Project Period: 09/01/2013 - 09/01/2014
Award Amount: $200,000.00
Matching Contributions: $200,000.00
Project Location Description (from Proposal): SE reaches of Tampa Bay, bracketed to the north by Cockroach Bay, south by Hillsborough/Manatee County line, west by Tampa Bay, and east by US41

Project Summary (from Proposal): Restore 1,043 acres of various coastal habitats (including 398 acres of wetlands and 645 acres of uplands), restore sheetflow, and improve water quality for Tampa Bay.

Summary of Accomplishments: The excavation of over 274,000 cy of coastal soils to create approximately 38 acres of various estuarine habitats (tidal channels and lagoons and intertidal islands and shorelines for the Tampa Bay estuarine ecosystem.

Lessons Learned: Staff of the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Section of the Southwest Florida Water Management District and biologists from an environmental consulting firm (Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc.) must work closely with the project's construction contractor (QGS Development, Inc.) to insure that the project is properly constructed as designed and field adjusted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservation Activities</th>
<th>Excavation of estuarine channels/lagoons and intertidal habitats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress Measures</td>
<td>Other Activity Metric (Cubic yards of material - acres of estuarine habitats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value at Grant Completion</td>
<td>38 acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservation Outcome(s)</th>
<th>Excavation of 275,144 cubic yards creating 38 acres of wetlands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservation Indicator Metric(s)</td>
<td>acres of priority habitat restored (seagrass, oyster reefs, salt marsh, forests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline Metric Value</td>
<td>0 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric Value at Grant Completion</td>
<td>38 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term Goal Metric Value</td>
<td>1043 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in which Long Term Metric Value is Anticipated</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final Programmatic Report Narrative

**Instructions:** Save this document on your computer and complete the narrative in the format provided. The final narrative should not exceed ten (10) pages; do not delete the text provided below. Once complete, upload this document into the on-line final programmatic report task as instructed.

**Project Title**

Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project in Tampa Bay (Florida), Project No. 1802.13.037277

**Reporting Period**

This is the final and only report for this project. Execution of the grant agreement and commencement of project construction both occurred during December, 2013. NFWF funds are being used to help offset excavation expenses.

1. **Summary of Accomplishments**
   
   In four to five sentences, provide a brief summary of the project’s key accomplishments and outcomes that were observed or measured.

   The Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project is a collaborative effort between the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Program of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and the Hillsborough County Resource Management Section of their Parks, Recreation, and Conservation Department. Once completed, this $11 million project will be the largest single coastal ecosystem restoration project ever performed for Tampa Bay to date: the enhancement/restoration/creation of 1043 acres of various estuarine, freshwater, and upland habitats. The NFWF grant of $200,000 is being used to help defray excavation costs associated with creating various estuarine habitats. With SWFWMD matching funds ($200,000), the NFWF grant has been used to excavate 274,144 cubic yards of soils to create 38 acres of various estuarine habitats (i.e., tidal channels and lagoons and intertidal islands and shorelines). Overall project construction is anticipated to be completed by December 2015.

2. **Project Activities & Outcomes**

   **Activities**
   
   - Describe and quantify (using the approved metrics referenced in your grant agreement) the primary activities conducted during this grant.

   After bidding of the project during mid-2013, a construction contract was awarded to low bidder QGS Development, Inc. for construction of the overall 1043 acre project. Project construction began during December 2013. The tidal channels and lagoons proposed for this grant were constructed within low-lying coastal uplands that were either heavily dominated by mature non-native vegetation (i.e., Brazilian pepper, Australian pine trees, guinea grass) or were fallow farm fields infested with abundant, widespread young non-native vegetation. After removal of non-native vegetation, heavy equipment excavated the various estuarine habitats. Utilizing NFWF grant funds (coupled with SWFWMD matching funds), approximately 274,144 cubic yards of soil were removed to create 38 acres of tidal channels/lagoons and intertidal islands/shorelines. Excavate is being recycled on site as upland “observation mounds”; the mounds will rise to an elevation of about 50’ above sea level and planted as an upland habitat. In addition, the mounds will serve as a public amenity, providing preserve visitors the option to experience dramatic views of the site’s restored wetland and upland communities.
• Briefly explain discrepancies between the activities conducted during the grant and the activities agreed upon in your grant agreement.

There are no discrepancies between activities conducted during the grant vs activities agreed upon in our grant agreement.

Outcomes
• Describe and quantify progress towards achieving the project outcomes described in your grant agreement. (Quantify using the approved metrics referenced in your grant agreement or by using more relevant metrics not included in the application.)

Project outcomes are exactly what were described in the NFWF grant agreement. Grant funds were proposed to offset project costs associated with excavation and contouring of soils to create various estuarine habitats. The grant funds have been exclusively used to accomplish what was originally proposed. As noted, over 274,000 cubic yards of soils have been excavated and contoured to create 38 acres of new estuarine tidal channels and lagoons as well as various intertidal islands and meandering shorelines.

• Briefly explain discrepancies between what actually happened compared to what was anticipated to happen.

There are no discrepancies between activities conducted during the grant vs activities agreed upon in our grant agreement.

• Provide any further information (such as unexpected outcomes) important for understanding project activities and outcome results.

There were no unexpected outcomes for this portion of the project or use of NFWF grant funds.

3. Lessons Learned
Describe the key lessons learned from this project, such as the least and most effective conservation practices or notable aspects of the project’s methods, monitoring, or results. How could other conservation organizations adapt their projects to build upon some of these key lessons about what worked best and what did not?

