

Polk County Success from the Field

Partnership Fulfills Woodland Niche

Background

In September 2017, a partnership between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Ruffed Grouse Society and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was formalized to providing funding for a new Forest Wildlife Specialist position in Northwest Wisconsin. This partnership position mimics successful Farm Bill Biologist partnership positions with Pheasants Forever and NRCS, currently staffed throughout Wisconsin. Focusing on young forest habitat in Northwestern Wisconsin, the Forest Wildlife position provides assistance to private landowners to develop sound forestry practices on their private properties.

Highlights

In spring 2017, the local NRCS District Conservationist, Keith Zygowicz and Valerie Johnson, Forest Wildlife Specialist, visited Eric and Kim Wojchik, along with other woodland landowners to evaluate their properties for potential use of the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The visit with the Wojchiks involved looking at tree type and density, invasive species, signs of erosion and what habitat components were present. After field work was complete, a report was given to the owners with options to improve species habitat. Landowners could then chose which habitat improvement practices they would like to work on. The Wojchiks decided to improve pollinator habitat by planting a mixture of forbs and grasses that act as a food source for bees and other pollinators, spring through early fall. Eric explains, "Our property has many opportunities to make habitat enhancements and we are greatly appreciative of the guidance and assistance of USDA staff in making those enhancements work."

The Wojchiks will also work to eradicate bush honeysuckle on a portion of their land. The Conservation Stewardship Program will enable planting pollinator friendly flowers and grasses while also combatting invasive species, like honeysuckle. Eric explains, "If we want a chance to practice proper forestry and habitat management in years to come, we must control the bush honeysuckle, as well as other terrestrial invasives."

Future Plans

Going forward, the NRCS, DNR and Ruffed Grouse Society partners plan to continue this effort of woodland landowner support and look to possibly attain more Forest Wildlife Specialist positions in other areas of the state. Through the continued partnership of these programs and working relationships of the agencies



Partnership projects, like the one recently completed in Polk County, increase habitat and help bring in ruffed grouse and other beneficial species.

involved, landowners in Northwest Wisconsin are able to learn more about the woodlands they own and enjoy, while also learning how to sustainably manage them.

Healthy forests are the centerpiece of the Ruffed Grouse Society mission, and this important mission is shared by many other conservation organizations. This new initiative will greatly expand and improve habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other wildlife dependent upon young forests; and is only possible due to the hard work, commitment and collaboration of the Ruffed Grouse Society, Wisconsin DNR and NRCS. "We are very excited to bring this initiative to fruition," stated Josh Sherman, NRCS assistant state conservationist for field operations. "Private landowners manage the majority of forested land in Wisconsin, and through this position we envision being able to better provide needed technical and financial services to this community."

For more information, visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov or contact Keith Zygowicz at the Balsam Lake Service Center 715-485-3138.

