

# **WILDLIFE STEWARDSHIP PLAN**

For The

## **FREDERICK CITY'S WATERFORD PARK**

Prepared for

**Mrs. Ginny Brace, President  
Friends of Waterford Park  
1604 Rock Creek Drive  
Frederick, MD 21702**

### **Location**

**On the south side of Rock Creek Drive,  
Between Baughman's Lane and Route 15**

**In**

**Frederick County  
Maryland**

**On Approximately**

**8.5 acres of Field**

**Prepared by:**

**Donald Rohrback  
Wildlife Biologist  
Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife & Heritage Service  
Indian Springs Wildlife Management Area  
14038 Blairs Valley Road  
Clear Spring, Maryland 21722  
301-842-3355**

**October 2005**

## **Introduction**

Many wildlife populations, particularly Upland bird populations have suffered a rapid decline over the last 10 to 15 years. This decline has been influenced by many land-use related issues including changes in common farming practices, advancements in farm machinery, undeveloped land lost to suburban encroachment, etc. Every time a hedgerow is taken out of a field, or a field is turned into town homes, upland wildlife species such as pheasants, quail, rabbits, and songbirds are affected. It is the goal of this wildlife stewardship plan to provide landowners such as yourself, with the necessary information to create or enhance existing wildlife habitat on your property. The land that you own definitely has the potential to provide the necessary habitat needs for a wide variety of wildlife species to survive year-round.

Experience in Maryland shows that the limiting habitat factors for pheasant, quail, rabbits and other wildlife species are usually safe nesting cover, winter cover and winter food. Nesting cover and winter food benefit wildlife most when adjacent to areas providing winter cover. By having safe nesting cover and winter food, near winter cover, you can provide for the year-round requirements of most wildlife. Brief descriptions of nesting cover, winter cover and winter food follow:

**Winter cover** provides protection for wildlife during the cold months of the year and is almost always associated with woody growth such as trees, shrubs, brambles and vines. Wood edges and hedgerows fulfill this need for quail and rabbits. Another type of winter cover, often called a "wet meadow," is found in areas that are usually too wet to till but remain relatively open due to the type of vegetation growing there.

**Nesting cover** is probably the most important habitat component for upland wildlife, especially quail, pheasant and rabbits. These species nest on the ground, usually in herbaceous vegetation. Quail and pheasant prefer open stands, with 30 to 50% of the area bare soil. Cottontails will "nest" in many types of grassy cover.

**Winter food** is also important to upland wildlife species. To be useful, winter food must meet three requirements - it should hold seed through mid-March, it should hold its seed above the snow, and it must be close to winter cover.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE WILDLIFE HABITAT**

The Waterford Park is a section of Frederick City's Greenways system and is located on the south side of Rock Creek Drive, between Baughman's Lane to the west and Route 15 to the east. This section of park consists of 8.5 acres of fields, and 9.5 acres of forested lands. A Paved walking trail meanders through the forest on the southern edge of the property. A new section of sewer line was recently constructed that bisects the central portion of the park and was recently seed in grass. Rock Creek flows along the southern boundary of the park and Carroll Creek bisects the northeastern section of the property, with both streams converging together on the

eastern most corner of the site. Most, if not all of the surrounding countryside is in residential development.

Area residents and Frederick City Officials have been discussing various environmental, aesthetic, and recreational enhancements that can be made in the park. The prevailing notion is to maintain the area in a natural condition devoid of any recreational facilities. These stakeholders wish to have an assessment made of the field area in order to formulate a working plan for the property. The following plan will make some recommendations on how to enhance the property to achieve the desired outcomes of the various stakeholders. The property currently contains a good diversity of permanent cover and to a much lesser extent safe nesting habitat. The basis for much of this plan is to increase the amount of safe nesting cover by establishing some of the open areas into warm season (WSG) to create an old-field habitat.

Although currently uncommon in Maryland, warm season grass species made up most of the grasslands that originally existed in Maryland and throughout the United States. As interest in native plantings grows these species will become more popular, replacing introduced or exotic species such as fescue. Furthermore, most of these species have tremendous value as pasture forage and hay. In fact, compared to cool-season grasses, they are considerably more palatable, produce significantly higher weight gain in beef cattle, and are available as forage during the drier summer months.

