

**East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture  
Final Performance Report  
Prepared by Catherine Rideout  
Coordinator, East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture**

**State:** Alabama

**SWG Grant Number:** T-04-P-01

---

**Period:** October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2009

**Need:**

The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (EGCPJV) will engage in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities that are linked to the delivery of continental and range-wide bird conservation goals expressed in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Flyway Plans, the Partners in Flight Plan, the U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Woodcock Management Plan, Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan. The EGCPJV will be an effective means of leveraging, coordinating, and efficiently utilizing the fiscal and logistical resources of bird conservation stakeholders in the region. In addition to making significant contributions to continental bird conservation, the EGCPJV should promote an improved socio-economic environment through benefits to natural resource related industries such as forest products, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and nature tourism. Ultimately, by developing and delivering a regionally based, biologically sound approach to all-bird conservation, the EGCPJV will promote ecosystem sustainability; one of the principles embodied in the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

**Objective(s):**

The objective of this project is to provide financial support for the staffing and development of the EGCPJV partnership.

**Expected Results and Benefits:**

This project will provide significant and tangible benefits to all species of birds within the East Gulf Coastal Plain, by supporting the partnership and necessary mechanisms to develop habitat conservation planning and delivery tools to achieve habitat targets for priority bird species within this geographic region. This project will provide the means for Alabama to participate in this partnership and to utilize the products and materials produced by the EGCPJV in the development and ongoing planning activities of the Alabama Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

**Approach:**

Institutionalize the partnership by employing a Coordinator, establishing a

Management Board and technical committees. Draft a long-term strategy for comprehensively addressing bird conservation in the East Gulf Coastal Plain. Work with partners to implement conservation strategies for high priority habitats (longleaf pine, maritime communities, forested wetlands, native grasslands). Auburn University will provide financial management for the EGCPJV and house the Coordinator.

**Target Date for Achievement:** October 1, 2005

**Completion Date:** September 30, 2009

**Significant Problems Encountered:**

None

**Significant Deviations:**

None

**Costs:** See Grant Agreement, cost reflected on SF 269.

**Accomplishments:**

**Establishment of Coordinator Position and Management Board**

In May 2006, Allison Vogt was selected and hired as the coordinator of the EGCPJV. Allison spent her tenure from May 2006 to June 2008 focused on developing the East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture Partnership, defining its mission, formalizing the roles and responsibilities of the partners, and administering the partnership contributions that supported the joint venture. During this time, several major objectives were accomplished including establishment of a formalized management board consisting of thirteen State, Federal, and NGO partners. These partners represent a diversity of conservation partners in the EGCP and include the following agencies and organizations: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; American Bird Conservancy; Auburn University; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources; Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks; National Audubon Society; National Wild Turkey Federation; Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative; Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); and the US Forest Service.

Each organization is represented on the management board and is committed to engage actively in the development, implementation, and refinement of the Joint Venture conservation strategy (see Attachment 1). Management board responsibilities include the following: leading and governing the activities of the JV, formulating strategies to further the JV's mission, overseeing the programmatic planning and evaluation of the JV, and promoting the activities of the EGCPJV to the broader conservation community.

## EGCPJV Implementation Plan and Open Pine Decision Support Tool

A first step in building and fostering a new joint venture is to formulate and draft an implementation plan. The coordinator worked with the management board members, technical staff from partnering agencies, and additional conservation experts in the EGCP to develop this plan. The technical personnel involved in joint venture activities have included personnel from a broad diversity of agencies and organizations including state and federal agencies, universities, and NGOs that focus on the conservation and management of birds and their habitats. The implementation plan outlines the organization and mission of the EGCPJV, describes the strategic approach to conservation, and presents information on the priority birds, habitats, and major conservation challenges in the East Gulf Coastal Plain. Several meetings of the management board and the technical working group occurred in order to address the organization and administration of the partnership and to establish the scientific approach and framework of the organization (Table 1).

Date	Location	Group
August 2006	Auburn, AL	Management Board
October 2006	Jackson, MS	Technical Working Group
November 2006	Norfolk, VA	Management Board
May 2007	Decatur, Alabama	Technical Working Group
June 2007	Starkville, MS	Management Board
October 2007	Wildersville, TN	Technical Working Group
October 2007	Charleston, WV	Management Board
May 2008	Daphne, AL	Technical Working Group
May 2009	Holly Springs, MS	Management Board
September 2009	Jackson, MS	Technical Working Group
November 2009	Decatur, AL	Management Board

