

Habitat Enhancement Accomplishments
Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel
Payette National Forest 2008



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New Meadows / Council Ranger Districts

**Habitat Enhancement Projects
Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel
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In an effort to facilitate the recovery of the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel, the Payette National Forest has accomplished the following habitat enhancement projects for calendar year 2008. The areas selected are consistent with the USFS Habitat Restoration Plan, USFWS Recovery Plan, and the USFS/USFWS Conservation Agreement.

Accomplishments for 2008:

Enhancement Burning: (Lost Valley)

40 acres were broadcast burned. Objective was to rejuvenate and enhance the grass and forb communities within occupied habitat. This area was previously broadcast burned in 2001,2003.

Youth Conservation Corp (YCC): (Lost Valley, Lick Creek Lookout)

The YCC students constructed approximately one half mile of fire line, and completed slash and duff pull back to facilitate fall burning at Lost Valley.

NIDGS surveys were completed in the Lick Creek Lookout area, no new NIDGS populations were discovered.

NEPA: (East & West Zones)

East Zone:

EA was completed for the East Fork Lost Creek Habitat improvement NIDGS. 710 ac. be will treated, treatment will consist of mechanical thinning, and under burning. Objective of the treatmeant is to enhance and restore NIDGS habitat and create dispersal corridors between Lost Valley Metapopulation area and occupied NIDGS sites in the East Fork of Lost Creek.

EA was completed for Warm Springs Fuels Reduction Project, a 5,725 acre fuels reduction project. 159 acres is designated as free thinning (NIDGS marking prescriptions). Objective of the free thinning units is to enhance and restore NIDGS habitat for future translocation sites.

West Zone:

EA was completed for the Summit Gulch Vegetative Management Project; 800 acres of NIDGS habitat enhancement will occur in and adjacent to the Summit / Tree Farm sites.

Vegetative Monitoring: West Zone (Range Allotment Monitoring)

West Zone range specialists established and re-read allotment monitoring sites at the following sites in 2008. Cold Springs East (SHC,UTL), Cold Springs West (SHC,UTL), Cottonwood Corrals (SHC,UTL), Fawn Creek (SHC,UTL), Hoo Hoo Gulch (SHC,UTL), Huckleberry (SHC), Mill Creek (SHC,UTL), Summit Gulch (NPF,SHC,UTL), Tree Farm (SHC,UTL).

NPF = Nested Plot Frequency, UTL = Utilization, SHC = Seed Head Count

Vegetative Monitoring: IDFG (Summit, Tree Farm)

Dr. Eric Yensen developed two study proposals addressing NIDGS diet. One study will focus on diet / overlap with livestock grazing; the other study will identify important forage plants NIDGS eat throughout the active season.

IDFG is conducting the first part of the diet study, refer to, *Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel Diet Study Interim Report Of the 2008 Pilot Field Effort*.

Noxious Weed Treatment:

Wildlife Services: May – October (Predator Control)

Two Badgers, four red foxes, and 1 coyote were removed from the Lost Valley area.

GPS and GIS: Lost Valley, Price Valley, Butter Gulch, Lost Creek, Gray's Creek
Maps were produced showing treatment area, year of treatment, active burrows, confirmed NIDGS observations, area's surveyed for NIDGS presence, log landing area's, skid trails and timber sale cutting unit boundaries.

NIDGS Inventory:

From June 10 to August 15 approximately forty person hours were spent surveying approximately 1800 acres in Lost Creek and Butter Gulch area. Sites were surveyed that had similar, soil, vegetative characteristics, aspect, elevations (4800' – 6,000'), and slopes consistent with extant and extinct NIDGS populations. NIDGS habitat was searched by walking slowly, looking for NIDGS burrows, NIDGS droppings, looking for clipped vegetation, and glassing NIDGS habitat. GIS maps that depicted soil and vegetative land types that are consistent with extant and extinct NIDGS populations were referenced.

Lost Creek: Approximately 1800 acres were surveyed in Lost Creek, near the confluence of East Lost, Lost Creek, and Butter Gulch area. **Several new sites were discovered Lower Lost Creek, Middle Lost Creek, and Butter Gulch**). All were small populations, 5-20 individuals inhabiting S, SW, SE, W aspects, and elevations range from 4,900'- 5,700'. Habitat between populations is fragmented by conifer encroachment and small riparian areas.