However, the most important characteristic of these grasses may well be their value for upland wildlife. Warm-season grass plantings in pastures and on marginal ground removed from agricultural production have proven to be the key to the recent rebound of upland birds and other wildlife species in the Mid-West. Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, the Dakotas and others are experiencing some of the highest quail and pheasant populations in decades. Professional researchers, biologists, landowners, farmers, and sportsmen seem to agree that these grasses are a major reason for the rebound.

Because of the light, fluffy, "trashy" characteristics of these species, they can be difficult to establish using conventional methods; the ESTABLISHMENT section below discusses the difficulties you may encounter. However, do not be discouraged, once you have established a stand, the benefits of low-maintenance and increased wildlife should far outweigh the initial effort.

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF WARM-SEASON GRASSES**

Warm-Season grass species should be planted using a specialized warm-season or range-land grass box on a conventional or no-till drill. If "de-bearded" grass seed is available, this can be drilled without the specialized box. Consult your seed supplier about the availability of de-bearded seed. Note, however, that all species should be drilled as shallow as possible,  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an inch. Burying seed any deeper than this will prevent adequate germination.

The Wildlife & Heritage Division has a special no-till drill available for landowners to use to plant this particular type of seed. This drill is specifically designed to plant the fluffy type seed of this particular species of grass. You will need at least a 35-hp tractor to pull this drill. In order for us to maintain this drill in good working order, we charge a modest fee of \$10.00/acre to help offset our maintenance cost for this particular piece of equipment. If you lack the necessary equipment to plant your fields, the local Quail Unlimited Chapter can be contracted to plant this grass for you. Please call the Indian Springs Wildlife Office if you are interested in this service. I would be happy to provide you with contact person.

**When planting warm season grasses, a properly prepared field is the most critical step in getting these grasses established.** First, you will need to have the area sprayed with an herbicide in the early spring of 06 to kill the existing vegetation. I would recommend that you use Roundup or similar type of herbicide. In addition to the Roundup, I would also recommend that you include an herbicide called Plateau, which has been specifically developed to establish warm season grasses. When you have the various fields sprayed, I would recommend that you include approximately 4oz/ac of Plateau in the spray mix, along with the Roundup and a surfactant. I have Plateau here at my office and have supplied a number of landowners with this chemical at cost.

When planting warm season grasses extreme care must be taken to ensure good seed to soil contact while limiting maximum seed depth to one-half of an inch. However, do not be concerned about covering all of the seed, in fact, it is better to leave some on the surface than cover it too heavily. Planting dates range from April 15th to June 15th for most species.

### **NATIVE WARM-SEASON MIXTURES**

#### **MIX 1: WHIP Planting Sites:**

##### **GRASS MIXTURE**

2 lbs. Big Blue-Stem  
2 lbs. Little Blue-Stem  
And 2 lbs. Indian-grass

##### **with LEGUMES/FORBS**

1 ozs. of each:  
a. Partridge Pea  
b. Lanceleaf Coreopsis/Purple Cornflower  
and c. Black Eyed Susan

*Sheet*

*Other  
1/2 lb*

**IMPORTANT: All WSG seeding rates are per acre of "Pure Live Seed" (PLS), please specify PLS when ordering seed.**

## SEED SUPPLIERS

**The following is a list of companies that should be able to supply you with the seed or mixtures recommended.**

Sharp Bros. Seed Co.  
Route 4 Box 237A  
Clinton, MO. 64735  
1-800-451-3779

Bluestem Seed Co.  
4045 Somerset Dr.  
Prairie Village, KS. 66208  
816-786-2401

