

Unique Partnership Improving Wildlife Habitat in Colorado



2018 CPW EFFICIENCY SUCCESS STORIES

A unique conservation partnership between Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), the Colorado State Land Board, and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) is improving rangeland and wildlife habitat in Colorado.

After years of paying various individual private contractors for rangeland and wildlife habitat improvement projects on their lands, the State Land Board was interested in completing more projects cheaper and more efficiently by purchasing a hydro ax machine. These machines are incredibly effective at quickly removing and mulching trees from areas that have become overgrown.

Recognizing an opportunity to partner with CPW to improve wildlife habitat, the State Land Board looked to CPW for help in developing projects and hopefully to operate and maintain the machine. While CPW had the expertise for project development and the funding to operate and maintain the machine, they didn't have the staffing to operate the machine. Enter the NWTf who also has expertise in working on these types of projects.

Under a unique three-way partnership, CPW now pays for the operation and maintenance of the machine, the contract for the operator is run by the NWTf, and the hydro ax machine is owned by the State Land Board. Projects are being done on lands owned and/or managed by CPW and the State Land Board.

A five-year contract was signed and improvement work began in September 2017. In 12 months it has accomplished more than 840 acres of habitat and rangeland improvement in Southeastern Colorado on the State Land Board's Chancellor Ranch and CPW's Spanish Peaks State Wildlife Area in Las Animas County as well as CPW's Granada State Wildlife Area east of Lamar.

"This partnership puts everybody at the table, so it's a more efficient method of working," said Southeast Deputy Regional Manager Brad Henley.

Henley said that the average cost of the work done by the hydro ax is coming in at about a third of the cost as what it would be to



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**—Brad Henley,
Southeast Deputy
Regional Manager**

A hydro ax creates habitat in CPW's Spanish Peaks State Wildlife Area in Las Animas County.

contract individual projects out on separate basis.

"This contract is efficient," Henley said. "With other contracts, if a machine breaks down, or you have fire danger where you can't operate, or snow conditions in winter where you can't get on the land, your contract could run out and you're out of luck. By having this partnership in place, we're able to be a lot more flexible on when and where the work gets done. Most of the time contracts are not five years long. A lot of our funding has time constraints. So this eases that up."

The unique partnership helps fulfill the missions of all three agencies and is a perfect example of on-the-ground conservation work.

"In regards to wildlife management, this is all part of a holistic approach we undertake," Henley said. "All wildlife needs food, cover, space and water. Yes, we're manipulating vegetation to improve wildlife habitat or 'cover' through the use of the hydro ax. But we're also planting food plots and improving water resources on our wildlife areas. All this works together for the betterment of wildlife."