



# Michigan Recent Accomplishments Summary

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Updated Dec. 2021  
RGS & AWS Eastern Great Lakes Region  
Jon Steigerwaldt

# Habitat Success from Michigan's Forests 2021

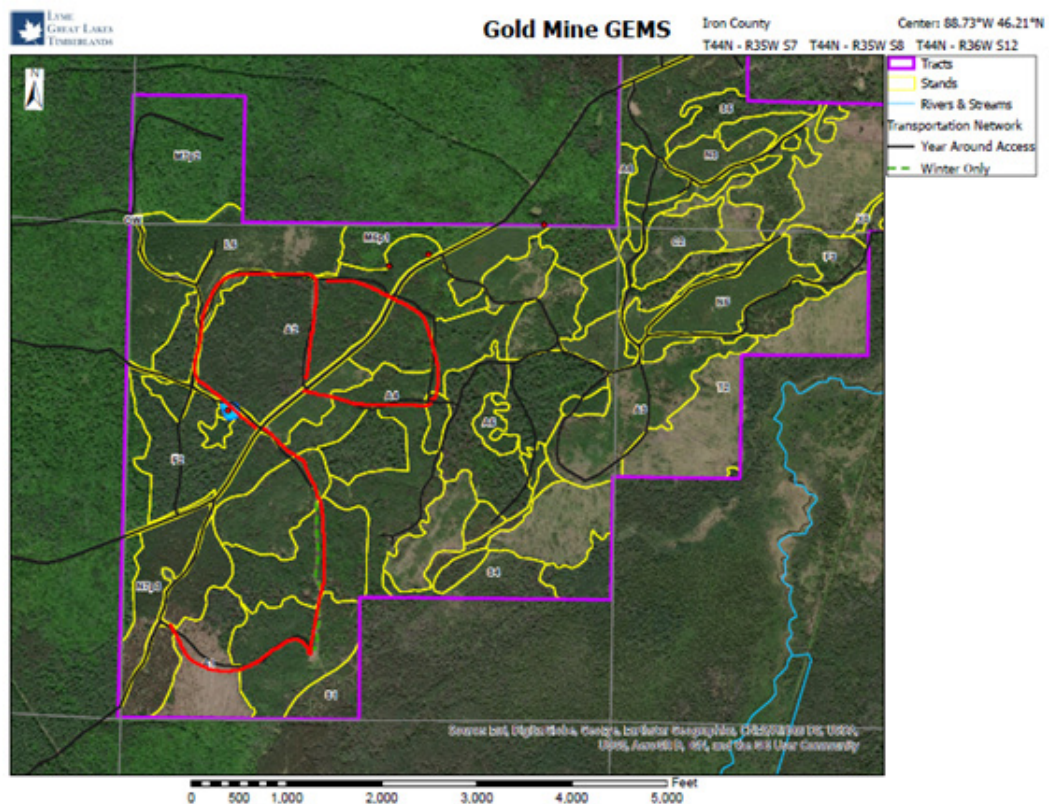
Jon Steigerwaldt – Forest Conservation Director,  
Great Lakes and Upper Midwest Region

Earlier this year, I stepped into the role of Forest Conservation Director for Michigan. Since that time, I have worked hard with my colleagues and with dedicated MI RGS & AWS volunteers to make great strides to implement a new vision for grouse and woodcock habitat management in the state.

Below are some highlighted projects RGS & AWS are working on in Michigan. In total, Michigan implemented, is managing, secured or has pledged \$792,827 in funds for 2021. Combined with momentum on the policy front and Forest Service projects on 4 national forests, Michigan is poised to open a new chapter in forest habitat conservation. To receive a full list of projects, please contact me at: [JonS@RuffedGrouseSociety.org](mailto:JonS@RuffedGrouseSociety.org)

## Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative Grant

In April 2021, RGS & AWS was awarded a Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative Grant by the state of MI. This \$12,580 grant was applied for and managed in partnership between RGS & AWS and Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands, an industrial forestland owner whose lands are open to the public. Completed late summer 2021, the grant project brushed back and cleared existing looped game trails and forest openings on Lyme properties in phase I and fertilized and seeded in sites with fall rye, buckwheat, and medium red clover in phase II. In total approx. 5 miles of trail and 2 acres of game openings were treated between the Gold Mine GEMS and Bates-Amasa Complex outside of Iron River, further enhancing ruffed grouse habitat and hunting opportunity in the region.