Bamert Seed Co.  
Route 3 Box 1120  
Muleshoe, TX. 79347  
806-272-5506

C.P. Daniel's Sons, Inc.  
P.O. Box 119  
Waynesboro, GA. 30830  
404-554-2446

Because of the many different governmental and private conservation programs available, the large demand for warm season grass seed has resulted in the price of seed to increase considerably. This will most likely be the biggest cost associated with getting this grass established. However, do not be too disturbed; QU has, for a number of years, purchased a very large quality of seed and then distributed to landowners at a reduce price. This seed mixture has been specifically developed for the State of Maryland, and contains a good diversity of both Big and Little Bluestem and Indian Grass, as well as a nice wildflower mixture. If you are interested in purchasing your seed through QU please call me at the Indian Springs Office and I would be happy to arrange everything. However, be aware that you are more the welcome to obtain your own seed from other sources if you so desire.

## MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF WARM-SEASON GRASSES

Warm-season grasses, although valued for their long-term benefits to wildlife, low-maintenance requirements and high nutrition as pasture forage and hay, are more expensive and time-consuming to establish. However, because of this trait they will rarely spread outside of the original planting, which is especially important when establishing nesting cover adjacent to valuable agricultural crops.

Be patient, it may take two or more growing seasons for a stand to become complete. In the interim, care should be taken to control weeds and woody growth by mowing your stand at least once after seedlings reach a height of 3-4 inches and weeds are 6 inches and taller. Do not mow the grass seedlings themselves---keep mower deck high enough to mow only the weedy growth. You could also apply another application of the chemical Plateau to the warm season grasses seedlings during the second year of growth to help in controlling competing weed species, I would highly recommend an additional application of Plateau, this would insure good growth on the WSG seedlings.

Once established, you could mow one third of your stand every other year, this will keep woody growth from encroaching. However, it will also create a layer of "litter"

on the ground, this layer will eventually make movement of young birds difficult and is less attractive to those insects that are so important to young birds. If you do decide to mow, it may be necessary to lightly disc the stand every three or four years in order to turn over the litter layer, destroy woody growth, and encourage dormant grass seed and native annuals. However, the most effective and efficient method of maintaining and rejuvenating a stand of grass is to burn it. Burning one third of your total grass acreage every three to four years will insure a cleaner more valuable stand over a longer period of time. Please contact the Habitat Manager at the Indian Spring Wildlife Area, (301) 842-3355 for assistance and technical guidance. Your local Project Forester is also available for permits and assistance in conducting a control burn.

Lastly, please refrain from any work in your fields between April 1 and August 1 in order to avoid destroying nests or young of quail, turkeys, meadowlarks, and other upland wildlife.

## **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **BLUEBIRDS:**

Bluebirds are an attractive songbird, which primarily eat insects. Historically, they nested in natural tree cavities, but competition with the starling for natural cavities has depressed their populations in recent times. Bluebirds readily accept nest boxes, such as the ones described in the attached brochure. You could erect up to 25 boxes on your property to attract these desirable birds. Place the boxes where the entrance faces an open area and periodically check the boxes throughout the summer to remove any house sparrow nests and eggs. Please refer to the attached brochure for additional recommendations.

# COST PROPOSAL

Date: October 19, 2005

For: Mrs. Ginny Brace, President  
Friends of Waterford Park  
1604 Rock Creek Pr  
Frederick, MD 21702

Proposed work to be completed on Waterford Park, Frederick County, Maryland.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Qty</u>	<u>Unit/Price</u>	<u>Value</u>
01	Spraying (Approx)	1.0 ac	\$ 35.00/ac	\$ 35.00
02	Warm season grass seed	1.0 ac	\$ 85.00/ac	\$ 85.00
	<small>With Wildflowers</small>			
03	Planting grass seed	1.0 ac	\$ 30.00/ac	\$ 30.00
05	Equipment Mobilization	n/a	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00

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**Total : 250.00**

All planting will be completed according to Natural Resources Conservation Service specifications and guidelines.

If this proposal is acceptable, please sign, date, and return to the Indian Springs Wildlife Office.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, on this date, \_\_\_\_\_, accept this proposal as written.

PLEASE RETURN TO: Donald H. Rohrback  
Wildlife & Heritage Division  
14038 Blairs Valley Rd  
Clear Spring, MD 21722