

## **Attachment B**

### **A Description Of the Houston Toad Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative**

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) is a voluntary conservation initiative that was established as a new program in the 2008 Farm Bill. CCPI enables the use of EQIP, CSP and WHIP funds, along with the resources of eligible partners, to provide financial and technical assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands to achieve specific natural resource objectives.

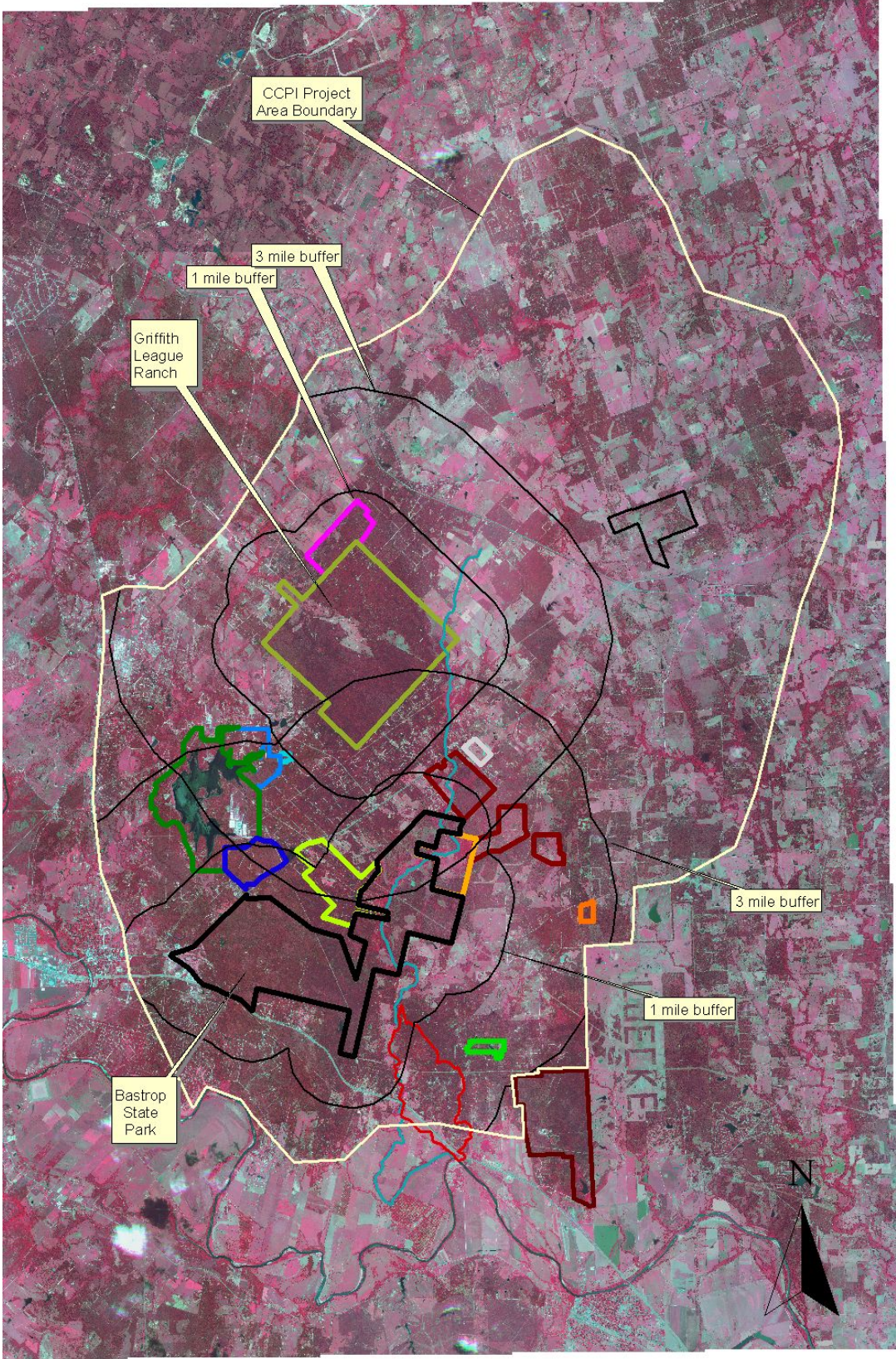
To establish a CCPI, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) enters into partnership agreements with eligible entities that want to enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands. General CCPI information can be found on the NRCS web page: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi/>

In June 2009 Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) entered into a partnership agreement with NRCS to establish the Houston Toad Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (Houston Toad CCPI). Conservation priorities of the Houston Toad CCPI include facilitating the recovery of the federally endangered Houston toad, improving water quality in Alum Creek, sequestering carbon through re-forestation and sustainable forest management, and developing habitat-sensitive fire breaks so as to facilitate the implementation of prescribed burning and minimize the potential for catastrophic wildfire. The geographic area of focus is the Greater Alum Creek Watershed, which includes much of eastern Bastrop County and a small portion of western Lee County as shown in the map on the next page.

EDF is currently working with NRCS and other partners including: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Department of Agriculture, Lost Pines Habitat Conservation Plan, Texas State University, Texas Forest Service and Houston Zoo to implement the Houston Toad CCPI. Implementation involves outreach to producers, development of conservation plans, completion of application materials, development of contracts, and project ranking, implementation and monitoring.

