

General Information and Education Session

“Making Tracks”—A Partnership Program That Works

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Abstract: The “Making Tracks” partnership program was initiated in 1986 with the joint signing of a memorandum of understanding between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF). In 1997 alone, through the challenge cost share program, 89 projects were funded for \$746,000 in 26 states. The amount of NWTF money available for partnership projects is growing at 20% per year. This partnership is also international as the NWTF and USFS cooperated with many agencies and individuals in Mexico and the United States to help restore the Gould’s subspecies of wild turkey to historic range in Arizona. The partnership also includes hosting J.A.K.E.S. (Juniors Acquiring Knowledge, Ethics, and Sportsmanship) youth events across the nation. The partnership has also initiated funding for increased prescribed burning projects in the Southeast in 1996 and across the nation in 1998 (proposed). Rewarding partners for their contributions can best be accomplished in 3 ways: 1) More biologically sound projects, 2) Display of the partners’ name and/or logos in prominent places 3) Help partners host fund-raising banquets. The “Making Tracks” partnership is expected to continue fast growth well into the new century.

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With more than 600 projects in 34 states encompassing more than \$4.2 million, the “Making Tracks” partnership is definitely dynamic and expanding. In 1986, the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service signed a memorandum of understanding formally initiating the “Making Tracks” partnership. That year, only 1 project, on the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina, was funded for \$8,000. In fiscal year 1997 alone, 89 projects were funded for a total of \$746,000 in 26 states. This is truly a partnership program that works.

The “Making Tracks” partnership program was born out of a need to increase the amount of habitat improved for wild turkey habitat and for other wildlife species on the national forests. “Making Tracks” also arose out of new opportunities that

started when the NWTF initiated a fund-raising program that allocated money for cost-share projects.

The growth of "Making Tracks" reflects both the increase in money available through the NWTF and the changing amounts of funds available through the Forest Service. Participation in the "Making Tracks" partnership has been remarkable. For example, in 1986 only 1 national forest in 1 state participated; in 1991, 19 states participated; and in 1997, national forests in 26 states participated. Since its inception, national forests in 38 states have had at least 1 cooperative project funded through the "Making Tracks" program. Since national forests occur in only 41 states, and Alaska doesn't have any wild turkeys, this represents a 93% participation rate. In addition, most national forests have had a very active program of projects. In South Carolina, there have been 80 projects funded for more than \$420,000.

The NWTF raises funds for the "Making Tracks" program through a series of fund-raising banquets. Growth in this program has been, and continues to be, phenomenal. In the past few years, funds available for cost share projects has increased more than 20% per year. Of all the net money raised, 56% will go into an account called the Wild Turkey Super Fund spent in that state. These funds are available for cost share projects with other groups, not just the Forest Service.

Forest Service budgets have been decreasing in the past 3 years putting an increasing importance on involving partners to help fund needed projects. In all but the first year, state wildlife agencies have also contributed to these partnership projects. Other partners include Wildlife Forever, The Ruffled Grouse Society, state and local chapters, universities, non-profit organizations, Department of Defense, Army Corps of Engineers, private industrial companies, and private landowners.

A wide array of projects have been funded. Projects have included prescribed burning, water developments, creation and maintenance of turkey brood rearing areas, road closure gates, shrub removal, plantings of both seeds and seedlings, rejuvenation of open areas, purchase of planting equipment, supplies and installation of fences and signs, development and printing of brochures, support for the turkey transfer boxes, the design and printing of the "Making Tracks" posters, the ongoing restoration of the Gould's subspecies of wild turkey, and support for the NWTF youth program entitled JAKES (Juniors Achieving Knowledge, Ethics, and Sportsmanship).

"Making Tracks" has crossed international boundaries with the ongoing restoration of the Gould's subspecies of wild turkey. The Gould's restoration program is a cooperative project with many partners including the Arizona Game and Fish Department, USDA, Mexican governments at both state and national levels, and the Forest Service. The range of this subspecies is mostly in Mexico, but populations have been found historically in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. After 10 years of intense coordination, in 1994 and again in 1997, Gould's wild turkeys were captured in Mexico and transplanted to suitable, but unoccupied habitats on the Coronado National Forests.

"Making Tracks" also cooperatively funds and hosts educational activities such as JAKES events. Since 1990, cooperative events have been held on many national

forests from California to Pennsylvania to South Carolina. More than 8,000 kids have attended these events where they were introduced to the biology of the wild turkey and the need for quality habitats for the wild turkey and other wildlife on the national forests.

Prescribed burning is one of the best tools for improving wildlife habitat, particularly in pine forests. In 1997, a new project/program was tested on 3 national forests in the South. In this program, NWTF provided funds for the purchase of additional helicopter time for aerial ignition of prescribed burns. Using this technique, more hectares can be burned in 1 day than can be burned with just hand ignition. This system allows for greater efficiency and effectiveness, while continuing to comply with state smoke management guidelines. In the first year alone, more than 9,700 additional hectares were burned for wildlife habitats. That is 9,700 ha more than the FS could have burned without this program.

How to Reward Partners for their Contribution

The NWTF is a strong, active partner with the Forest Service. Other non-profit groups have also been very active in partnerships. They have provided money, time, and counsel for the Forest Service. The partners represent an array of interests, but the ways to reward them for their contributions really fit into only 3 categories:

—Good projects. The simplest way to recognize partners is to provide an increasing amount of good quality, biologically-sound projects for them to help fund.

—Display their name and/or logo. If a project is accomplished through cooperation with a partner, have a sign installed with their name or logo on it. If you have a small project, a simple sign is adequate, but if you have a large project or an area with many projects, put up a large, attractive sign in an area of high visibility. In annual reports, informational brochures, videos, and slide shows use their sign and logo. Name recognition is a major emphasis for partners. Use their names and logos wherever appropriate.

—Help the partners raise funds. Become a member of their organization. Get involved with their fund-raising program. Identify the movers and shakers in your community and let the partners know who they are. While this is the most direct way to help partners, there are also many regulations in the government that limit the amount and type of activities a person can do at work. But as a member on your own time, you can substantially help the partner organization.

The Future

The growth of the NWTF, including the amount of money available for cost share projects, is amazing and will continue into the 21st century. At the same time budgets for wildlife programs in the Forest Service are most likely to decline or at best remain stable. Within this disparity, more partnership projects will be needed to accomplish needed habitat management on your national forests. The number of Forest Service wildlife partnerships with state and private groups increased to more than

1,300. Using more effective partnerships, we can still expand the amount of needed habitat work accomplished. To do this, more partners must become actively involved with the Forest Service. There are an increasing number of programs within the Forest Service, and groups with widely divergent emphasis can still find areas to help meet their areas of emphasis for wildlife habitats.

Partnerships do take time to develop and maintain, but the results far exceed these costs. Without partnerships, wildlife habitats will decline. With good, active partnerships like "Making Tracks," we can continue to actively manage your national forests for quality wildlife habitats.