

The Conservation Fund

Restoring a Forest Legacy at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge: *A Forestland Partnership Between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Conservation Fund's Go Zero® Program*

CCBA Criterion CM3.3, Community Impact Monitoring -- Monitoring Update

5.11.2011

Original Plan

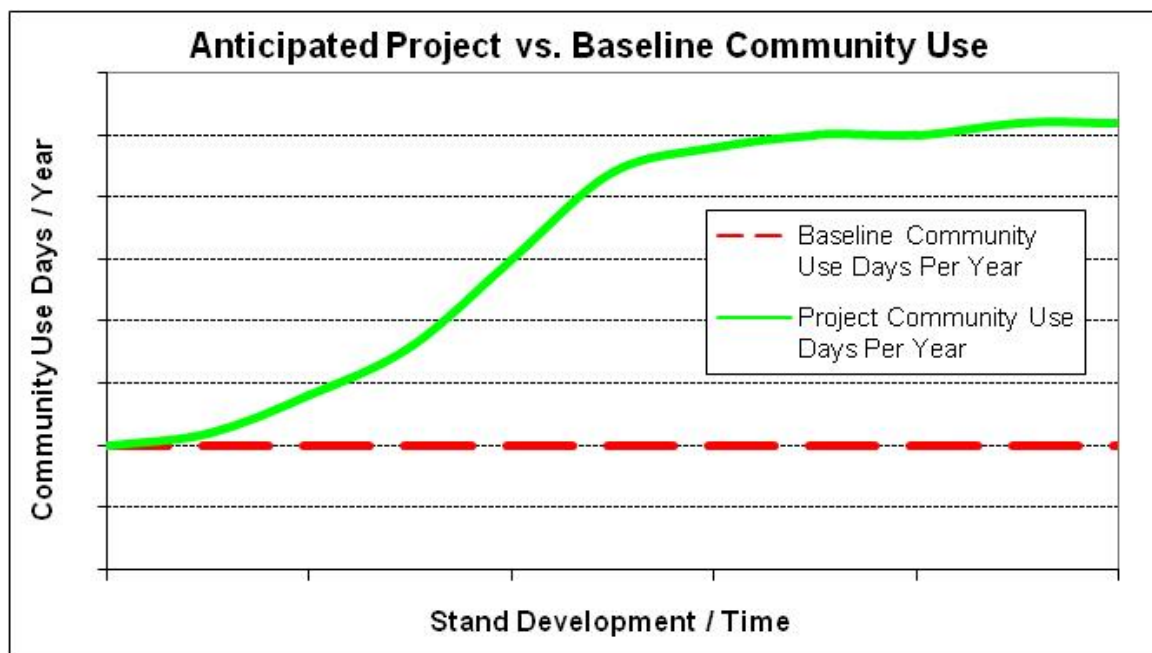
Mingo NWR already tracks visitors to the Refuge through the use of car counters. There are about 8-10 car counters in place at different points within the Refuge, including one along the Refuge's auto tour route. The Refuge's auto tour is a one-way road which travels through the Refuge and passes several of the Go Zero Tracts, including the Tract which will soon feature a new educational display. The Refuge has had a car counter along this route (at a location near the Tracts) for the past several years and has collected baseline data on the number of visitors using this route. The Refuge will continue to monitor traffic along this route and will compare it to the baseline. Also, once the environmental display near the Tracts is complete, the Refuge will use either a car counter or a person counter positioned at the pull-out to track how many people stop at the new display on the Go Zero Tract. Visitor usage will also be monitored by tracking the number of individuals who take educational brochures from the display. This will allow the Refuge to monitor changes in visitor use specifically on the Tracts.

Within the next 5 years, the Refuge also plans to develop a walking trail that would depart from the new scenic pull-out. This will also likely increase the number of visitors to the Tracts. Car and person counters will be used to monitor the increase in usage caused by the new walking trail.

Monitoring Update

As stated in the original Project Design Document, the Refuge used a car counter along its auto tour route - which passes by several of the Go Zero Tracts - to monitor visitor usage. During FY 2010 (October 1, 2009 - September 30, 2010) there were 6,726 visits recorded by the car counter. During FY 2011 (October 1, 2010 – present), 4,072 visits were recorded. The road is only open four months of the year (April - May & October - November) and the results for 2011 are not completed yet. If the 2011 numbers are extrapolated for the remainder of April and all of May, the number of visits in FY 2011 should be roughly the same as the number of visits in FY 2010. This is in line with our predictions for use of the Go Zero Tracts outlined in the PDD. Increases in visitor usage were predicted to be modest at first, as the newly planted seedlings are still so young, but it is anticipated that visitor use days will be positively correlated with the Tracts' stand development. As the stands develop into mature bottomland hardwood forest,

activities such as hiking, bird watching, photography and hunting are expected to increase, as illustrated below.



Also, as stated in the Mingo NWR Project Design Document, plans are underway to develop an environmental display and a walking trail that would depart from a new scenic pull-out created near several of the Go Zero Tracts. Once the environmental display near the Tracts is complete, the Refuge will use either a car counter or a person counter positioned at the pull-out to track how many people stop at the new display on the Go Zero Tract.

The educational display and pull-out are part of a new construction project taking place at Mingo NWR that will involve building all new roads and other additions within the Refuge. The engineering and construction plans for the project are being developed over the course of 2011 and USFWS plans to put the project to bid at the end of 2011 or the beginning of 2012. When the construction of the new road is complete in 2012, the auto tour route along the Go Zero Tracts will probably be open year round or at least a majority of the year. This will likely significantly increase visitor usage. Data from the months of October, November, April and May can be tabulated separately for comparison to baseline purposes.

In addition, in order to monitor changes in social and economic well-being resulting from project activities, the Fund will monitor whether those jobs affected by the project are lost due to the project. The tenant farmers who were previously working on some of the Go Zero parcels are now working on other agricultural lands on the Refuge. The Refuge staff has contact with these farmers annually to negotiate relevant leases, and will monitor whether their access to farming acreage on the Refuge has changed due to the Go Zero project.

All USFWS data, including visitor monitoring results, is publicly available. After construction of the new roads and pull-out are complete, Mingo NWR staff plan to draft a summary of the changes in visitor use to the Go Zero Tracts and will disseminate it on their website and Facebook page. The Conservation Fund will also publish the consolidated results (visitor use and job information) on its Go Zero site. Results will be tabulated and disseminated by publication on the Mingo NWR website and Facebook page every five years thereafter.