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FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAMS IN MISSOURI: PARTNERSHIPS IN LAND STEWARDSHIP

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Fish and wildlife resources are highly valued by Missourians. Over 70% of Missouri residents annually participate in fisheries and wildlife activities. However, the future of fisheries and wildlife conservation depends to a large extent on the land-use decisions made by landowners, as approximately 93% of the state is under private ownership. These landowners have different motivations, circumstances, and land ownership objectives which govern their management decisions.

Educational programs which enable landowners to make informed decisions regarding the conservation of fish and wildlife are critical to land stewardship and resource sustainability. Although idealistic concepts, "stewardship" implies "care and responsible management" of the land base and ecosystems which sustain fisheries and wildlife resources. Resource professionals and educators are continually challenged to develop and successfully implement meaningful programs which put these idealistic concepts into practice on private lands.

A variety of proactive fisheries and wildlife habitat incentive programs have been developed and implemented in Missouri through land stewardship partners. These focused programs have been designed in part to demonstrate that agricultural production and fisheries and wildlife habitat enhancement can be compatible and to promote the concept that these resources and supporting ecosystems are an asset to the landowner. An educational process serves in motivating landowners to participate and take advantage of the technical assistance these programs provide. Through these efforts both resource management and land ownership objectives are accomplished. A brief summary of two of these incentive programs, the Partners for Prairie Wildlife Program and Stream Stewardship Program, is provided in an effort to share ideas on making wildlife an asset to the landowner.

PARTNERS FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE PROGRAM

The Partners for Prairie Wildlife Program is basically an incentive program for improving grasslands. Prairie wildlife populations have been declining for a number of years due to several factors, including the loss of prairies, decreased diversity in grasslands, and the increased amount of woody encroachment into pastures, prairie, and fencelines. The Missouri Department of Conservation is testing a pilot program designed to reverse the tide of declining quality grassland habitat by offering landowners incentives to change management in favor of prairie

wildlife. The Partners for Prairie Wildlife Incentive Program is offered in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Soil and Water Conservation Districts Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and county Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Additional funding is provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Monsanto Agricultural Group. University Extension provides educational assistance.

Objectives of the incentive program are to:

1) enhance grassland diversity and structure to improve wildlife nesting and broodrearing cover; 2) reduce fragmentation of prairie landscapes by removing invading trees from prairie soils; and 3) demonstrate that livestock forage production and prairie wildlife habitat improvements can be compatible.

Two target zones have been established for program participation. These zones are in west central and southwest Missouri, and both are associated with State Prairie Conservation Areas.

Briefly, the incentive practices include:

- PPW-1, Converting fescue to warm-season grasses;
- PPW-2, Converting fescue to alternative cool-season grasses/legumes;
- PPW-3, Controlling introduced cool-season grasses in native prairies;
- PPW-4, Overseeding lespedeza into an existing stand of cool-stand grass;
- PPW-5, Overseeding lespedeza into an existing stand of warm-season grasses;
- PPW-6, Overseeding lespedeza into wheat or other small grains;
- PPW-7, Resting prairie;
- PPW-8, Implementing a rotational grazing system;
- PPW-9, Restoring prairie wildlife habitat fragmented by tree invasion; and
- PPW-10, Fence replacement.

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts handle the application and the cost share payment procedures. Missouri Department of Conservation biologists evaluate the area proposed for a particular practice and certify that wildlife nesting or broodrearing habitat will be improved.

STREAM STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

Missouri is a stream state, with more than 56,000 miles of waterways providing water, fisheries and wildlife habitats, and recreational opportunities. These water resources depend on the stewardship of natural resources within the watershed. One method of achieving resource management and land ownership objectives is to promote the concept of watershed and stream stewardship. Educational programs addressing these concepts are of particular importance. An example of a proactive stream stewardship program, developed by the Missouri Department of Conservation and land stewardship

partners, has been to provide incentives to landowners for the long-term conservation of stream corridors on private land.

Stream Stewardship Programs have been initially implemented on three pilot streams in southern Missouri. Through voluntary participation, landowners who practice good stream stewardship are rewarded through a process of receiving bid payments over a 10-year period in exchange for an easement to conserve healthy stream corridors. Qualifying landowners must have an active Soil and Water Conservation Plan and own at least one-fourth mile of frontage along one of the pilot streams. Landowners retain complete control of trespass rights and have a variety of management options available for income production, including fish and wildlife management, timber and fuelwood production, and hay production. If the stream corridor is used for grazing, fencing is required with a percentage of the costs reimbursed.