## Ottawa National Forest Great Lakes Restoration Fund

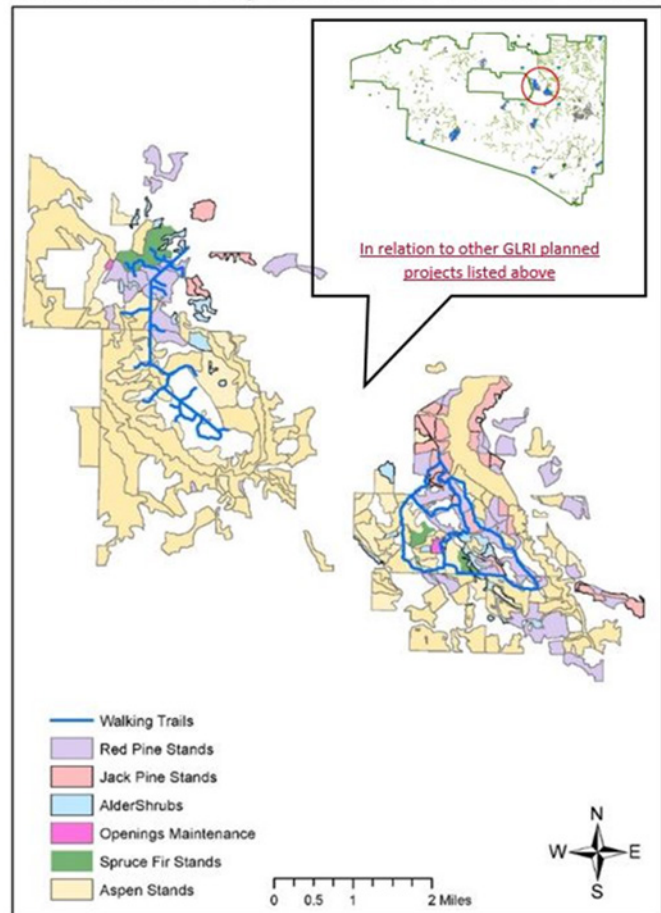
In early 2020, talks began with Forest Service wildlife staff on the Kenton Ranger District of the Ottawa National Forest about ways RGS & AWS and other partner organizations could partner on habitat projects. Out of those talks emerged a 3-year, \$500,000 Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant. Funded at \$150,000 above the requested amount, this grant is to be split between RGS & AWS, the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), and Ottawa National Forest, with RGS & AWS receiving \$225,000 worth of funds for project planning, implementation and administration, outreach, education support, and oversight of timber and non-commercial contracts.

The target species for this grant include: ruffed grouse, American woodcock, golden-winged warbler, spruce grouse, moose, snowshoe hare, whitetail deer, black-billed cuckoo, white-throated sparrow, rose-breasted grosbeak, sedge wren, eastern whip-poor-will and numerous raptor species. Opening maintenance will benefit pollinators, such as yellow-banded bumblebees and various butterflies.

The final acreage target for this project is 1,000 acres from condition-based stands currently identified as potential project areas within approximately 15,000 acres of aspen, 3,000 acres of spruce/fir, 600 acres of jack pine, 2,600 acres of red pine, 1,500 acres of alder/willow shrub, and 1,200 acres of possible habitat openings. Work began this summer with RGS & AWS's grant partner, ABC, conducting an assessment of all habitat sites before implementation work begins in 2022. In addition to habitat assessments, ABC mowed 15 miles of hunter walking trails within the project areas.



### Potential Areas for Early Successional Habitat Enhancement





## Ottawa National Forest Stewardship Agreement

Building on the momentum of the Ottawa GLRI Grant, RGS & AWS and Forest Service staff on the Kenton Ranger District are finalizing an approximately \$120,000 stewardship agreement with the Ottawa National Forest. This agreement will seek to reinvest timber revenue from a 250 acre timber sale on the Ottawa, back into the National Forest by creating forest wildlife habitat, pollinator habitat, maintaining hunter walking trails, and revitalizing Forest Service infrastructure to harvest additional timber. This Stewardship Agreement is planned to be finalized in early 2022 and start with boots on the ground around the time RGS & AWS will implement GLRI project work as determined with the project assessment ABC finished in 2021. These two projects combined will bring the opportunity to support staff working on these and future projects in the UP of Michigan.



