/or improve the quality of existing habitat; many of which are being considered for listing as endangered species. In addition to restoration of native prairie grasses and forbs, prairies require the use of prescribed fire or some form of mechanical or chemical disturbance to prevent shrub and tree encroachment and to invigorate the native perennial herbs and grasses. Eradication/control of exotic and invasive species is necessary to achieve restoration of native vegetation.

Technical Requirements for Restoring Prairie Habitat

Restoration will comply with the Practice Standard for Practice Code 643, Restoration of Rare and Declining Habitats. Mixed stand of at least four native grass species, four native forb and legume species, and one native shrub species will be required. Total grass seeding density not less than 4 lbs. PLS/ac and not to exceed 6 lbs.PLS/ac. Total forb seeding density not less than 2 lbs. PLS/ac and not to exceed 3 lbs. PLS/ac with no species comprising >50% of the mixture. Acceptable grass species include, but are not limited to, big bluestem, little bluestem, indiangrass, switchgrass, eastern gamagrass, and sideoats grama. Acceptable forbs and legume species include, but are not limited to, black-eyed Susan, butterfly milkweed, false sunflower, grey headed coneflower, Illinois bundleflower, lance leaved coreopsis, partridge pea, prairie dock, purple coneflower, purple prairie clover, rough blazing star, spiked blazing star, tall coreopsis, and white prairie clover. Shrubs will be planted in patches or clumps approximately 30’x30’ with seedlings planted on 5’x5’ spacing within the clumps. Acceptable shrub species include, but are not limited to, Chickasaw plum. Refer to Appendix 2 of the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program Manual or consult a NRCS biologist for planting rates, dates and planting guidance.

Noxious weeds and other undesirable plants, insects, and pests shall be controlled during establishment.

Refer to the corresponding general location map showing the areas located within the historical blackland prairie distribution. If the offered field’s location is too near the prairie boundary area to determine with certainty that it is prairie habitat, then the soils information should support any determination that the offered field is considered prairie.

General Location Map of Blackland Prairies Mississippi