Law Enforcement: (Lost Creek)

Access management (road restrictions), four carsonite signs were installed in the Lost Creek / East Lost area to discourage unauthorized vehicle and ATV usage in road closure areas.

Metapopulation Management Plan: (Lost Valley)

The Lost Valley Metapopulation Management Plan has been submitted to IDFG for final editing. Purpose of the plan is to have a management plan that outlines needed enhancement and maintenance of habitat for the subspecies.

PROPOSED PROJECTS - 2009:

Habitat Enhancement Projects: (Price Valley)

The Upper Weiser Condition Class / Fire Regime Project. Commercial timber harvest will occur on approximately 500 acres adjacent to occupied NIDGS habitat north of Price Valley Guard Station, prescribed fire will be implemented following timber harvest. Treatment will open the canopy to reduce tree densities, larger more fire resistant trees will be retained, convert stands of shade tolerant species to seral species, and reintroduce fire into areas that have not experienced fire for 120 years. The objective is to expand NIDGS habitat, provide NIDGS dispersal corridors, rejuvenate and enhance grass and forb communities through prescribed fire after timber harvest.

Maintenance Burning and Thinning: (East Zone and West Zone)

East Zone: Lost Valley and Price Valley, approximately 50 ac. will be broadcast burned in the Eagle Nest area of Lost Valley. No maintenance burning is scheduled for the Price Valley in 2008.

West Zone: Cottonwood Corrals and Chipmunk Springs approximately 100 ac. will be broadcast burned at one or a combination of the sites. Pre-commercial thinning will occur where necessary. Funding and NEPA may delay the projects until 2009. Sites will be prioritized in early summer.

Metapopulation Management Plan: (Summit Gulch / Tree Farm)

The Summit Gulch / Tree Farm Metapopulation Management Plan will be completed in 2008.

The purpose of the plan is to outline needed enhancement and maintenance of habitat for the subspecies.

Payette NF Habitat Restoration Plan: (East Zone and West Zone)

2008 – 2013 Payette NF "Habitat Restoration Plan" will be completed in 2008.

Purpose of the plan is to outline habitat enhancement restoration schedules for each extant and extinct NIDGS population within the boundaries of the Payette NF.

NEPA: (East and West Zones)

East Zone: Lost Valley/Price Valley Category 6 (CE) for maintenance burning, precommercial thinning, native seed collection, and fireline construction, the project area is approximately 450 ac. with a five year effective date, 2008-2013.

East Lost Squirrel (EA) planned NEPA completion 2008, the project will treat approximately 700 acres, the purpose is to restore NIDGS habitat by reducing conifer encroachment and density, enhance and rejuvenate dry meadow communities, and create connective corridors between occupied and unoccupied NIDGS habitat. The project will connect the East Lost population site with the Lost Valley Metapopulation Area.

West Zone: NEPA has been completed for the Summit Gulch Vegetative Management Area, 889 acres of commercial and pre-commercial thinning, and 2061 acres of broadcast burning will occur, this project will enhance NIDGS habitat in and surrounding the Summit / Tree Farm Metapopulation. The Lick Creek Vegetative Project will be re-advertised, and offered for sale in 2008, 730 acres of commercial and pre-commercial

thinning, and 250 acres of broadcast burning will occur. A category 6 and 12 CE for maintenance burning, commercial thinning, pre-commercial thinning, fireline construction, and native seed collection & planting. Project areas and funding will be determined in 2008, implementation will occur in 2009.

GPS and GIS: (East and West Zones)

Up-date restoration maps and GPS inventory areas.

NIDGS Inventory: (Upper Grouse Creek, Fawn Creek Saddle, Upper Lost Creek, and North Star Butte to Pollock Mountain).

Interpretive Site: (Lost Valley Restoration Area)

NIDGS interpretive site, dependent on funding.

Vegetative Monitoring: June-Sept.

Coordinated and monitored by range. Annual seed head counts, and one Nested Frequency Plot (Summit Gulch) will be reread.

Fencing: Aug.-Oct.

Re-construct portable electric fencing to exclude grazing to help facilitate Fall burning where necessary.

Law Enforcement: June-Oct. (East and West Zones)

Access management

Wildlife Services: June-Oct. Predator Control. (East and West Zones)