

FINAL REPORT

Project Title: Migratory Bird Habitat Acquisition & Restoration, Magothy Bay Natural Area Preserve (MBNAP)

Grant #: NA16NOS4190171 Task 9

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation – Division of Natural Heritage

Prepared by Rob Evans



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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA, or any of its subagencies.

This contract had two primary components, (1) Spady tract Acquisition, and (2) Songbird Habitat Restoration, and (3) Pollinator habitat restoration.

Spady tract Acquisition : The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) completed fee simple purchase of the Spady tract, a 105.58-acre property in Northampton County, Virginia on April 29, 2019. The final executed deed for the tract designates the property to be “retained in perpetuity....for the conservation of its natural heritage resources” and specifies this property is an addition to the Magothy Bay Natural Area Preserve and “will be retained and managed in perpetuity in a manner that furthers the maintenance, preservation, restorations, and management of its natural heritage resources consisting primarily of habitat conditions for migratory songbirds”.

This tract was purchased for \$552,000. As indicated on the recorded deed, 39.8% of the acquisition funds were provided by this grant, with the remaining acquisition costs provided by the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF).

The Commonwealth of Virginia obtained a real-estate appraisal prepared by Kendall C. Bradley & Associates, Inc., completed on March 29, 2018, with a review conducted by Mr. Mark T. Shelton, MAI, of Hallmark Properties, Inc. Title work was completed by Bridge Trust Title Group of Virginia Beach, with title insurance issued on March 27, 2019. A Phase 1 environmental assessment and report and surveys were completed for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation by Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson. Property boundaries were posted by DCR’s operations steward Richard Ayers, and a funding acknowledgement sign was posted.



Figure 1: View of Spady tract, looking east. Woods adjacent and behind house are part of the tract, as well as the recently planted field

Songbird Habitat Restoration: DCR concluded preliminary habitat restoration consisting of native shrub and tree sapling planting in March, 2019. The restoration site was the recently-purchased 53.7-acre Medlin Tract at MBNAP. In September 2018, a winter wheat cover crop was planted to conserve nutrients, reduce soil loss and suppress competing weeds. Wax myrtle (*Morella cerifera*), a fast-growing native evergreen shrub, was added to provide year-round bird cover, fix nitrogen, and provide a preferred food source rapidly. Oak saplings were planted to introduce a tree component that otherwise would not be present in an early successional forest, as well as to provide immediate structure for bird perches and promote dispersal (via droppings) and establishment of other preferred food plants (e.g. black cherry, blackgum, sassafras, muscadine grape, greenbriar, etc.). This approach for converting agricultural fields to young forests yields enhanced forest structure, composition and diversity in a short period relative to other restoration strategies.



Figure 2: View of tract before and after restoration

From late February thru March, DCR managers and volunteers planted 1,178 containerized (1-gal) wax myrtle (*Morella cerifera*) shrubs (~23/acre).



Figure 3: A load of Wax Myrtle on-site, amidst several planted rows

In March 2019, DCR staff and volunteers planted 340 oak saplings ranging in height from 6- to 9-ft at an average planting density of 6.5/acre.



Figure 4: An oak sapling being unloaded and placed into planting hole on-site, Oak sapling at the edge of planting row

Pollinator habitat restoration:

In early April 2019, the southwest 1.5-acre corner of the Medlin Tract was prepared by disking and sowed with common milkweed seed to establish an interpretive pollinator demonstration site along the Southern Tip Hike and Bike Trail.



Figure 5: Pollinator habitat – site preparation

Overall Project Significance:

Both the Spady tract and Medlin tract restoration area are located near the southern end of the Delmarva Peninsula (the southern tip), an area that has long been recognized as a major stopover area for birds as they migrate south along the coast each fall. The region serves as a critical link in a habitat

chain that stretches from northern Canada to South America. Both tracts, when viewed through the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program’s Geospatial and Educational Mapping System (Coastal GEMS), intersect areas mapped as being of “international importance” as a coastal avian protection zone, and “very high” in the Virginia Ecological Value Assessment.

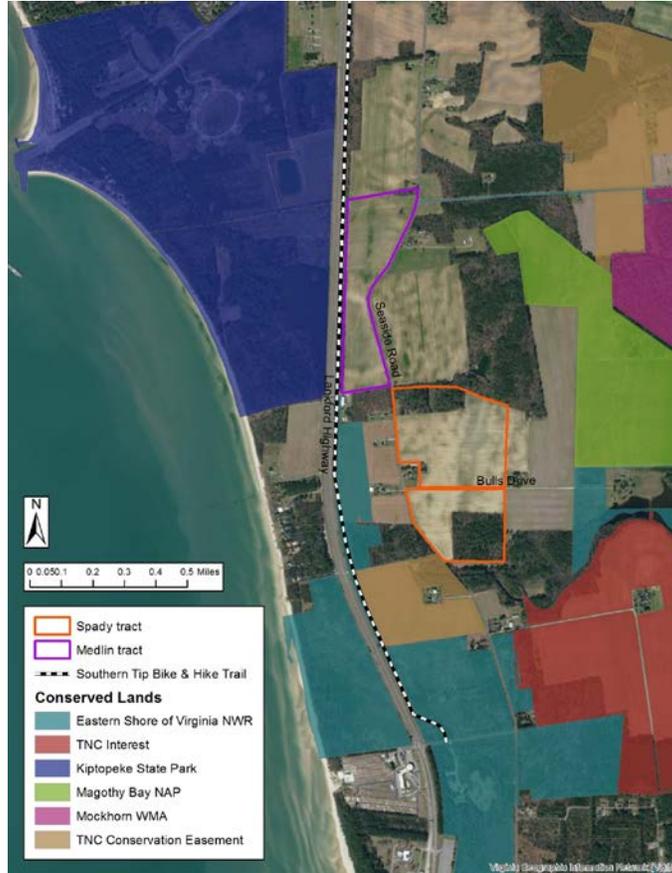


Figure 6: Project Area Locations, amidst other mapped conservation lands



Figure 7: Funding partners sign, along Spady tract boundary and property boundary sign along Medlin boundary