As the plan was developed, the technical working group, with agreement from the management board, identified open pine habitats, including longleaf pine, as the highest priority habitats to address while moving forward in biological planning to sustain priority bird species. Under the leadership of Dr. Barry Grand, of the Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Auburn University, the EGCPJV received additional funding support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Southern Company to begin biological planning and design activities in open pine systems. The joint venture focused its initial energy on the development of an Open Pine Decision Support Tool (DST) to guide protection and restoration efforts of open pine systems, with a focus on longleaf pine (see Attachment 2). Six high priority pine focal species were identified. The ecology, habitat requirements, and population objectives stepped down to the EGCP from national plans were used in the development of the tool. Species include:

- 1) Bachman's Sparrow (*Aimophila aestivalis*),
- 2) Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*),
- 3) Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*),
- 4) Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*),

- 5) Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), and
- 6) Southeast American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*).

To identify high priority areas for restoration in order to optimize bird response, several attributes were used to weight the landscape including the following:

- 1) likelihood of being managed with fire at regular intervals,
- 2) proximity to land managed for long-term conservation,
- 3) proximity to land in public ownership,
- 4) proximity to patches of habitat that meet assumed requirements for supporting sustainable subpopulations of priority birds, and
- 5) proximity to areas that are not currently open pine habitat but are suitable for the restoration of pine habitat.

The result is a model that prioritizes the entire EGCP landscape based on density and proximity of sites that meet the objectives of suitability for restoration, ability to use prescribed fire as a management tool, likelihood of long-term conservation, probability of colonization, and contribution to source populations of focal species. The map shows conservation priority areas that are most likely to provide the greatest contribution to conservation objectives and should serve conservation delivery targets.

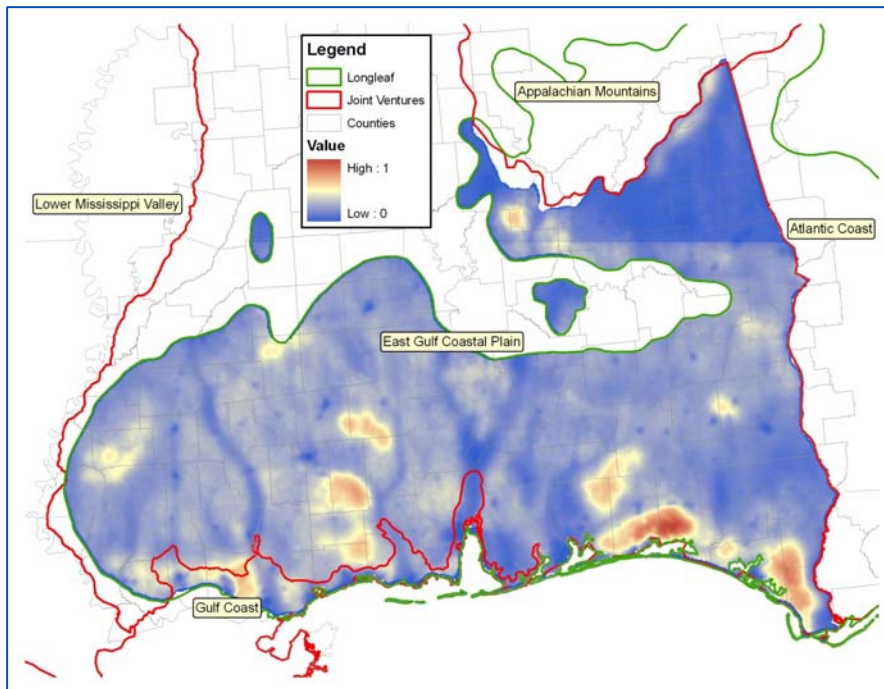


Figure 1. Map of combined conservation priorities for focal species (Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman’s Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Southeast American Kestrel, Northern Bobwhite, and Henslow’s Sparrow) inhabiting open pine systems with the range of longleaf pine in the East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture Area.

Subsequently, the EGCPJV received additional support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to expand the Decision Support Tool to the historic range of

longleaf pine. This tool, still under development, will contribute to large-scale planning efforts throughout the range of longleaf in the southeastern coastal plain from Texas to North Carolina. It will allow the prioritization of conservation delivery projects related to open pine ecosystems throughout the region. Catherine Rideout and Barry Grand have coordinated with several additional technical experts on this project, including staff from the Lower Mississippi Valley, the Appalachian Mountains, the Atlantic Coast, and the Gulf Coast Joint Ventures. Several issues are being discussed and resolved including the evaluation of the EGCPJV focal species list for the rangewide tool and the need for suitable spatial data for the western part of the range of the DST. This project should be completed by March 2010. The coordination required to achieve this project should result in a greater level of collaboration in the conservation and restoration of longleaf pine habitats across the historic range. Catherine Rideout and Barry Grand have made multiple presentations on the EGCPJV Open Pine Decision Support Tool and the current status of the rangewide tool to the conservation community. Presentations have been made to diverse groups include the following: USFWS, Southeast Quail Study Group, Partners in Flight, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Southern Company, Gulf Coast JV Management Board, and many technical groups.

