

Project Description – Blackbird Reserve

The proposed site of this pond, pasture and agricultural food plot project is within the state-owned Blackbird Reserve Wildlife Area in southern New Castle County, Delaware. The property is managed by Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) for recreational use, including deer and waterfowl hunting. The 535-acre site is predominantly forested (71.4%), with 152.9 acres (28.6%) in open agricultural lands. As part of the purchase agreement of the property the open agricultural lands were to be restored to something other than “active agricultural”, i.e., farming. In an effort to maintain habitat heterogeneity and provide wildlife habitat values for all species currently utilizing the property the DFW proposes restoration of these agricultural lands into a combination of forested areas, shallow wetland ponds, wildlife pastures and agricultural food plots. The latter three habitat types (shallow wetland ponds, pastures and agricultural food plots) will be restored to provide suitable goose habitat (Figure 1). Existing lowland areas will be excavated to create two permanent shallow ponds surrounded by managed pastures designed to attract migratory geese. In addition areas adjacent to the pastures will use agricultural practices to create wildlife food plots also designed to attract migrating geese. In total, approximately 2.2 acres of ponds, 16 acres of pasture and 23.6 acres of food plots will be established. The slopes of the shallow wetland ponds will be planted in beneficial wetland plants and the pastures will be planted with cool season grasses, including white clover and a fescue mix (creeping red and chewing). The wildlife food plots will be established using agricultural practices and will be planted in corn, soybean or winter wheat; however, no more than 80% of the crop will be removed providing both food and feeding habitat for migrating geese. The remaining 20% of crop left standing will be distributed along the perimeter of the fields to improve vegetative erosion control, as well as in thin strips or small blocks within the fields providing ideal winter feeding habitat for migrating geese. Only 23.6 acres or 15.4% of the original 152.9 acres of agricultural land will remain in agricultural, albeit wildlife food plots. The DFW will contract with a local farmer to plant and maintain the food plots through in-kind services associated with removing 80% of the crop; however the DFW will not derive any income associated with this agreement. For scaling purposes, the Trustees assume that restoration will begin in 2009 and productivity of pasture land and food plots will be an average of the species planted, while the ponds will have productivity similar to the wet meadows of Mad Horse Creek.

Figure 1
Proposed restoration projects at Blackbird Reserve. The targeted ponds are outlined in blue, the pasture areas are outlined in green and the agricultural wildlife food plots in orange.



Excavation	\$ 7,260
Pasture Creation	\$ 5,280
Wetland Planting	\$ 1,000
Project Administration	\$ 2,710
Maintenance	\$ 50,000
Technical Oversight	\$ 8,736
Monitoring	\$ 4,400
Total	\$ 79,386