

Georgia WILD Newsletter: September 2008

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Broad River Area preserves Piedmont heritage

By Jon Ambrose

Broad River Natural Area covers 440 acres along the Broad River in Northeast Georgia's Madison County. This state-owned property was created from two contiguous tracts bought in 1996 and 1998 with funds from RiverCare 2000, a statewide land acquisition program funded by a combination of hunting and fishing license fees, state appropriations, and private donations.

The tracts were featured in a Broad River Heritage Trail proposal developed by members of the Broad River Watershed Association to support protection of significant tracts along the Broad, a free-flowing river that runs from Franklin Springs to the Savannah River and Clarks Hill Lake's upper reaches on the Georgia/South Carolina border. Gov. Zell Miller issued an executive order dedicating the natural area as a Heritage Preserve in 1998.

Broad River Natural Area contains exemplary natural habitats of the Piedmont, populations of rare species such as ground juniper (*Juniperus communis* var. *depressa*) and sandbar shiner (*Notropis scepoticus*), and significant cultural features such as an old wooden fish weir, or trap, in the middle of the river. It also includes more than one mile of river frontage and several miles of walking trails.

The primary management objective for this property is the protection of rare species populations and natural communities of plants and animals. Public access is also provided for hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation, scientific research and environmental education.

Getting there

** From Danielsville, go north on U.S. 29 for two miles. Turn right onto Ga. 281 and go four miles. The area is on the right 0.3 miles after crossing the Broad River.

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Your money at work: Survey colors in picture on painted bunting distribution

Painted buntings are small yet striking multi-colored songbirds with a critical connection to scrub/shrub, maritime forest and salt marsh habitats along Georgia's coast. The Southeastern population, one of two populations that exist in North America, breeds along the Southeastern seaboard from North Carolina to Florida.

Data since 1965 shows painted buntings populations in a steady decline. Habitat loss, cowbird parasitism and the introduction of non-native species such as house cats compound pet trade impacts the birds face in their Latin American and Caribbean wintering grounds.

After a pilot survey in 2007 with Georgia Wildlife Resources Division partners in Florida and the Carolinas, Wildlife Resources again surveyed the species distribution, habitat preferences and breeding densities this spring.

Preliminary observations from routes run mostly by seasonal biologist Chris Depkin and dedicated volunteers showed expected occurrences on barrier islands and along the coast, where concentrations lead the southeast. But the unexpected included the extent of inland distribution of painted buntings along the Savannah River drainage, as well as the particular types of habitat used by singing males.

Results from the Eastern Painted Bunting Population Assessment and Monitoring Project (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/point/pabu/) will increase understanding of the role habitat types play and give landowners and wildlife managers better tools and information to enhance or create breeding area for this species. The hope is to continue the survey in tandem with the Carolinas, Florida and the U.S. Geological Survey in 2009.

Coastal nongame program manager Brad Winn said the painted bunting is a high-profile species the public recognizes & and there are indications of local losses with declines in habitat.

Georgia's survey portion is partly funded through the sale of nongame wildlife license plates -- the bald eagle and hummingbird plates -- and donations to the Give Wildlife a Chance income tax checkoff.