



THOUGHTS ON CONSERVATION

INNOVATIVE RELATIONSHIP *With* INDUSTRY

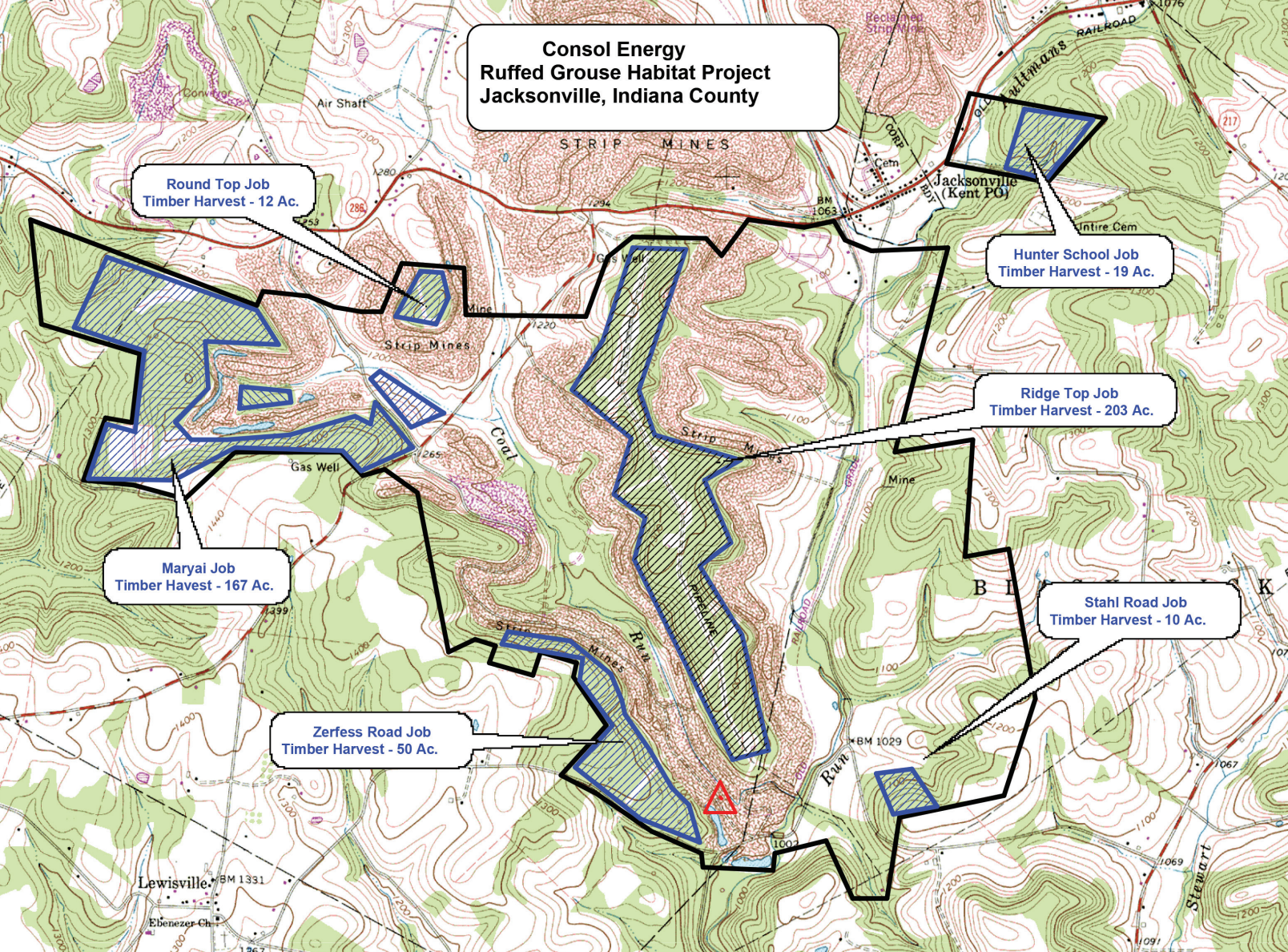
Ruffed Grouse Society and CONSOL Energy partner to create young forest habitat.

By LINDA D. ORDIWAY, PH.D., RGS AND AWS REGIONAL WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

INNOVATIVE RELATIONSHIP

In a constant pursuit to find opportunities to create habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other forest wildlife including deer and songbirds, the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) has been fortunate to forge an innovative relationship with CONSOL Energy (CONSOL), a company based in Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania, that simultaneously benefits both industry and wildlife conservation. This strategic relationship allows RGS to expand its scope of habitat creation through cooperation with a large private industrial landowner without relying upon uncertain government funding. CONSOL should be applauded for its focus on wildlife conservation and public hunting opportunities.

