

Mississippi: Upper Black Creek Watershed

The Partners

The partners include NRCS, USFS, MS Forestry Commission, MS Department of Wildlife Fisheries & Parks, and other partners involved in ecosystem restoration efforts. Monitoring of ecosystem improvements will be accomplished by partnering with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Mississippi Army National Guard at Camp Shelby.



The Project

The Upper Black Creek watershed is located approximately 15 miles southeast of Hattiesburg, Mississippi and approximately 45 miles north of Gulfport, Mississippi. The watershed is approximately 809,514 acres which includes 13,035 acres of cropland, 103,084 acres of pasture, and 330,962 forested acres including areas inside the boundaries of the Desoto National Forest. Acreage outside the Desoto National Forest consists of state and private lands.

The watershed is classified as “functioning at risk.” Major threats to the system include pollution from household and industrial garbage dumping, untreated sewerage run-off, increased sedimentation from roads/development, and non-native invasive species (e.g. cogongrass and feral hogs). This project is expected to generally enhance natural resources within the watershed and reduce the threat of wildfires to federal and adjoining state and private lands while creating jobs in the local communities. These funds would also provide technical assistance for stewardship plans on neighboring private lands. The overall enhancement of natural resources will create a herbaceous understory in the upland ecosystems while promoting sensitive/rare plant communities which have historically been of special interest to local tribes in the area



The Benefits of Additional Resources

Among the Federal lands within the watershed Communities, nearly \$1.5 million worth of implementation-ready projects have been identified. These projects include treatment of approximately 4,000 acres of off-site; Southern Pine Beetle susceptible stands identified to be thinned; 10,000 acres of landscape scale prescribed burning; 500 acres of longleaf pine ecosystem restoration; and over 10 miles of unclassified roads that will be decommissioned to improve overall water quality.



These projects will be prioritized to have the greatest impact on creating watershed health and landscapes with the additional funding resources. Outreach efforts by the NRCS will be supported by the USFS and other partners to reach new customers and work with existing customers to address needed resource concerns on private lands such as reducing wildfire threats, protecting water quality and improving wildlife habitat for at-risk species. Additional funding will provide local landowners with the means to reduce fuels and contribute to community safety, restore ecosystems on their land, and provide a boost to the local economy. The combined treatments on both Federal and private lands will be complimentary, and through our collaboration will be choreographed to ensure the treatment effectiveness and therefore treatment benefits are maximized.

The Measure of Success

Successful outputs of this project will be a restored ecosystem, communities made more resilient to fire events, critical values related to American Indian culture, wildlife and watershed enhanced, and employment opportunities created. This project will also serve to strengthen collaboration in local communities and demonstrate the effectiveness of an All Lands approach to improving forest health and resilience as supported by sister USDA agencies.

Individual species will be monitored for population trends to measure success of the project. In particular the gopher tortoise for understory enhancement and the effectiveness of feral hog trapping which has a direct link to water quality. Impacts to the local economy will be monitored in cooperation with county governments by analysis of job creation and force multipliers.