One key lesson to share is that close coordination between SWIM staff, the project’s consulting firm, and the construction contractor is paramount for completion of a successful and productive project. Robust, interactive construction management oversight is critically important, allowing the project design to be adjusted in the field to accommodate real-world features. This “fine-tuning” of the project during construction results in a project that will maximize its ecological benefits. An example of such field adjustments would be adjusting the edge of a proposed wetland to accommodate a viable stand of upland vegetation that otherwise had not been recognized for its presence or value (during habitat mapping/design). In addition, being able to hire a contractor that is willing to accommodate minor field adjustments (i.e., “hammering-to-fit”, at no additional cost) is critical to this adjustment system working within the project’s budget.

4. Dissemination
Briefly identify any dissemination of lessons learned or other project results to external audiences, such as the public or other conservation organizations.

The Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project has garnered numerous newspaper and website articles as well as several television stories. A project kickoff ceremony was held on February 3, 2014, bringing together various elected officials, board members, and local/state agency representatives, inclusive of Herschel T. Vinyard, Jr. (Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) as the event’s keynote speaker. In addition, the project has been profiled for a variety of public audiences through invited presentations (e.g., two Sierra Club chapters, continuing education classes of the University of South Florida, Scubanauts, Optimist Club, Apollo Beach Women’s Club, Largo High School marine biology class); future presentations are pending for other user groups, including the Tampa Bay Regional Planning
Council. Lastly, the SWIM Program working with the non-profit “Tampa Bay Watch” organization is endeavoring to organize and implement the largest volunteer marsh planting (by number of plants) ever conducted for Tampa Bay for the Rock Ponds site (note: Guinness Book of World Records does not list “marsh planting” as a category, but, if achieved, the Tampa Bay event could be a world record). The previous Tampa Bay record was established at a different SWIM restoration site (Terra Ceia) during September 2007, when 350 public volunteers installed 34,000 plugs of marsh grass in two hours during one volunteer event. The proposed Rock Ponds event is targeting having 400 volunteers install 40,000 plugs of marsh grass (anticipated timeframe – about two hours!). The event may occur during Fall 2014.

5. Project Documents
Include in your final programmatic report, via the Uploads section of this task, the following:

- **2-10 representative photos from the project.** Photos need to have a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and must be accompanied with a legend or caption describing the file name and content of the photos; See photos below, attached and labeled as part of this narrative.

- **Report publications, GIS data, brochures, videos, outreach tools, press releases, media coverage:** See attached pdf-scans of newspaper and television stories plus the program created for the “Kickoff Ceremony”.

- **Any project deliverables per the terms of your grant agreement.** There are no other project deliverables per the terms of the grant agreement.
Note: NFWF project footprint highlighted in yellow box

Figure 3. Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project Plans (Uplands + Wetlands)
Clearing of dense stands of non-native vegetation at Rock Ponds site prior to excavation of estuarine channels/lagoons and intertidal islands/shorelines.

Trackhoe with “thumb” clearing non-native vegetation at Rock Ponds site prior to excavation of estuarine habitats.

Excavation of estuarine habitats by heavy machinery at Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project (Western Restoration Sector).
Bulldozer grading proper elevations for estuarine lagoon and intertidal habitats of the Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project.

Closeup of trackhoes excavating fill and loading soils into off-road dump trucks during construction of estuarine habitats at the Rock Ponds site.

Completed “finger” lagoon, ready to be planted at the Rock Ponds site.
Completed open water lagoon in Western Restoration Sector of Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project (ready for planting).

Completed tidal channel between two completed islands within Western Restoration Sector of Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project (ready for planting).

Completed estuarine lagoon with intertidal islands and shorelines of a portion of the Western Restoration Sector of the Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project (ready for planting).
**POSTING OF FINAL REPORT:** This report and attached project documents may be shared by the Foundation and any Funding Source for the Project via their respective websites. In the event that the Recipient intends to claim that its final report or project documents contains material that does not have to be posted on such websites because it is protected from disclosure by statutory or regulatory provisions, the Recipient shall clearly mark all such potentially protected materials as “PROTECTED” and provide an explanation and complete citation to the statutory or regulatory source for such protection.
Coffee and Doughnuts
The Employee Committee is providing free coffee and doughnuts to staff at each service office on Wednesday, Feb. 12 from 7:30-9 a.m. Also, a raffle will be held at each office.

February Service Milestones
Congratulations to the following employees for their years of service.

Donna Porter
Regulatory Support Supervisor
5 years

Carolyn Pina
Staff Engineer
10 years

Patty Franz
Senior Environmental Scientist
20 years

Karen Gruehagen
Senior Environmental Scientist
25 years

Alba Mas
Regulation Director

District Kicks Off Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project
Dozens of state and community leaders joined the District last week in kicking off the Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project.

The project, located just north of the Manatee County line in Ruskin, will feature more than 1,000 acres of restored uplands and wetlands when completed in about two years. Executive Director Robert Beltran acknowledged the project was possible thanks to community partners like Hillsborough County.

"Over the years, Hillsborough County has been an incredible partner as we’ve worked together to restore coastal habitats along Tampa Bay," he said.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel Vinyard agreed.

"Nothing gets done unless you have partners," he said.

About 381 acres will be restored as coastal uplands and 398 acres will be restored as various freshwater and estuarine wetlands. This