Currently, Dr. Grand is working on a sensitivity analysis of the EGCP DST, and there are plans for a technical publication on the Open Pine DST for 2010. Currently, several partners including Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, National Wild Turkey Federation, and US Fish and Wildlife Service are using the DST to prioritize the use of funds from various longleaf restoration programs. In order to increase the conservation community's knowledge of and use of the Open Pine DST, the joint venture office will focus on building an effective outreach and implementation strategy. Barry Grand and Catherine Rideout will conduct outreach efforts that may include workshops, webinars, and outreach materials, in order to increase the use of this DST by the conservation community.

Additionally, the coordinator has spent considerable effort and time facilitating conservation efforts in longleaf pine with various partners including the Longleaf Alliance, America's Longleaf Initiative, Southeastern Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS), and others. In addition to determining outreach efforts on the DST, the joint venture envisions playing a role as the conservation community focuses on several challenges, including mapping/inventory longleaf, the development of "Desired Forest Conditions" in open-pine/longleaf pine habitats, and the development of databases to track the location and condition of these habitats as conservation projects are accomplished.

### **Future Efforts and Direction**

The investments of energy, time, and funding in the joint venture by partners such as the Alabama Department of Natural Conservation Resources have resulted in an active and growing partnership. Throughout the grant period, this funding was leveraged by additional partner contributions from state, federal, and NGO support. Additionally, this funding demonstrated match for various other contributions that allowed federal match.

Ultimately, the implementation plan of the Joint Venture was approved by the

Division of Bird Habitat Conservation (USFWS) in 2008, and the partnership received official “Joint Venture” status. This approval resulted in FY2009 USFWS funding for the EGCPJV at the level of \$254,000, and the joint venture expects at least similar allocations in subsequent years. With the procurement of funding from US Fish and Wildlife Service, the joint venture is poised to hire and Assistant Coordinator in the next few months. This additional, full-time employee will greatly increase the joint venture capacity to work on coordinating the development of a sound biological foundation for this joint venture as we begin to address planning and design activities in grassland habitats and forested wetlands. Additionally, this staff member will assist in building and facilitating efforts of additional working groups, focused on the implementation of successful habitat delivery projects.

In addition to continuing to work on the conservation bird and bird habitats, the joint venture management board has decided to invest time and energy in the consideration of the development of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, being led by the Department of Interior. These science partnerships, consisting of federal agencies, states, tribes and private organizations, will collaboratively develop science-based products needed to effectively implement on-the-ground conservation for all taxa. The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint venture lies within the boundaries of the Gulf Coastal Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative. Our joint venture will join the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture partnership in providing leadership as the Gulf Coastal Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative is developed.

### **Acknowledgements**

The EGCPJV office would like to acknowledge the investments of funding, time, and energy by the partnering organizations including the following: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; American Bird Conservancy; Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources; Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks; National Audubon Society; National Wild Turkey Federation; Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative; Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; US Fish and Wildlife Service; and the US Forest Service.

We recognize the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Southern Company for providing funding for the establishment of the EGCPJV, the Open Pine DST, and the expansion of the DST to the historic range of longleaf pine.

Lastly, we’d like to recognize the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for this funding that has led to the development of an implementation plan and ultimately has resulted in a fully funded joint venture, with established coordinator and assistant coordinator positions. Additionally, we appreciate the participation of key members of the agency during the development of the EGCPJV.

# East Gulf Coastal Plain JOINT VENTURE

## WHO ARE WE?

*partnership*

The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture is a self-directed partnership of federal, state, and private stakeholders dedicated to the conservation of priority birds and habitats in the East Gulf region.

We aim to serve as the hub of a bird conservation community that works in concert to achieve shared regional, science-based goals for habitat restoration and management. By working in partnership to implement our shared vision, we can most effectively secure a sustainable future for birds and the habitats they rely on throughout the East Gulf Coastal Plain.

## WHERE DO WE WORK?

*focus*

By transcending political boundaries and focusing on regional landscapes, the East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture can effectively conserve habitats at an ecologically-meaningful scale.

The East Gulf Coastal Plain corresponds to the Southeastern Coastal Plain Bird Conservation Region (BCR 27). BCRs are a nationwide system of biological units defined by shared bird communities, habitats, and resource issues.



