

Bowie County WRP/WRE Plan and DFCW Training - Hardwood Stand Evaluation and Marking

In July 2020, in order to meet 7 CFR Part 1467, § 1467.11 (a)(2)(ii) 16 U.S.C. § 3837440 CPM 514.62 Warranty Easement Deed, Part IV for Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)/Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Compatible Use Authorization and Permitting, the USDA NRCS and USFWS requested the support of Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) staff and partners to collaboratively develop a process, protocol, and product for an existing WRP/WRE property in Bowie County, Texas.

Initial meetings and site visits were held virtually on several occasions, and on the WRE/WRP “Bachelor Tract” between July and October 2020. As a follow-up to those meetings and site visits, a proposed Managed Marking Plan was developed by LMVJV staff and approved to move forward (see attached 9/30/20). The Plan incorporated a Desired Forest Conditions for Wildlife (DFCW) training effort, while also meeting the goal and objectives of NRCS and USFWS to properly manage forested easements. The DFCW concept has been used in the lower MS valley since 2007, and is a significant reason why millions of acres of bottomland hardwood easements and conservation lands have been so productive for species like the LA Black Bear. The goal of the Texas effort had two specific objectives: (a) properly evaluate and mark the Bachelor WRP/WRE forested 150-acre tract, and (b) train a core group of Texas staff to understand and utilize the DFCW concept.

Between November 2020 and February 2021, LMVJV staff communicated the need. Using the Bachelor WRP/WRE as a training focus area, a group of 24 agency and organization staff with forestry experience was assembled to learn and develop DFCW skills. On February 9, 2021, Jeff Denman and Duck Locascio conducted a virtual training session for the group. They set a target date of March 15-16 to meet on site and complete the task as a “hands-on” practical training session.

Pre-Planning and Site Evaluation on **March 15**, with goal to complete this job on **March 16**.

March 15

At 11 am, Jeff Denman, Bill Bartush, Adam Terry (TPWD), and Cody Dunagan (TPWD) met with landowners in DeKalb, Texas. They reviewed the site plan, discussed landowner objectives and history, then drove to property (5 miles north and 3 miles east of DeKalb) to evaluate stand and discuss best entry locations and logistics of travel (previous day’s rainfall required 4x4 vehicle use, and staging areas away from site for those without 4x4). At 1 pm, the group initiated evaluation and baseline to outline the training protocol for Day Two; during this time, we discussed marking guidelines to meet landowner objectives and allow maximum wildlife potential. Jeff D, Bill B, Adam T, and Cody D initiated marking to establish parameters and marking examples for 3/16 operation. From 5-7 pm, parted with landowner and traveled to New Boston; met with NRCS (Darren Clark and Will Blackwell) to review findings of Day One and

refine plan for 3/16. Because of forecasted storm conditions on 3/17, expectations were to complete site marking by 3/16. Prior to full group's arrival on 3/16, Denman decided to return early on Day 2 with a small group to continue marking.

March 16

Day 2 – At 0630, John Stevens (FWS) Jeff D, Adam T, and Cody D returned to site and initiated marking. Bartush and Day 2 group staged in DeKalb at 8 am; the group was provided maps and briefed on safety; expectations and travel to site were summarized, and all logistics were covered with Q&A.

Bob Baker, Clay Shipes, John Tomza (TPWD) – provided 3 (4x4) UTVs, paint guns and forestry gear; Jamie Hooker (NWTF), Steve Arey (FWS), Steve Rockwood (DU); Ami Mineta, Darren Clarke, Will Blackwell (NRCS) caravanned to site and off-loaded UTVs – training aspects began at 9 am with group and Jeff Denman. John Stephens, Adam T, and Cody D continued marking.

0930 - 10:30 – Jeff Denman led marking practical through various parts of stand, encouraging participation in deciding “how and what” when identifying a “marked tree for removal,” OR, to identify a tree as valuable for wildlife, not mark for removal, thereby enhancing the stand.

11 am – Jeff Denman provisioned 3 teams (3 members per team, with marking paint, counters, and tally sheets) to coach through the WRP/WRE tract as a practical training session; this hands-on experience allowed all to obtain the “360°” experience of marking decisions, critical for identifying potential “take” tree and leave tree considerations to promote DFCW.

12 noon – Lunch break; afterward, continued marking in coached groups through 7 pm. Though some in the group left at 4 pm, most trainees stayed until 7 pm, and then returned home.

7 pm – Closeout session with landowner, and reviewed expected next-step details with Jeff Denman, Darren Clark, Will Blackwell, and Steve Arey. Highly recommended that the landowner contact a consulting forester to help retain logger, develop sound contract, and supervise a logging contract that is expected this summer.

March 17

Day 3 – 6:30-8 am – Debriefed with Jeff Denman, Bill Bartush, Darren Clark, and Will Blackwell. We had good discussion of future WRE enhancement actions, costs, and support that could be expected. Bartush met at 0900 with Holly Attaway to brief and clarify marking goals met, and next steps.

Additional Comments from Jeff Denman: The landowner is an avid squirrel hunter, and highly desires to retain strips of un-thinned forest throughout “for ease of access around and through the parcel” while hunting. After lengthy discussion, we agreed to leave an exterior (perimeter) strip unmarked (un-thinned), but I (Jeff Denman) had to insist on marking for thinning the entire interior. However, there will be variable retention thinning with pockets of un-thinned amongst the thinned, rather than the “established 100-yard wide strips” requested by the landowner. From the 150 total parcel acres, those interior un-thinned strips would have reduced the area to be thinned by 2/3, or about 50 acres. The reduction of 50 acres would seriously reduce purchaser interest and logging to meet DFCW. The approximate 102 acres marked, and strip thinning dense ash, will now result in a much better opportunity to sell and log successfully.

On Day 3, we had planned to mark for one-half day to complete the marking. However, severe storms were forecast for Wednesday morning, so we revised our plan, knowing all work had to be completed on Tuesday. Thus, there was a marathon effort by many folks on Day 2 to get the field work completed before the storms.

The landowner had seen “Kingwood Forestry” signs on other property in the area, indicating Kingwood was managing those parcels. I suggested the landowner consider at least 2 forestry consultant companies; I spoke of F&W Forestry – a former trainee/employee of mine now works in this area for them. I contacted the F&W individual to brief him of what is needed, and he stated he frequently works in the New Boston/DeKalb area. As I understand it, the forestry consultant needs to:

- *Coordinate with/on behalf of the landowner.*
- *Coordinate with USDA for compliance with WRP/WRE.*
- *Conduct the sale by preparing bid invitations and distribute the information about the marked timber and maps for sale, show the sale area to prospective bidders, receive bids, and recommend to the landowner which to accept.*
- *Prepare timber sale contract with protective clauses for approval and acceptance by USDA (as easement owner), landowner, and buyer.*
- *Administer the sale, processing payments to the landowner from the buyer.*
- *Monitor logging for compliance with the timber contract.*
- *Close out sale with an inspection by USDA and landowner.*

Jeff Denman - Preliminary volume estimates as follows:

4000 hardwood pulpwood trees, estimated to be	1,140 tons
Topwood from sawtimber trees, estimated to be	<u>200</u> tons
Total estimated hardwood pulpwood	1,340 tons
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128 overcup oak sawtimber trees, estimated to be	19.7 mbf (Doyle tree scale), or 148 tons
136 ash sawtimber trees, estimated to be	13.3 mbf, or 100 tons
81 elm sawtimber trees, estimated to be	9.1 mbf, or 68 tons
1 hickory sawtimber tree, estimated to be	0.1 mbf, or 0.7 tons