Within the 105,000-acre project area EDF and its partners have the following objectives:

1. Restoring/enhancing 13,500 acres of forest habitats that will benefit the Houston toad through the implementation of various conservation practices including forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, prescribed forestry, and others.
2. Creating 20 linear miles of habitat-sensitive fire breaks
3. Restoring 12,000 linear feet (length) of riparian forest buffer along Alum Creek at widths ranging from 35 to 200 feet.
4. Quantifying the carbon sequestration value of re-forestation and sustainable forestry projects and facilitating the aggregation and sale of associated carbon credits.



5. Educating landowners about appropriate conservation practices, resources that are available to them, and carbon markets.

Restoration and enhancement of forest habitats in the Lost Pines Ecosystem will facilitate recovery of the federally endangered Houston toad and benefit a variety of other wildlife including quail and turkey. The quantification of carbon sequestration that results from these forest projects will facilitate the participation of producers in carbon markets<sup>1</sup>.

Fire breaks will be created in such a manner as to minimize soil disturbance and maintain tree canopy. These “habitat-sensitive” fire breaks will minimize any potential for harm to the Houston toad while still facilitating the implementation of prescribed burning and limiting the ability of wildfires to spread across the landscape.

The restoration of riparian forest buffer will provide habitat for neotropical migrant songbirds and other wildlife. This forest buffer will also enhance water quality in Alum Creek, which is an important source of water for wetlands and ponds that support Houston toad breeding.

Education of landowners will help insure that conservation benefits are maintained and will also better prepare landowners for participation in any future carbon market.

We expect 15% of the producers in the Greater Alum Creek Watershed to participate in this CCPI during the course of the five-year project, which runs from July 2009 through June 2014. The total Houston Toad CCPI budget is \$2,378,608 over the five-year period, of which \$1,148,331 is provided by USDA (federal funds) and \$1,230,277 is provided by producers, EDF and other partners as match (non-federal funds).

Conservation practices supported by the CCPI include the following:

#### NRCS Conservation Practices

Fence (378): we will install interior cross-fencing in order to facilitate prescribed grazing and restrict cattle from sensitive habitat areas.

Prescribed Grazing (528): we will prescribe the rest period, intensity, frequency, duration and season of grazing primarily in order to maintain the desired structure, composition and function of plant communities.

Prescribed Burning (338): we will implement prescribed burns in order to restore and enhance desired vegetation conditions and improve habitat quality for the Houston toad.

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<sup>1</sup> Producers that are sequestering carbon can currently sell credits in the voluntary carbon offset market, but we will advise producers participating in this CCPI to consider waiting for the passage of legislation regulating carbon as this is likely to substantially increase the value of their carbon credits.

Forest Stand Improvement (666): we will use mechanical and follow-up chemical treatments to reduce high densities of understory shrubs, primarily yaupon, in order to restore natural community balance and enhance habitat for the endangered Houston toad. In addition, we may cut or kill selected trees in order to enhance habitat conditions for the Houston toad.

Riparian Forest Buffer (391): we will plant riparian trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants in the potential or historical riparian zone of Alum creek. This conservation practice will improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat and store carbon. We plan to implement this practice through a Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) so as to maximize the incentives for producer participation. This CCRP will complement the CCPI.

Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490): we will use mechanical and/or chemical treatments to prepare sites for tree/shrub establishment as described below.

Tree/Shrub Establishment (612): we will plant stands of loblolly pine trees and post oak trees on appropriate soils on upland sites in order to restore habitat for the Houston toad and store carbon.

Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645): we will develop Wildlife Management Plans and specifications designed to benefit the Houston toad and other native wildlife. These plans and specifications will identify the components of habitat that are in need of management and the specific combination of practices and actions that are needed to accomplish management objectives.

Range Planting (550): we will establish native adapted plants by seeding in order to restore historic plant communities in areas where less than 15% composition by weight of the desired plants are present.

Pest Management (595): we will use environmentally sensitive means to suppress weeds and non-native grasses in order to facilitate the establishment and growth of tree seedlings and maintenance of desired habitat conditions.

Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644): we will document how habitat needs will be provided for the Houston toad and other wetland-associated wildlife and we will develop a plan for operation and maintenance of desired wetland conditions.

Wetland Enhancement (659): we will modify the hydrologic condition and biological habitat components of wetlands for the purpose of establishing conditions favorable to the Houston toad and other native aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

#### Other Conservation Practices and Activities

Carbon Sequestration Quantification and Aggregation: we will quantify the carbon sequestration values and rates of newly restored upland and riparian forests, as well as

existing, sustainably managed forests in order to establish the carbon credits for participating producers.

Monitoring of Houston Toads and associated habitats: we will survey for Houston toads at representative sites across the target landscape and we will monitor the impacts of conservation practices on the toads, as well as their habitat.

Head-starting of Houston Toads: the Houston Zoo will collect portions of Houston toad egg strands and grow adults, which will subsequently be released on appropriate participating producer properties with suitable habitat conditions.

Safe Harbor: we will offer safe harbor assurances to participating producers through a programmatic safe harbor agreement for the Houston toad.