

IS BUSH GETTING THE MILITARY TO PAY LAURA FOR HER NATIVE PLANTS?

✘ There's plenty that's stinky about this program where Texas A&M funnels money from the Pentagon to Bush's Crawford neighbors to restore wildland to make up for the habitat the military is trashing in training programs.

The Pentagon has been funding Texas A&M University to pay landowners near a Texas military post to protect endangered bird species on their land under a secretive program designed to free the military to conduct training activities that would damage the birds' habitats inside the post's boundaries, documents show.

[snip]

Under the program, the Army accumulates "credits" that correspond roughly to the acreage that landowners agree to conserve for between 10 and 25 years. After banking sufficient credits, the military can use them to offset the habitat loss or harm that would stem from its activities. It must set aside 10 percent of the credits to foster the recovery of a target species.

There's the problem that you're creating habitat for as little as 10 years (after which the habitat will be long gone at Ft. Hood). And there's the problem that the habitat is not continuous contiguous with the land at Ft. Hood.

✘

A biological evaluation issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service on Aug. 2, 2007, agreed with the Army that the

project's impact would not necessarily boost the bird's numbers because the contracts with landowners were "not in perpetuity. . . . Thus, golden-cheeked warblers would receive short term benefits from the proposed action with no guarantee of future protection."

[snip]

"You don't go out 10 miles away and start planting trees. You've got to do it on adjacent territory," he said. "It needs to be guided by the science that pertains to the biology of the bird."

But the most troubling part of this—which the WaPo barely alludes to—is that this really was a plan dreamt up by George Bush and his political ally Susan Combs, administered in secret through the Bush family pet university, Texas A&M, giving money secretly to people who are literally W's neighbors in Crawford.

At Fort Hood, the program – which **does not disclose the landowners' identities, the amounts they receive or precisely where their properties are located** – aims to provide ranchers with expertise and financial incentives to expand habitat for the endangered golden-cheeked warbler.

[snip]

"From my perspective, the bottom line is, it was all political pressure to take a slug of money every year and put it toward this program, and no was not an answer," the official said. "We should spend money on soldiers preparing to go to war. And instead it appears **this was about making sure this money was devoted to a specific constituency in Texas.**"

[snip]

In a Jan. 15 e-mail to several

colleagues, Brig. Gen. Richard C. Longo, who helps oversee military training for the Pentagon, wrote of the recovery credit system: "BOTTOM LINE: **RCS is not good unless you are a local landowner in the Fort Hood area.**" His commander, three-star Lt. Gen. James D. Thurman, replied, "ROGER AGREE HOLD THE LINE ON THIS. **NO FREE CHICKEN!**"

[snip]

Both Combs and Wilkins said **they had made the decision to shield the landowners' identities** in order to enlist ranchers in the program. Wilkins – who said the program had paid \$460,522 directly to property owners and spent another \$1.9 million on "conservation actions" on their land – said groups including the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association and the Texas Farm Bureau have embraced the project.

"The participation rate would be really low" if ranchers' names became public, because Texans feel passionately about their privacy, Wilkins said, adding that landowners are "lining up" to participate in part because they only have to commit to temporary rather than permanent easements. [my emphasis]

And I wasn't kidding when I asked whether this money was going to pay Laura to put native species back on the pig farm at Crawford. She has spoken a lot about her efforts to plant native species on the pig farm. And compare the WaPo's map, left, with Google's map showing Crawford. This either includes the Bush ranch itself, or at the very least their close neighbors. And if Laura had gotten money through this program, with a 10-year agreement she could desert the ranch in just 7 years, something she's bound to do anyway in favor of the house in an exclusive, segregated neighborhood Dallas.

I'm all in favor of planting native species—we've planted natives in about 1/4 of our own lawn. But I had to pay to do that myself. I didn't have George Bush funneling me money for doing so.

Update, from pajarito in comments below:

I worked on this bird species in TX, including Ft. Hood. My work led to the listing of the species as endangered. This is a boon-doggle of high order.

The bird in question needs habitat "chunks" of over 200 acres and the habitat needs to be a mature mix of oak and juniper with dense canopy. These tree stand characteristics could not be realized in 10 years or even 20, even with normal rains. So, the money is not benefiting the bird.

[snip]

Worse yet, one of this and other endangered bird species' biggest problem is a nest parasite, the Brown-headed Cowbird which takes over host nests with its young. Cowbirds increase 100x in number when cows are present. Ft. Hood has a sweetheart deal with local ranchers to let cows graze on Ft. Hood, thousands of them.

Cows have nothing to do with the Army Mission. Cows & cowbirds don't help the endangered songbirds. Army does help local landowners stay rich...the Cattle Growers are in this deep, as are TX politicians.

[snip]

The GCW nests only in central Texas, has very specific habitat needs, and has been in decline for quite some time due to habitat loss. A colleague tried to expose the Ft. Hood cattle BS quite some time back.