## National Forest Foundation Grant

RGS & AWS currently has a \$59,376 National Forest Foundation Grant on the Baldwin Ranger District of the Manistee National Forest to create approximately 43 acres of young forest and savanna type habitat across 5 individual sites (as well as create an additional 35 acres of young forest habitat on the Finger Lakes National Forest, New York). This project has \$7,000 sister project, also on the Baldwin Ranger District. That additional project will enhance 20 acres of habitat across 4 individual sites. With projects sites already selected, work is expected to be completed the winter of 2021-2022.



## MI State Habitat Grant - Enhancing Upland Game Bird Habitat in Northern MI

Though it received setbacks and state funding hurdles due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, RGS & AWS was able to extend and move forward with implementing the Enhancing Upland Game Bird Habitat in Northern MI grant. This \$151,101 grant aims to create/maintain 513.4 acres of habitat, mow 9 miles of trails, and plant 600 trees over 3 years (2020-2022). This project work is spread over 4 project sites around the Pigeon River State Forest and Cheboygan County. 261.5 acres of habitat in the core of grouse/woodcock country were created/maintained in 2021 alone through this grant.



## John Short Habitat Project

Project work continued on the John Short Habitat Project in 2021. In total, 26.5 acres of openings and trails on the Pigeon River State Forest were restored and treated with tillage and planting of RGS clover mixture. With funding and support coming from multiple sources, this \$12,850 project highlights the importance of collaboration to leverage funds for conservation deliveries.

## MI State Habitat Grant - Southern Woodcock Project

On June 5, 2021, RGS & AWS staff submitted a state Wildlife Habitat Grant Application to the Michigan DNR to benefit woodcock habitat and enhance hunting, training, and viewing opportunities on lands in southern Michigan. This grant was developed with help from several Michigan members who were assisted in identifying potential sites and engaging Wildlife Division staff in planning efforts. These members included John Paige, Travis Powers, and Bill Bopra, among others.

The grant and generous matching funds from chapters, partners, and RGS will provide a total of \$56,800 in project funding. In total, about 80 acres will be treated across 16 units on 4 different Game Areas in Southern Michigan. These include the: Deford, Lapeer, Port Huron, and Portland State Game Areas. Primary treatments would include brush management create and enhance early successional woodcock habitat on each site. [UPDATE: Due to projected project cost savings, RGS & AWS staff and volunteers are working with DNR staff to identify approximately 20 more acres to complete on the Lapeer and Deford State Game Areas].

All grants are approved for 2 years, though it's possible all work could be completed by the fall of 2022. Special thanks go to additional partners who lent their support: Robert Lytle Chapter, Roger Moore Chapter, Saginaw Valley Chapter, Southwest Michigan (Kalamazoo) Chapter, Michigan Upland Experience, Uplander Lifestyle, and Michigan United Conservation Clubs.



## Zone Aspen Project Scoping

On February 4, 2021, the public was made aware of the Huron-Manistee National Forests intent to implement an ambitious, forest-wide habitat/forest management project known as “The Zone Aspen Project” (ZAP) and a 30-day commenting period was initiated. A total of 48 responses to this project were received by the Forest Service. Forty-seven of the comments were in support of the ZAP as proposed in the scoping and in the Environmental Analysis. Many of these comments came from members of the RGS & AWS. In addition to members of RGS & AWS, an official letter of support was sent from the Chief Conservation and Legislative Officer on behalf of the organization. Additional Zone Aspen Project Draft Decision Notice DN-6 letters of support came from the Director of Economic Development for the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Thanks largely to RGS & AWS member support, the Huron-Manistee National Forests are moving forward with ZAP. This project came about largely because Aspen stands on the Manistee National Forest are aging. Of the 49,833 acres of aspen originally examined in this project, only 1,517 acres are currently early-successional habitat (aspen that is between 0-19 years old). This amount of young aspen habitat is approximately three tenths of one percent (0.3%) of the Federal land ownership across the Manistee National Forest. This project proposes managing between 0-4,000 acres of aspen per year for the next 15 years, not to exceed a total of 29,500 acres over the life of the project

In the Project Scoping, the Forest Service acknowledged, “As you can see, we have a lot of work to do.” This is why RGS & AWS included in our comments that: “RGS & AWS is standing by to help build any needed capacity and foster a shared stewardship relationship with the Forest Service to address aging aspen concerns on the forest.” This mutual acknowledgement of opportunities to partnership is and will be key to RGS & AWS growing conservation deliveries in Michigan for years to come.

Huron-Manistee National Forests Zone Aspen Project Story Map:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0b7607e6430f4b58b3168547bd3a4d51>