## WHAT DO WE DO?

*strategy*



The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture pursues its conservation planning and action according to the principles of Strategic Habitat Conservation. Habitat conservation and restoration projects are prioritized based on their ecological contribution to restoring and maintaining regional avian diversity. By increasing the availability of high-quality habitats, we aim to achieve target population levels for priority birds.

Priority habitats of the East Gulf Coastal Plain include:

- Mature longleaf pine forests
- Native prairies and grasslands
- Bottomland hardwood forests

## MANAGEMENT BOARD PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

*collaboration*

The Management Board acts on behalf of all EGCP JV partners in providing leadership and coordination of partnership activities, and ensures that the vision and objectives of the EGCP JV are advanced to the mutual interest of all partners.

- Alabama Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources
- American Bird Conservancy
- Auburn University
- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Kentucky Dept. of Fisheries & Wildlife Resources
- Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries
- Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
- Mississippi Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks
- National Audubon Society
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Feb 2008

## Contact:

Catherine Rideout  
Coordinator  
Catherine\_Rideout@fws.gov

East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture  
3301 Forestry and Wildlife Sciences  
Auburn University, AL 36849

334.844.9219  
[www.egcpjv.org](http://www.egcpjv.org) (coming soon)

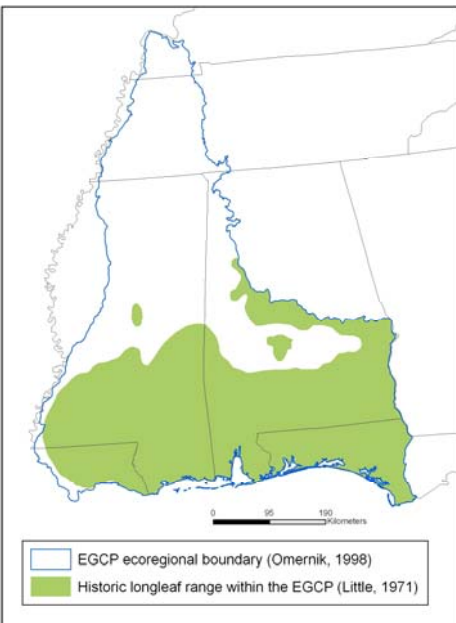
## A DECISION SUPPORT TOOL TO GUIDE THE RESTORATION OF OPEN PINE HABITATS IN THE EAST GULF COASTAL PLAIN

### ROLE OF THE DECISION SUPPORT TOOL IN CONSERVATION DECISION-MAKING

The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (EGCP JV) is developing a series of tools that enable the strategic conservation of open pine habitats. We intend for this tool to guide decisions about where, when, how, and why to undertake conservation actions based on a comprehensive landscape analysis and the application of key conservation biology principles to maximize conservation benefits for birds and other wildlife.

The core elements of the decision support tool pursue the following questions:

1. Where do stands of high-quality, open pine habitat currently occur on the EGCP landscape?
2. Where does recently restored longleaf pine occur on the EGCP landscape?
3. Where could longleaf pine be appropriately restored on the landscape?
4. What are the EGCP JV's numeric and spatial habitat objectives for sustaining priority birds in open pine habitats?
5. Where on the EGCP landscape should conservation strategies be directed in order to achieve the most ecologically-meaningful conservation benefits?



### GEOGRAPHIC TARGET

The geographic scope of this decision support tool will include the intersection of the EGCP JV planning boundary with the historic range of the longleaf pine forest ecosystem. However, our intention is that the fundamental elements of this tool will be applicable across the entirety of the historic range of longleaf pine, specifically the West Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Plains.

### IDENTIFYING HIGH PRIORITY AREAS FOR RESTORATION

Attributes used in the decision support tool to weight a landscape unit according to its relative potential to optimize bird response and maximize overall conservation include:

- Likelihood of being managed with fire at regular intervals
- Proximity to land managed for long term conservation
- Proximity to land in public ownership
- Proximity to patches of habitat that meet assumed requirements for supporting a sustainable subpopulation of priority birds
- Proximity to areas that are not currently open pine habitat but are classified as a land cover type with the potential for restoration of longleaf pine

### ON-THE-GROUND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

Target audiences for the open pine decision support tool are programs of agencies and non-governmental organizations that either directly fund or deliver on-the-ground restoration programs in pine forests of the EGCP.

Target conservation strategies include:

- Reforestation of agricultural lands
- Improvement of the habitat value, through appropriate management, of existing, closed canopy pine stands
- Conversion existing off-site loblolly and slash pine stands to well-managed longleaf pine stands
- Acquisition, preservation, and appropriate management of existing high-quality, open pine stands

