

FEATURE – USDA Helps Restore Endangered Species Habitat

INTRO: The U.S. Department of Agriculture is working with local agencies in Florida to restore an endangered species habitat...which happens to be on an air force base golf course. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more. (1:31)

SAVING AN ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT ON A FLORIDA GOLF COURSE PROVED TO BE A CHALLENGE. BUT THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WAS ABLE TO COOPERATE WITH LOCAL AGENCIES TO RESTORE THE HABITAT OF THE ENDANGERED OKALOOSA DARTER.

Travis Davis, Three Rivers RC&D: There were six isolated populations of the darter that we're trying to come together by removing culverts and obstructions for the fish to breed.

THE GOLF COURSE, LOCATED ON EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE ON FLORIDA'S PANHANDLE, CONTAINS CULVERTS THAT ARE HOMES TO THE DARTERS. BUT THE CULVERTS HAD BECOME DETACHED. U-S-D-A'S NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE WORKED WITH STATE AGENCIES, THE GOLF COURSE AND THE AIR FORCE TO GET THE CULVERTS REJOINED AND THE PATHWAYS CLEARED SO ALL THE FISH COULD MINGLE.

Steve Seiber, Chief of Natural Resources, Eglin Air Force Base: All of this is to prevent the sediments from entering the darter streams, which were inundating and smothering the vegetation, they're habitat.

SO FAR THE EFFORT HAS HELPED THE DARTER POPULATION INCREASE GREATLY IN ITS NATURAL HABITAT.

Chris Metcalf, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: I think roughly two to three thousand darters have been increased just because we did this project.

John Harper, USDA NRCS: This is one major step with Eglin Air Force Base to ensure that the darter will continue to thrive and that hopefully in the future we will be able to downlist this species.

Rep. Jeff Miller, R-FL: It's amazing to see the success in a very short period of time. The fish population has grown exponentially. Certainly the wetland areas that were disturbed have begun to heal themselves. The vegetation is growing in great.

FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.