Project Narrative, 'Longest Yard' #228-12-01-n
194 acre Ridgetop Acidic Barren Habitat Project

The game land encompasses 3,906 acres and lies on the edge of the Allegheny Front in Shade Township, Somerset County. The topography is rolling with high elevation, ranging from 2,340 to 2,920 feet. The game land is largely forested, and adjacent surrounding land is primarily a mixture of deciduous forest, coniferous forest, and mixed forest. Other habitats include agricultural, urban, emergent and forested wetlands, and open water.

The game land is entirely with the focal area for golden-winged warblers. According to the PA Wildlife Action Plan (PA-WAP), golden-winged warblers are a species of greatest conservation need and were given a rank of "high-level of concern, rare". Particular emphasis will focus the development of young forest habitat to enhance habitat conditions for the golden-winged warbler. The gameland is also within an Important Birding Area and is part of an important flyway along the Allegheny Front for migrating songbirds and birds of prey. All of the game land is within a ten-mile buffer for endangered Indiana bats. Also, the northern long-eared bat, a species of concern, has been found just to the northeast and southwest of the game land border. Two species of plants, the mountain bellwort and the yellow-fringed orchid, are both know to exist on the game land. The status of both species is currently undetermined but noted as in population decline. There are two clusters of rock outcrops on this game land that may provide habitat for the Allegheny woodrat. A historical record indicates woodrat activity several miles east of these rock formations.

Forest management practices will incorporate silvicultural and contractual guidelines consistent with the conservation of the endangered Indiana bat and other bat species. A 60% canopy closure will be maintained within forested stands. The majority of timbering will be limited to between November 16 and March 31. All snags, unless they pose a safety hazard to the logging crew, will be retained. All live, dead and dying shagbark hickory and other hickory species will be retained. Overall 3 or more live trees/acre greater than 20 inches dbh and 16 or more live trees/acre 10 to 20 inches dbh will be retained. Species that will be targeted for retention (if present) include hickory, red maple, sugar maple, ash, red oak, black oak, scarlet oak, white oak, chestnut oak, black cherry, tulip-poplar, white pine, pitch pine, hemlock, basswood, and elm. A minimum 100 foot buffer of perennial steams and a 50 foot buffer of intermittent streams will be maintained. No prescribed burning is included with the current project, although prescribed fire may be included as part of the overall management strategy for this game land.

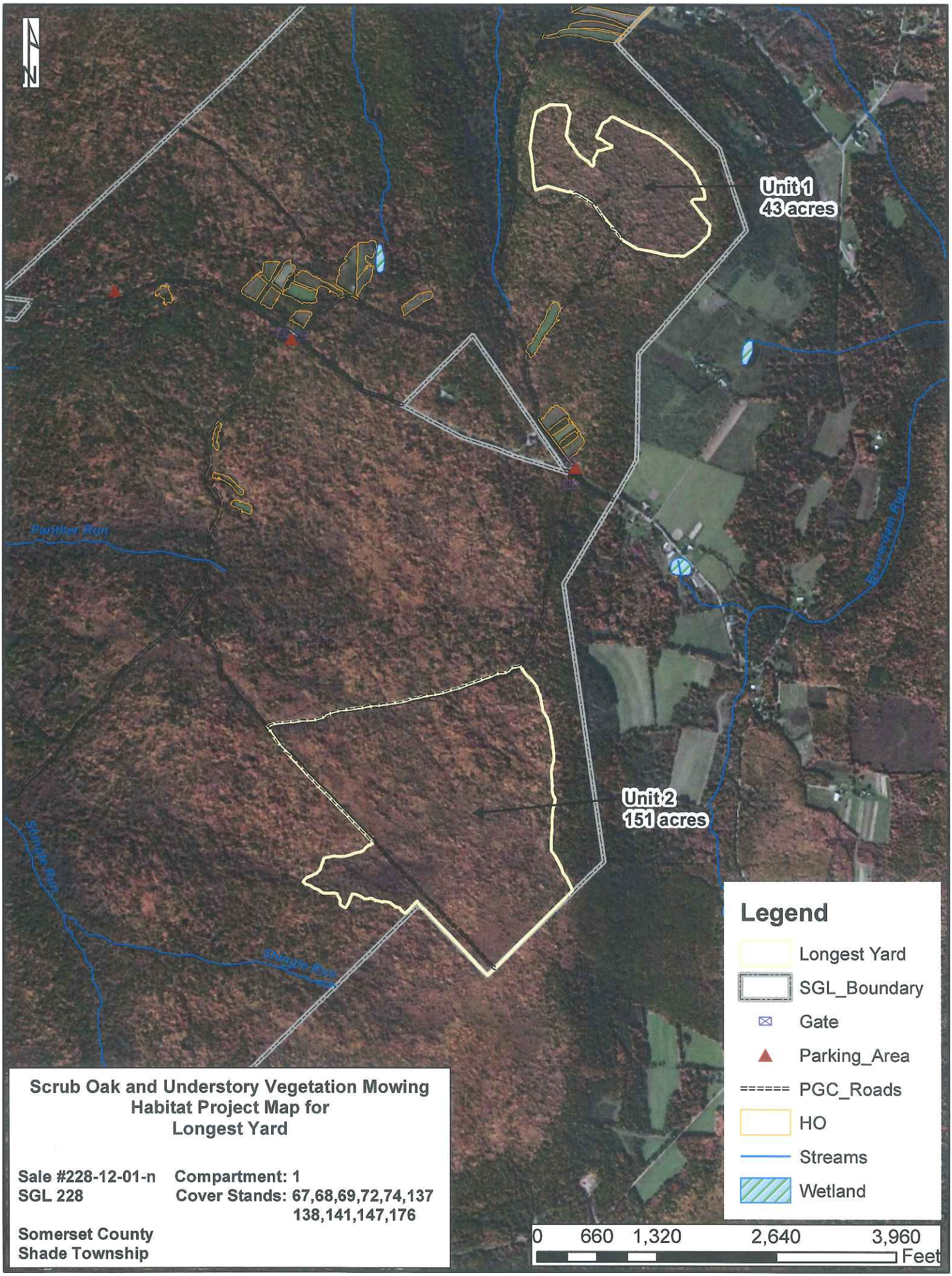
The goal of this project is to maintain and restore the scrub oak component on this game land in early successional habitat, with particular emphasis on best management practices to enhance habitat for golden-winged warblers and other species of wildlife that benefit from young forests. The entire project area encompasses 500 acres within scrub oak shrubland dry oak – heath woodland community types. The scrub oak shrubland community occurs on dry, acidic soils within the ridgetop acidic barren complex. Low vegetation is dominated by scrub oak, mountain laurel, blueberry, huckleberry, and sweet fern. Tree species include oaks, sassafras, black gum, red maple and pitch pine existing as scattered individuals or in small woodland patches. The dry oak – heath woodland community is dominated by trees that form less than 30% of the main canopy cover, and occurs on dry, acidic soils within the ridgetop acidic barren complex. Dominant trees include chestnut oak, scarlet oak, black

