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Step taken to restore area refuge

By Jimmy Watson
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in Tree plantings to reduce greenhouse gasses in portion of Red River National Wildlife Refuge.

Decades of deforestation on what is now land included in the Red River National Wildlife Refuge got a tremendous lift recently when thousands of hardwood seedlings were planted through a nationally funded project.

The Conservation Fund, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Environmental Synergy Inc. participated in the effort to plant 350,000 hickory, oak and cypress seedlings on nearly 1,200 acres of bottomland in the southernmost section of the refuge, near Natchitoches.

"All of the planting has been done on what is basically marginal farmland ... area that isn't really usable for traditional crops," RRNWR manager Pat Stinson said. "Most of the land was cleared in the '70's during the soybean boom. We've talked to some of the current farmers in the area who told us their grandfathers cleared the land, thinking it would come back."

The trees will remove an estimated 426,000 short tons of CO₂ from the atmosphere as they grow into a mature forest over the next 100 years. The land and trees will be managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to ensure long-term protection and stewardship for the benefit of the people who both live in the area and who choose to visit it.

Supported by donations from The Conservation Fund's Go Zero® program, the project, known as the Red River Restoration Initiative, is helping to restore and protect native forestland at the Red River National Wildlife Refuge.

"When most people consider the impacts of deforestation, they discuss the Amazon or even Central America," said ESI president Carol Jordan. "What they may not know is that we have lost approximately 20 million acres of bottomland hardwood forest over the last century along the U.S. Gulf Coast. No other wetland system in North America has suffered such tremendous loss."

The recently completed planting project called for one-inch seedlings, which have a better than average survival rate and could provide habitat and shade in the not too distant future. Approximately 35 to 400 more acres will be planted in the near future.

"It takes about five years for the seedlings to get above the weed level, but once they do, they grow pretty fast," Stinson said. "In 15 to 20 years there will be trees we can walk under. Most

people in this area are used to seeing pine plantations that can get 15 to 20 feet tall in about five years."

The project has received Gold Level Validation, the highest level available under the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance standards.

"The Conservation Fund's Gold Level validation against the CCB Standards is a great achievement because it shows through a rigorous independent evaluation that this native forest restoration project has been carefully designed to maximize social and biodiversity benefits, not only effectively reducing greenhouse gases but also restoring native habitats," said CCBA director Joanna Durbin.

After decades of conversion from forestland to marginally productive farmland, much of the land in the Red River and Lower Mississippi River valleys is degraded and can no longer support wildlife with a natural flooding regime to help feed the nutrient-starved, isolated floodplains. Restoring these lands is one of The Conservation Fund's and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's highest priorities and requires a mix of public and private financing.

"Our continuing partnership with The Conservation Fund, ESI and others plays a significant role in our conservation success throughout Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi Delta," said Sam D. Hamilton, Southeast regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The blending of our collective innovation and creativity along with strong industry partnerships is allowing us to accomplish a great deal toward our conservation goals as well as those of our partners."

The Conservation Fund's Go Zero program works with a diverse group of partners to develop solutions to climate change and habitat loss. Go Zero supporters include leading companies such as Dell, Delta, Gaiam, Land Rover Portland, New Jersey Resources, The North Face, Philadelphia Eagles, Travelocity and U-Haul as well as thousands of individual donors across the globe.

"In a time when public financing for land conservation and habitat restoration are at historic lows, Go Zero donors are providing new, private capital that is used to further conserve and restore our nation's land and water legacy," said The Conservation Fund's Go Zero director, Jena Meredith. "CCB Gold Level Validation further ensures the nation derives—and will continue to receive for many years into the future—significant public benefits, including cleaner air, filtered water, restored sensitive wildlife habitat and enhanced areas for public recreation."

About the contributors

The Conservation Fund is dedicated to advancing America's land and water legacy. With our partners, we conserve land, train leaders and invest in conservation at home. Since 1985, we have helped protect more than 6 million acres, sustaining wild havens, working lands and vibrant communities. We're a top-ranked conservation organization, effective and efficient. <http://www.conservationfund.org>

Environmental Synergy, Inc. provides project development and carbon monitoring services for carbon based forestry projects. In the past 10 years, ESI has planted over 24 million trees on 81,000 acres in the U.S., which are expected to remove approximately 26 million metric tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. www.environmental-synergy.com

Scientific Certification Systems has been providing global leadership in third-party environmental and sustainability certification, auditing, testing and standards development for more than 25 years. SCS programs span a wide cross-section of industries, recognizing achievements in green

building, product manufacturing, forestry, retail, agricultural production, fisheries and energy. The SCS Greenhouse Gas Verification Program provides verification of project-based emissions reductions, project design validation and pre-assessment analysis. SCS is accredited to ISO 14065 for GHG Validation and Verification by the American National Standards Institute and, under this accreditation, offers Voluntary Carbon Standard and Climate Action Reserve offset verification services. SCS also offers offset verification services under the Chicago Climate Exchange and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity standards. Learn more at <http://www.SCScertified.com>.

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