



# Actions to Abate Critical Threats, such as Encroachment and Invasive Species, Using GIS and Conservation Area Planning Across the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) Landscape; Phase I

05-280

## Background:

For the past 10 years, the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership (GCPEP) has served as a national model in landscape-level conservation planning and natural resources management. Operating under a Memorandum of Understanding since 1996, the strength of the partnership is the respect among 10 partners of differing missions and objectives while acting cooperatively and sharing significant challenges through respectful, positive, and result-oriented action. Throughout the years, GCPEP has established effective cross-boundary methods for managing and restoring both terrestrial and aquatic systems in northwest Florida and south Alabama.

## Objective:

As the population within GCPEP continues to grow, develop and urbanize at a rapid pace, the federal, state, and private conservation lands in this region face innumerable threats posed by incompatible recreation, landscape fragmentation, urban encroachment, the persistence and spread of invasive species, and increased resource demands in general. The majority of invasive species currently found in the GCPEP area thrive in disturbed habitats where native species have been removed, and almost all of the major infestations can be traced back to developments bordering conservation lands.

The GCPEP partnership works cooperatively through its Conservation Action Plan (CAP) to strategically address and abate threats such as encroachment and invasive species.

## Summary of Approach:

Following the model of previous successful Legacy GCPEP projects such as fire management, land protection, and aquatic management, this collaborative project addresses the current lack of a GCPEP comprehensive, spatially-explicit Geographic Information System (GIS). Without having a GCPEP specific GIS database delineating vegetative community types and incorporating conservation targets across partner lands, it is constraining strategic management of threats such as invasive species and urban encroachment. This project is focusing on the abatement of encroachment and invasive species threats through:

- The completion of a spatially explicit GIS-based database which will map conservation targets, invasive species, and encroachment buffers on GCPEP partner lands;
- The development of a GCPEP Invasive and Native Strategic Work Plan using the GIS Database and Target Maps;
- Facilitation of a GCPEP Invasive and Native Species Subcommittee; and
- The revision of the GCPEP CAP to include new partners and address escalating threats to partners' land management.

## Benefit:

A GCPEP GIS database, which will be available to all partners through a developing Internet-based Webtool, will provide GCPEP with real time mapping of conservation targets and threats at a landscape level. This will allow all GCPEP partners to more efficiently identify invasive species and encroachment issues and develop cost effective, site-specific prescriptions to abate these conservation threats.

## Accomplishments:

GCPEP continues to function as a partnership effort aimed at more effectively managing and restoring conservation lands in Northwest Florida and Southern Alabama. Through staff and partner efforts in 2006, GCPEP developed a centralized GIS

database focusing on cross-boundary threats and conservation targets, created a GCPEP Invasives/Natives Subcommittee tasked with developing an Invasive and Native Strategic Work Plan, and began significant revisions of the GCPEP Conservation Action Plan. These planning tools and working groups, forged in partnership, will continue to benefit GCPEP land managers who share common challenges and boundaries. These accomplishments are made possible through a grant from the Legacy Program.

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