oak, black gum, sassafras, sweet birch, gray birch, red maple and pitch pine. The structure of the lower shrub layer is composed of blueberry, black huckleberry, and sweet-fern. Mountain laurel, scrub oak, and highbush blueberry provide an additional layer of taller shrubs.

Over 500 acres of forest on this game land is considered reverting scrub oak barrens habitat. The barren forest community of scrub oak-pitch pine in central Pennsylvania once covered more than 325,000 acres, but today far less supports scrub oak barren habitat. Generally, these habitats are primarily restricted to the highest, most exposed portions of the ridge and are surrounded by slopes and drainages with mixed hardwood forest. Scrub oaks produce consistent yields of acorns that are food for a variety of wildlife species, both game and non-game. Barren habitat has a historical relationship with periodic wildfires; and habitat maintenance in this habitat type on game land will include prescribed burns to preserve this habitat component.

The goal to restore and maintain the scrub oak component in early successional stage will involve a combination of strategies. The use of clearcuts with residual tree and tree island retention, in conjunction with mechanical mowing treatments and prescribed fire, will be employed to manage the ridgetop acidic barren complex on this gameland. The **'Longest Yard'** project is the first phase of a larger 500 acre management area that is divided into nine units to facilitate various strategy and timeframe implementation. A mechanical mowing treatment will be used to treat **194** acres of scrub oak and other understory vegetation up to eight inches in diameter in certain management units Once mowing is completed, a clearcut with residuals will be conducted (from November 16, 2013 through March 31, 2014) to remove the invading hardwoods species from other management units. Within several years, prescribed fire will be utilized to begin removing organic material and maintaining these units in early succession. Over the following ten years, the remaining management units will be treated with mechanical understory mowing and clearcuts with residuals, followed by prescribed fire.

This 194 acre habitat project is the first phase of a broader comprehensive project designed to maintain and restore critical and unique ridgetop acidic barren habitat that was historically widespread in Pennsylvania. Similar habitat projects are currently underway or in the planning phase on other game lands, not only in the Southwest but across the State. These habitat projects are crucial to maintaining and restoring unique and critical habitat diversity that provides benefit to a variety of wildlife species.



Scrub Oak and Understory Vegetation Mowing Habitat Project Map for Longest Yard

Sale #228-12-01-n **Compartment: 1**
SGL 228 **Cover Stands: 67,68,69,72,74,137 138,141,147,176**

Somerset County
Shade Township