Most of the food plots are planted with a traditional mix of clovers. Scott Westphal, coordinator for the WU Youth hunt, gets a plot ready in anticipation of the upcoming youth hunting season. (WU photo)

WU receives Grant for Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative grant

IRON COUNTY—This spring, Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County was awarded a grant from the Michigan DNR Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative, which funded a project with funds from the Deer Range Improvement Program (DRIP).

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The Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHIPI) is a grant program designed to foster productive relationships between the DNR, sportsmen's organizations, concerned citizens and other partners that produce tangible deer habitat improvement benefits and educate the public about the importance the work and the scientific principles involved in it.

This Initiative is targeted for implementation only in the Upper Peninsula at this time.

Wildlife Unlimited of Iron County found that the goals of this grant dovetailed nicely with its Youth Hunt Program, which teams WU, hunt mentors, area landowners, the DNR and area businesses with young people wishing to hunt during the two-day Michigan Youth Deer Hunt.

Around 20 to 30 young hunters are taken afield annually at no cost to the hunter. They hunt from blinds on private property over food plots either provided by a generous landowner or plots developed on private property by WU.

"Our objective is to give young people that have never hunted deer or have never taken a deer the chance to participate in this tradition we all enjoy so much. The hunters are treated to a day on the rifle range the week before the season, provided a rifle if needed, a license, a mentor to guide them, a lunch on Saturday to compare hunting tales and finally the processing of their kill. The hunt yields a better than 50 percent success rate with the majority of the deer taken being antlerless," said WU Representative Ted Sammond.

The grant proposal titled, "Wildlife opening creation and native prairie habitat," allocated $7,500 from the DHIPI fund, with WUIC putting up a matching $2,500.

The intent of the project is to partner with private landowner(s) in our area to plow, till, lime (if soil test indicates need), fertilize, and plant a cool season clover mix with an appropriate cover crop on five sites.

Two additional sites will be treated with native prairie grass seed mix in cooperation with

USDA-NRCS assistance.

Total estimated acreage impacted by all types of planting is approximately seven acres. This project is intended to seasonally benefit white tailed deer and other wildlife and enhancement of local youth hunting mentoring opportunities.

Initially the soil was tested at each of the sites to determine the fertilizer and lime required to optimize the productivity of the plots.

“While we were waiting for the test results, the plots were sprayed with herbicides to remove as much of the existing vegetation as possible. After the herbicide had done its work the ground was disked and planted. Most of the plots were planted with a traditional mix of clovers.

“Two were planted with a tall grass prairie mix acquired from Pheasants Forever. The prairie plots were plant nearby two of the clover patches. We had hoped to have a field day for area property owners to come out and compare our results. However, prairie plants develop slowly under good growing conditions and the extended rainless periods during this summer made it difficult to determine the success of these plantings,” said Sammond.

“While it appears that one of the prairie plots will develop, the public field day will have to wait for mid-summer in 2013 when the success of the plantings is determined. Mentors on the prairie plots and the neighboring clover plots will log the number of deer seen and the success of our youth hunter to begin developing a sense of how the deer as well as other wildlife are utilizing these plots.”

The traditional clover plots have a turnip cover crop which takes some of the feeding pressure off of the clover the first year allowing it to become established. In late August or early September, the plots are mowed encouraging the plants to send up new tender shoots which are very appealing to the deer, especially as most of the surrounding vegetation is now tough as it nears the end of this year’s growth. The photo to the right shows one of this year’s DHIPI clover plots with a turnip cover crop.

Landowners interested in trying a native prairie planting should contact the Natural Resource Conservation Service in Kingsford at (906) 774-1550 for more information.

For additional information regarding the Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative, interested individuals or organizations should contact Bill Scullon, MDNR Private Lands Wildlife Biologist at (906) 563-9247.

WU is now taking names of hunters between the ages of 12 and 16 interested in participating in its 2012 Youth Hunt Program.

For more information or a hunt application, call Scott Westphal at (906) 282-6261, Rick Commenator at (906) 265-2531, Larry Pifke at (906) 265-3878, Dave Grondin at (906) 875-3014 or Ted Sammond at (906) 875-3535.