

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HABITAT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM  
HABITAT ENHANCEMENT AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROPOSAL**

**PROJECT INFORMATION**

**Project Title: Aravaipa Watershed Improvement**

**Project No. 10-505**

**Region/GMU: 5/31**

**HPC: Southeast Arizona Sportsmen's Club**

**Project Type: Prescribed Burn/Restoration**

**Project Description:**

The Aravaipa watershed project is comprised of two project areas, the Oak Grove and Turkey Creek watersheds (a.k.a. South Rim) and the Cobra Ranch. The South Rim project is comprised of two components: 1) installation of erosion control structures within the Turkey Creek drainage, 2) prescribed burn within the uplands of the South Rim. The planned burn area will be approximately 8,800 acres with a fire use area including an additional 17,500 acres which would be allowed to burn if the fire leaves the planned burn area.

The Cobra Ranch project includes: 1) expansion of the native grass floodplain farming from 27 acres to 127 acres, 2) recontouring of Aravaipa Creek and restoration of 23 acres of riparian and grassland vegetation along Cobra Ranch, which will reduce erosion and create a more stable grassland floodplain, and 3) introduction of native grass seeds and organic matter on approximately 1,000 acres of uplands to promote grassland restoration. Native grasses from phase one of this project will be harvested and used for phase three.

In 2009, the Bureau of Land Management applied for and received a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant for this project. At that time the BLM was planning on using internal fire funds to complete the prescribed burn portion of this project (with \$15,000 of funding from the NFWF grant). Since that time BLM fire funds have been reduced and \$45,000 is still needed to complete the prescribed burns on the South Rim.

**Wildlife Species to Benefit: Bighorn sheep (25%), white tail deer (25%), mule deer (20%), black bear (15%), javelina (15%)**

**Possible Funding Partners: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, Sky Island Alliance**

**Implementation Schedule:**

**Beginning: March, 2010**

**Completed: September, 2011**

**NEPA Compliance: (if applicable)**

**Completed: Yes  No**

**Projected Completion Date: September, 2010**

NEPA has been completed for all but the prescribed burn which is currently in scoping at BLM.

**PROJECT FUNDING**

**SBG Funds Requested: \$45,000**

**Cost Share Funds: \$234,760**

**Total Project Costs: \$279,760**

<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION</b>	
<b>Applicant: Jeff Conn</b> <b>BLM Natural Resource Specialist</b>  <b>Telephone: 928-348-4470</b>	<b>Address:</b> <b>Bureau of Land Management</b> <b>711 S. 14<sup>th</sup> Ave</b> <b>Safford, AZ 85546</b>
<b>AGFD Contact and Phone No. Duane Aubuchon, 928-428-3582</b> <b>(If applicant is not AGFD personnel)</b>	
<b>Coordinated with:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Applicant's signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

**SEND COMPLETED APPLICATIONS TO:**  
**Game Branch**  
**500 W. Carefree Hwy**  
**Phoenix, AZ 85086**  
**RoThompson@azgfd.gov**

**WAS PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE LOCAL HPC?      YES   X        NO**

**HAS PROJECT BEEN SUBMITTED IN PREVIOUS YEARS? IF SO WAS IT FUNDED?**  
 This project has not been submitted previously.

**NEED STATEMENT/PROBLEM ANALYSIS:**

Historic grazing, agriculture, development, stream channelization, fire suppression, and OHV use have led to an encroachment of woody plants in grassland areas and increased erosion throughout the southwest and within the Aravaipa watershed. This has resulted in a decrease in watershed function, reduced productivity of wildlife forage, and a decrease in bighorn sheep movement and forage areas. In spite of these impacts, the Aravaipa Ecosystem Management area maintains one of Arizona's most pristine and diverse areas, home to 529 plant and 353 animal species, 36 of which are threatened, endangered, or species of concern.

The South Rim project area historically had frequent natural fires, which reduced shrubs and woody species in grassland areas, reduced understory in non-grassland habitats, and provided periodic increases in forage for wildlife such as deer and bighorn sheep. Maintaining open areas for bighorn sheep allows for their natural movement between areas, increases foraging area, and decreases mountain lion predation.

**PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

- Reduce areas of active erosion which contributes excess sediment to Aravaipa Creek and accelerates drying in the uplands which contributes to shrub encroachment and desertification.
- Reduce woody plants which have increased in distribution and density to:
  1. Improve bighorn sheep habitat
  2. Improve mule deer forage
  3. Improve white-tail deer forage
  4. Improve watershed function

**PROJECT STRATEGIES:**

- Install natural channel design-type structures in the Turkey Creek drainage
- Conduct a prescribed burn (approximately 8,800 acres) on the South Rim
- Expand native grass farming to 127 acres on the Cobra Ranch
- Recontour Aravaipa Creek and restore of 23 acres of riparian and grassland vegetation along Cobra Ranch
- Introduce native grass seeds and organic matter on approximately 1,000 acres of uplands to promote grassland restoration (will be completed over a five to ten year period)

**PROJECT LOCATION:**

Township 6 South, Range 18 East, portions of Sections 34 and 35; Township 7 South, Range 18 East, portions of Sections 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 26; Township 6 South, Range 19 East, portions of Sections 20, 21, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33; Township 7 South, Range 19 East, portions of Sections 4, 5, 7, 18, 19. Quadrangle: Oak Grove Canyon. See map on Page 5.

**LAND OWNERSHIP AT PROJECT SITE (Please state specifically if PRIVATE PROPERTY and provide landowner's name):**

Public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Safford Field Office: 7,352 acres

Private lands owned by The Nature Conservancy: 2,363 acres

**IF PRIVATE PROPERTY, IS THERE A STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LANDOWNER AND THE DEPARTMENT?**

Yes.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:**

The predominant vegetation community in the area is semidesert grassland, Madrean evergreen woodland, and small portions of interior chaparral and Great Basin conifer woodland. The ridges are dominated by grama grasses intermingled with semi-desert shrubs. Mesquite, catclaw, juniper, and snakeweed, are typical of the shrubs that are beginning to dominate portions of the proposed burn areas. Mixed broadleaf vegetation dominated by cottonwood, willow, sycamore, and ash occurs in Aravaipa Creek, Turkey Creek, and Oak Grove Canyon, but these areas are outside of the burn areas.

**ITEMIZED USE OF FUNDS:**

**Special Big Game Funds**

\$45,000 – Prescribed burn, BLM fire staff salary

**National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**

\$15,000 – Prescribed burn, aerial ignition contract

\$8,501.50 – TNC Cobra Ranch grassland restoration (equipment and supplies)

\$6,638 – Sky Island Alliance Volunteer Coordinator and Program Director (salary)

\$11,001 – BLM supplies (tools, native grass plugs, erosion control training/workshop consultant)

Total - \$115,084.50

**The Nature Conservancy**

\$71,290 – Salary and overhead for implementation of Cobra Ranch restoration activities

**Sky Island Alliance**

\$36,186 – Volunteer hours

**Bureau of Land Management**

\$12,500 – BLM salary for planning documents and environmental compliance

**Total Matching Funds**

**\$234,760**

**Total Project Cost**

**\$279,760**

**LIST COOPERATORS AND DESCRIBE POTENTIAL PARTICIPATION:**

Sky Island Alliance – Recruitment and coordination of volunteers

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Funding organization

The Nature Conservancy – Private land owner, providing labor and equipment

Bureau of Land Management – Oversight, environmental compliance, biologist staff time.

**PROJECT MONITORING PLAN:**

Monitoring of the results of the prescribed burn and erosion control structures will be completed by the Bureau of Land Management, Safford Field Office. Projects on the Cobra Ranch will be monitored by The Nature Conservancy.

**PROJECT MAINTENANCE:**

Maintenance of erosion control structures will be completed by BLM staff and volunteers. Other portions of this project will not require maintenance.

**PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT TO BE FILED BY: Jeff Conn, Bureau of Land Management**