Thoughts on Conservation, continued on page 50



This map shows various forest management sites within the Consol Energy and Ruffed Grouse Society Habitat Project near Jacksonville in Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Map was provided by Ron Westover of Wenturine Brothers Lumber, Inc.

Copyright © 2001,
Maptech, Inc.

Thoughts on Conservation, continued from page 49



Large Private Industrial Landowner – CONSOL is considered one of the largest independent natural gas and coal exploration, development and production companies, with operations centered in the major shale formations within the Appalachian basin. They *own approximately 385,000 acres of surface land in the eastern United States*, much of which is in the Appalachian basin, which encompasses lands in southern New York, most of Pennsylvania and West Virginia, eastern Ohio and Kentucky, western Virginia, eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina and northern Georgia.

This region is infamous for its even-aged forest structure, contributing to documented declines in populations of wildlife that depend on young regenerating forests and early successional habitats (ESH). Examples of these species include ruffed grouse, New England cotton tail, American woodcock, golden-winged warbler and to a lesser extent the cerulean warbler. Within the basin, focal areas of habitat management for species of high

conservation concern, like the golden-winged and cerulean warbler, have also been identified by their respective biological technical committees.

Industry Recognizing Importance of Sustainability – As a leader in the natural gas and coal industry, they recognized the importance of the sustainability of natural resources and approached RGS in 2009 to propose a possible partnership involving the management of their timber lands which would result in the creation of ESH. The personnel at CONSOL were aware of the issues surrounding the lack of ESH, and they possessed the forested land to contribute to a potential landscape and regional impact. Some of these lands were within the suggested focal areas.

How were they aware of the ESH issues? They are grouse and woodcock hunters. The lands in the proposal were previously reclaimed mine lands and areas classified as not suitable for energy production. Therefore any habitat created would not be disrupted during the natural cycle of regeneration - an ideal situation for management.



This shows an actual forest management site in Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Photos by Linda Ordiway, Ph.D.

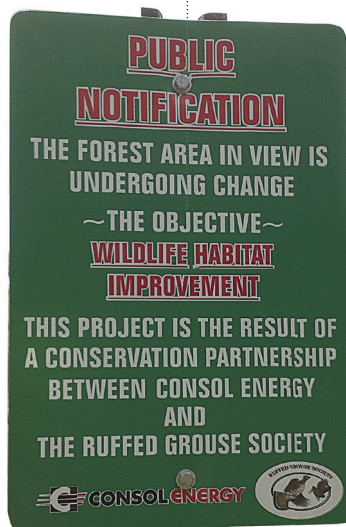
In 2010, a timber program policy was agreed upon through May of 2015. Briefly, RGS would lease the timber on identified parcels from CONSOL and share in the revenue generated from the sales of the wood products within these areas. Due to the large geographic area involved, CONSOL and RGS engaged the services of outside professional foresters to assist in the efficient operation and management of the program. The current partnership utilizes best management practices as established by industry standards and the respective state agencies (working in multiple states). Initial operations were implemented in Greene County in south-western Pennsylvania and near Madsville, West Virginia in Monongalia County in January 2011.

Link Between Industry and Conservation – This was an opportunity for industry, in this case CONSOL, to be responsible forest stewards at a regional conservation level by shifting forest age (from a predominately even-age forest across the region), structure and composition through active forest management. In doing so, **quality wildlife habitat would be created, and public access to these areas for all forest users would be maintained.** Through this relationship with industry, RGS was given the opportunity to take part in a program that would fulfill our mission (creating habitat and preserving the hunting tradition) and possibly provide a source of income

to our organization to further assist in fulfilling our mission (a means to create more habitat through maintaining operational assistance in funding) if the timber harvested would be profitable in the markets.

As with much of the forested lands in and around this region, the quality of the timber, as a commodity, was not all considered high value. With the primary objective of the partnership being to create young regenerating forests (a primary need at the regional conservation scale), this was not an obstacle. From a timber sale perspective however, this posed a challenge, which was exceptionally well-handled by the foresters at Appalachian Forestry Consultants (AFC) who actively sought buyers for the wood products of these varying qualities.

