FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN
Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR
Fence Fire -#2989

I. Background

On December 9, 1999 a wildfire was detected approximately 2.5 miles northwest of the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR Headquarters. Refuge fire crew members responded immediately along with local volunteer fire departments from the towns of Eagle Lake, Bernardo, Sealy, Columbus, and the Texas Forest Service. By sunset the wildfire was declared out, but only after 352 acres had burned portions of the Glueck and Wintermann Prairies on the refuge. Strong northwest winds that occasionally shifted (gusting to 25 mph) and low humidity made suppression difficult. The fire traveled rapidly through the area and had flame lengths measuring an estimated 2 -8 feet, making the fire's intensity extreme. It is suspected to have been started by a faulty electric line.

Although the wildfire originated on private property adjacent to the refuge, over 95% of the area burned was on the refuge (see map, Section VI). This area consisted mainly of native grasses (Fuel Type 3) on a flat topography with poor drainage. The Wintermann Prairie is composed of low land (5%), sandy prairie (60%), and claypan (35%) range sites. The Glueck Prairie is composed of low land (4%), loamy prairie (50%), sandy prairie (42%), and claypan (4%) range sites. Vegetation was extremely dry due to existing drought conditions and winter dormancy.

The wildfire burned to the refuge's auto tour route and 100;'acre Teal Marsh, an area used by wintering waterfowl. At the time of the fire, cattle were grazing the Glueck Prairie, but not the Wintermann Prairie. Cattle grazing is an essential habitat management tool used on the refuge to promote a healthy grassland habitat for the highly endangered Attwater's prairie chicken and other prairie dependant wildlife species. Moderate grazing (1) keeps areas from becoming too dense and rank; (2) maintains winter and nesting cover; and, (3) creates pathways for young prairie chicken chicks to travel.

II. Evaluation and Analysis

This wildfire damaged approximately 2 miles of barbed-wire fence - which is very much needed to manage this refuge's cattle grazing program for the benefit of the Attwater's prairie chicken. Also, the portion of the Glueck Prairie that burned will attract cattle as the grasses begin greening up, making it very difficult to properly manage this prairie during the immediate future.

III. Rehabilitation Needs and Objectives

Cattle grazing is an essential wildlife habitat management tool that cannot be properly conducted without the use of fencing. In the case of the area burned by the Fence Fire,

managing the cattle grazing within the burned area is essential to successful rehabilitation of the sites. We need to keep cattle away from the burned areas, especially during greenup. At other times, some grazing will be beneficial to the rehabilitation efforts..

Installation of a management fence is necessary to properly graze these prairie units. Also, the installation of a temporary electric fence in the Glueck Prairie is necessary to properly manage cattle grazing in this area.

IV. Environmental Considerations

Taking "No Action" to rectify the damage caused by this wildfire would not be acceptable. Other alternatives such as not grazing these prairie units, or using prescribed burns only are not feasible to meet habitat management objectives set for this area or the refuge. Biomass accumulation is quite high in this part of southeast Texas, requiring moderate grazing pressure to meet habitat objectives.

Discontinuing grazing would, in the long run, have a negative impact on the Attwater's prairie chicken. With less than 1 % of the historic coastal prairie habitat remaining, every effort needs to be made to improve and maintain as much of this habitat type as possible. The1993 Attwater's Prairie Chicken Recovery Plan lists grazing as a necessary habitat management tool for the recovery of this imperiled bird. The installation of a management fence would help meet refuge and U.S. Fish and Wildlfie Service objectives in carrying out Endangered Species Act mandates.

V. Summary of AnticiDated Resource Needs and Costs

Together, the Glueck and Wintermann Prairie units on the refuge encompass over 1200 acres. About 2 miles of barbed-wire fence were destroyed by the wildfire. Estimating $1.00/linear foot (includes labor and materials) to install a five strand barbed-wire fence would equal about $10,560.00. Installation of 1% miles of temporary electric fence (labor and materials) would equal $2,775.00. This project would be contracted out in order to complete it as soon as possible. Costs associated with planning and administering this rehabilitation project (i.e., going through bid process, supervising project, etc.) is estimated to be about $1,000.00. Total estimated cost: $14,335.00.

Rehabilitation Costs at a Glance

REHABILITATION NEED	COSTS
Install management fence in Glueck and Wintermann Prairie Units (- 10,560 feet X $1.00/ft.)	$ 10,560.00
Install temporary electric fence in Glueck Prairie Unit (- 7,920 feet X .35 cents/ft.)	$ 2,775.00
Administrative (planning, supervising, executing)	$ 1,000.00
TOTAL COSTS	$ 14,335.00

VI. Graphic/Pictorial Presentation/Map Exhibit

Photos and maps are stored in project files.