

BASIC AG

Small farm project demonstrates basic land management

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One challenge

facing the agriculture industry is the ever changing educational needs of producers. A growing segment of landowners are new producers who want to pursue a rural lifestyle or fulfill a dream of participating in agriculture. These individuals who are new to agriculture often face challenges

when pursuing their goals due to the lack of basic agricultural education.

Seeing the increase in the number of new producers in Oklahoma and Texas, the Noble Foundation began a focused program called Basic AG in 2008 to provide fundamental agricultural education. The purpose is to provide new producers with foundational knowledge of agricultural principles and practices through education, consultation and demonstration. Subject matter includes economics, soils and crops, forage and range, livestock, horticulture, and wildlife and fisheries.

One offshoot of the program has been the development of a small property to demonstrate best man-

agement practices used for wildlife habitat and fisheries as well as livestock production. This Noble Foundation demonstration property, called the McMillan East Farm, is 150 acres located in Marshall County, Okla., in the south-central region of the state. Its purpose is to provide the hands-on learning experience needed by producers new to agriculture.

The property is approximately 60 percent timber, dominated by post oak, and the open areas are a mixture of bermudagrass, native grasses and forbs. There are several brush species such as winged elm and Eastern red-cedar encroaching on the open areas. There is a 3.4 acre pond and several areas of active erosion on the property.

Current goals of the property are:

- Demonstrating best management techniques and practices to benefit wildlife and livestock on small properties.
- Improving the overall health of wildlife and fisheries habitat, pastures, and timbered areas.
- Developing a quality fishery and hunting opportunities for dove, turkey, waterfowl and white-tailed deer.

To date, completed management activities include:

- Collection of soil samples from potential hay fields, bermudagrass pastures and wildlife food

plots to determine soil nutrient requirements.

- Conducting pond surveys to learn about fish populations.
- Undertaking camera surveys to learn about deer populations.
- Preparing and conducting a prescribed burn to reduce thatch, control brush and encourage desirable plant species for wildlife.
- Using mechanical methods and herbicide to control brush species.
- Installing a parallel bar barrier on the pond overflow pipe to reduce fish escape and beaver damage.
- Removal of trees from the pond dam to maintain its structural integrity.
- Repair of actively eroding areas.
- Installation of eastern bluebird nesting boxes and predator guards.

Future management activities include:

- Continuing to conduct prescribed burns and hook and line, seine, and camera surveys.
- Fencing the pond and installing a livestock water access point at the pond to promote good water quality and aquatic vegetation beneficial to fish and waterfowl.
- Installing interior fences and corrals to allow for rotational grazing of livestock.
- Hosting field days and workshops on the property. ■