International Forest Fire News (IFFN) No. 30 (January – June 2004, 63-64)

Habitat Management in Military Training Areas, Germany

OFFENLAND: Habitat Management in Military Training Areas in the Pleistocene Lowland of Northeast Germany: Fundamentals of Nature Conservation and Practical Implementation

Acting partner: Brandenburg Technical University (BTU) Cottbus

Cooperation partners: University of Freiburg, University of Potsdam, The State Museum of Natural History Görlitz, The Institute for Agricultural Engineering (ATB) Bornim e.V.

Valuable open landscape biotopes, which are characterised by great biodiversity, cover large surfaces of military training bases. The conservation of these areas requires appropriate measures that ensure they remain open.

As integral part of the BMBF sponsored project OFFENLAND (Fkz 01 LN 0008), clearing of vegetation by shooting exercises and mechanized manoeuvres on an active military installation in eastern Germany were investigated.

Restrictions as limited access to the study area and extraordinary efforts in getting special permits to work on those areas should be considered. Beyond doubt the ignorance of the intensity, temperature and time of fire is another continuous problem while working with “fires of opportunity”.

Pitfall trapping, monitoring of the vegetation and soil analyses did not indicate any serious decline of abundance or vitality of species. Activity-densities of epigeic arthropods were not significantly affected by fire. Effects on the composition, structure and distribution of different vegetation types were observed. A typical mosaic of recently burned, earlier burned and unburned patches brings about a high variety of different vegetation patches. Furthermore varying soil qualities and fire intensities affect the secondary succession in many ways. Immediately after burning, representatives of all important groups of the soil microfauna were found alive in the upper soil layers. Shallow, short-term and small-sized patchy vegetation fires did not reveal any severe short- or longer-term impacts on abundances or biomasses of testate amoebae.

The results from this study highlight the fact that the “unintended side effect” of routine military exercises - especially shootings – may be an appropriate and feasible tool to create and preserve open landscapes with valuable open habitats for localized and rare animals.

Anyhow the establishment of prescribed fire in landscape management needs intensive and consolidated educational advertising. Local people and public authorities have to be convinced of the cost-effectiveness and environmental compatibility of controlled fire after a long tradition of fire fighting and fire suppression.

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Visual Impressions

Figure 1. Burned pine forest (Photo: Stumpf)

Figure 2. Small sized patchy vegetation fires result in a mosaic structure (Photos: M. Wanner)