

Interior Habitat Enhancement for Wildlife**FY2005 Request: \$80,000****Reference No: 39001****AP/AL:** Appropriation**Project Type:** Renewal and Replacement**Category:** Natural Resources**Location:** Fairbanks Areawide**Contact:** Matt Robus**House District:** Fairbanks Areawide (HD 7-11)**Contact Phone:** (907)465-4190**Estimated Project Dates:** 07/01/2004 - 06/30/2009**Brief Summary and Statement of Need:**

Improve habitat quality for wildlife through the use of prescribed fires, felling of mature aspen and birch groves, and thinning of trees in mature forest to promote re-vegetation. Past woodland fire suppression efforts, current fire protection needs near valuable properties, and relatively modest timber harvests have resulted in reduced amounts and distribution of early to mid-growth forest which are essential components of diverse productive wildlife habitats. This CIP will continue habitat enhancement work begun under the 1996 Demonstration Project/Post-Logging Revegetation and Wildlife Enhancement CIP.

Funding:	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	Total
Fed Rcpts	\$60,000						\$60,000
Fish/Game	\$20,000						\$20,000
Total:	\$80,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$80,000

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State Match Required	<input type="checkbox"/> One-Time Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - underway	<input type="checkbox"/> On-Going
25% = Minimum State Match % Required		<input type="checkbox"/> Amendment	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Bill	

Operating & Maintenance Costs:

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Staff</u>
Project Development:	0	0
Ongoing Operating:	0	0
One-Time Startup:	0	0
Totals:	0	0

Additional Information / Prior Funding History:

a) Demonstration Project - Post-Logging Revegetation and Wildlife Enhancement - \$600.0 (Fed Funds & Fish/Game Fund) - CH 123, SLA 1996, pg 52, ln 35; b) Habitat Management in Interior Alaska - \$100.0 (Fish/Game Fund) CH 61 SLA 2001, pg 18. Projects completed to date under this CIP include habitat management to benefit primarily moose, grouse, and bison in Interior, Southcentral, and Southeast Alaska.

Project Description/Justification:

Funds requested under this CIP will support habitat management projects and experiments in the boreal forest of Interior Alaska. The objective of these projects is to promote habitat diversity on a large geographic scale by manipulating habitat on a local scale to provide areas where earlier successional stages occur. This work is planned in areas where wildland fires, which provide this diversity naturally, have been suppressed and is most important in areas where wildfire will continue to be suppressed for public safety reasons. Each of these projects has specific measurable objectives to provide important forage and habitat types for species such as grouse, moose, and bison.

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The following table summaries program accomplishments to date in Interior Alaska:

Activity	Number of sites treated	Number of acres treated
Landscape-scale prescribed fire	5	89,541
Post-logging site treatment	10	235
Ruffed grouse habitat enhancement	57	675
Moose habitat enhancement	28	696
Total:	100	91,157

Currently, the ADF&G and cooperating land managers have completed plans to prescribe burn 74,000-acres on the Tanana Flats south of Fairbanks and 29,500-acres in the Robertson River drainage west of Tok, and are completing a plan to prescribe burn 20,000-acres at Wolf Lake near Tanacross to improve habitat for wildlife, especially moose. In addition, three 20–26 acre aspen units are ready for burning at the Nenana Ridge Ruffed Grouse Project and four 6–36 acre slash burns are being planned in areas near Fairbanks and Tok to evaluate burning as a means to improve wildlife habitat following timber harvests.

The following table shows the CIP funding needed for the habitat enhancement projects planned beginning in FY05:

Treatment	CIP Funds Needed
Tanana Flats landscape burn	15.0
Robertson River landscape burn	8.2
Wolf Lake landscape burn	24.0
Nenana Ridge aspen burns	6.1
Tok River. postlogging burns	16.7
Standard Creek postlogging burn	10.0
Total	80.0

Alternatives to prescribed fire for solving these habitat problems were considered and rejected. Mechanical treatments are prohibitively expensive on a landscape scale, will not provide comparable results, and create access and soil damage problems. Natural ignition (lightning) is unpredictable and may not occur in time to relieve the management problems the habitat treatment efforts are designed to alleviate. Improvement of browse conditions on the Tanana Flats remains our highest priority for the Interior because of the long history of intensive management, including predator control, to maintain a moderately high moose density for consumptive use. Prescribed burning is necessary in the Robertson River because lightning ignition is rare in this location. Prescribed burning is necessary for the Wolf Lake project because wildland fire is too risky given proximity of the project to Native allotments and the nearby village of Tanacross.

Full funding is needed for these projects this fiscal year and should not be delayed. The Tanana Flats project is urgently needed to prevent a decline in the moose population of GMU 20A. The Wolf Lake project needs to proceed as soon as possible because the BIA has contributed \$129,000 for preburn allotment protection work which could be lost if implementation is delayed much longer. Funding for the Tok River postlogging burns is needed in FY05 because burning must occur during the same year as the timber harvest, which is scheduled for winter 2003-2004, and DWC has invested many person-months in gathering preburn data to evaluate treatment effects on vegetation and wildlife. State funding for the Standard Creek postlogging burn is needed to match requested Ruffed Grouse Society funds and obtain information essential for promoting this technique as a routine part of timber management in the Interior.

Lastly, funding should not be delayed simply because of the problematic nature of prescribed burning. Opportunities for prescribed burning are quite limited. Weather conditions must be within the range necessary to safely achieve burn objectives and burning can only occur when fire personnel and equipment are not needed for higher priority wildland fires. Ideally, sufficient funding should be available for all projects during FY05 in case conditions materialize for safe implementation of each project. Projects not completed in FY05 will be carried forward to the next year.

A grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Aid will be obtained to complete this work. Wildlife Restoration funding requires a cost-share of 25% which will be provided by the Fish & Game Fund.