As foresters and wildlife biologists, one of the goals of conservation/forestry is to determine the best method of treatment to meet the requirement for a stand to regenerate and satisfy the needs of the wildlife potentially using the stand during different stages of its development. It was universally agreed within our team (Dave Bojtos of CONSOL, RGS regional biologist and AFC) to leave many of the highest quality trees or “the best of the worst” standing and evenly distributed



Thoughts on Conservation, continued on page 52

throughout the harvest area to serve as additional seed sources, mast and eventually downed wood for the newly forming stands on most of the cutting units. This also meant leaving some potential revenue behind on any given site.

Creating and Improving Grouse Habitat – How is the grouse population in these areas you ask? Historically, grouse were rather common (1970s). Presently, they are low primarily due to changes in land use history, development and lack of responsible forest management. Our efforts are delivering the results we want. The partnership has created the desired mosaic of a newly developing age class and differing structure. ***Through our management, we have provided a substantial source of soft/hard mast and cover for other wildlife in the immediate area.*** Given the prior condition of the forest, the new developing forest will be of a higher quality and more diverse. In the first spring, songbirds were detected that are considered regionally important including the blue-winged warbler, white-eyed vireo, Kentucky warbler, willow flycatcher, yellow-breasted chat, brown thrasher and golden-winged warbler. Mind you, this was all early spring during migration and detected by vocalization, but these birds were on the newly established site and would not be found in mature forest conditions.

The grouse present in the area will now have the appropriate habitat (in a few more years) to optimize their survival and possibly expand their population as this and the other harvest units mature. The regeneration should be nearing four-to-five feet in height at some sites - our habitat takes time to develop. The area includes some excellent woodcock habitat that should contribute to holding flight birds and also some breeding pairs.



COMING FULL CIRCLE

Ruffed Grouse Jewel – Although the largest concentrations of harvested areas were in Greene County, units were cut in Monongahela and Washington Counties in Pennsylvania as well. The real ruffed grouse jewel was in Indiana County. Roughly 700 acres were harvested throughout an area with repeated grouse sightings by the timber crews. Mike Wolfe, a forester for AFC, worked with Ron Westover of Wenturine Brothers Lumber Inc. of Nicktown, Pennsylvania in distributing the cutting units within a 2,200 acre area establishing 32 percent of the area in young regenerating forest habitat. The cutters reported on numerous occasions grouse on the log piles “grubbing” in the mornings upon their arrival. Cutting was completed on these units in 2012, and these lands have been transferred to the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) in December 2013. ***Under the continued active management of the PGC, and as the management with the CONSOL partnership continues, we anticipate the contribution to the area bird populations to show a notable increase in the next five-to-seven years.***



This partnership is critical to create sustainable wildlife habitat on significant lands owned by private industry.

To date, the total acres of ESH created through the partnership with CONSOL is approaching 13,000 acres and is growing with plans of further expansion within the Appalachian basin.

Utilizing Private Industrial Land Ownership – If we focus on Pennsylvania and land ownership as an example on how our access to private forest is changing and will be changing in the future (it probably is not much different from other states), we will see the role private industrial owned land plays in a vastly changing landscape. Too often industry is regionally underrepresented or recognized in their conservation efforts and programs.

There are 16.6 million total forested acres in Pennsylvania. Of that, 75 percent (12.5 million acres) of Pennsylvania's forests are privately owned, which makes the issue of access critical. This translates to about 738,000 owners controlling 12.5 million acres or about 17 acres-per-owner from 2010 data. In 1980, the average person owned 25 acres.**

Private individuals own a total of 6.23 million acres of the forestland. Of the private individuals, only 49 percent (3.1 million acres) are willing to manage their lands to create ESH, 11 percent are undecided and 40 percent (2.5 million acres) are opposed to any harvest at all. As the average size of land ownership decreases, so does the willingness to harvest timber.

Conceivably 2.5 million acres will not support the necessary diversity of species that use young regenerating forests due to a lack of forest management. With a little over 12 million acres (essentially 9.5 given the 2.5 million acres owned by those opposed to any harvest) of forest land in this overall private ownership category, that puts tremendous pressure on the private forest industry: 830,000 acres of public lands, 3.34 million acres of state game lands, state and county forests, national forests, state parks and wilderness areas, and 1.3 million acres of corporate lands (like CONSOL ownership).

That pressure makes conservation partnerships, such as the innovative relationship between RGS and CONSOL, so critical to create sustainable wildlife habitat and ensure our hunting tradition for future generations. We should all look hard at the numbers in the states we reside and hunt, respect your access and thank the owner - it may be industry. Thank you CONSOL Energy. 🌿

**2010 Private Forest Landowner Survey Summary prepared for Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, October 2012 – Penn State Center of Private Forests; Alexander L. Metcalf; James C. Finley; A.E. Luloff; Allyson B. Muth.