

How to Manage Vegetation to Encourage or Protect Wildlife

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Managing Forests for Wildlife

Many landowners express an interest in attracting and supporting wildlife on their forest land. The basic tool a landowner uses for wildlife management is habitat management, creating food and cover conditions suitable for the wildlife species that you would like to encourage. You can also manipulate habitat to discourage species. Important habitat elements to consider are plant species that provide food and cover, distance to water, and amount of different habitats available, especially the amount of edge between distinct habitats which help determine which wildlife species an area can support.

Habitat diversity is essential to promoting wildlife use of your property. Having a variety of habitats and habitat elements helps to ensure that the right mix of resources are available to all wildlife. It is also helpful to have diversity both spatially across the property and vertically. Providing the nooks and crannies that different species can use will encourage them to your property.

You can choose to encourage certain species by understanding the unique needs of a particular species – and enhancing the resources that species finds attractive. Be aware that encouraging one species might adversely affect another. You may choose to consider general needs of many species and thus to encourage a variety of animals to inhabit your property. Any action, or non-action on your part affects wildlife use of your property. As a landowner, you have the difficult job of considering the effect your actions might have on all species.

Wildlife typically do not respect property boundaries. If a resource like food cover or water is available, then the animal will take advantage of it. Available, in this case, means that the animal can locate the resource, that it is in sufficient quantity for the animal to use, and that the animal feels safe enough to access the resource.

Riparian or stream-side areas represent the most productive wildlife habitat types that you can have. Water is life to plants, and the animals that feed on them. Use extra care with management around water bodies, lake, streams, and such. Riparian areas often serve as corridors for wildlife to move between habitat types.

Wildlife management involves planning, setting realistic goals, providing the proper habitat elements, and waiting. Animals are specific in their needs and have varying requirements throughout the year. All of these needs must be met if the desired species is to occupy a given area. Planning for all of the animals' needs requires that specific goals be set. These goals must be reasonable in regard to the property that is being managed. Finally, realize that it takes time to develop the habitat requirements for certain species. It may take several years for a cut-over area to develop the plants that your target species' need.

Planning for Multiple Species

Cooperation with neighbors may complement wildlife management projects for all parties. Though you need not enter into a joint project, it might be best if neighboring projects are complimentary. Perhaps your neighbor has a water source that wildlife on your property could use. Communication with your neighbors informs them of your goals and objectives, reducing misunderstandings, while improving the success of your wildlife management plans.

Local native plants should be selected over introduced species or landscape cultivars. Introduced plants are often more expensive to establish and maintain. Native plants are adapted to the local environment, and the wildlife is familiar with these plants. However, ornamentals and non-native materials may have some aesthetic and wildlife value if chosen carefully.

With either native or introduced plants, certain problems may arise, namely, the appearance of unwanted animal species. Why are those species present? Because the habitat is suitable. Check the requirements of unwanted species against those of the desired species and adjust the habitat accordingly. Check with a wildlife biologist for the requirements of unwanted species.

In some situations, making the habitat desirable for a particular animal's prey species or disagreeable to its predators might be the technique that works

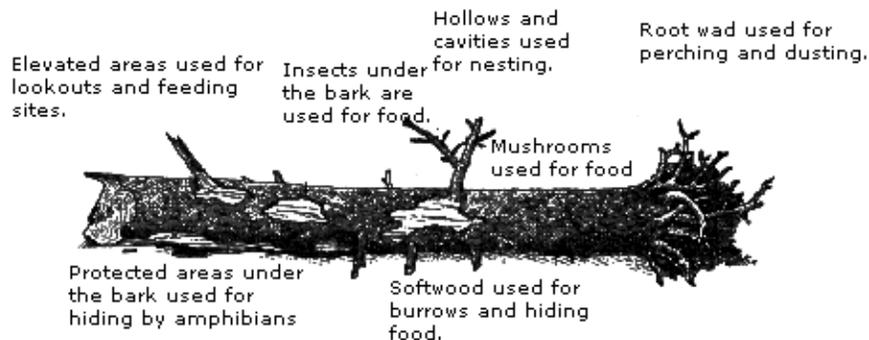
Wildlife habitat may be enriched in some situations with artificial structures. These generally benefit specific species and require a specific type, size, and location. Approach the establishment of artificial habitat with the intent of providing for the needs of one particular species. Remember, these structures require periodic maintenance.

Under normal conditions supplemental feeding is an ineffective technique for wildlife management. It is more effective and efficient to provide proper habitat as a natural consequence of your wildlife management program

Snag Management for Wildlife

Those snags (standing or fallen dead trees) that represent unclaimed firewood, lightning rods, fire hazard, or loss of growing area to some landowners are home to a variety of wildlife. The Forest Practice Rules require that all snags that are unmerchantable and can be left safely should be left to benefit wildlife. Cavity nesting birds that limit insect and rodent populations as well as provide a flash of color and song, need snags to thrive.

The size and quality of snags vary. To be useful as nest or den sites, a tree should be at least 4 inches DBH and 6 feet tall. Hard snags, that are valuable as firewood and potentially as lumber, offer nesting sites for a variety of birds. Eventually, they decay to soft snags useful for nesting sites and as a source of insects for food. Soft snags have no commercial lumber value. All soft snags should be retained unless they are a safety hazard. A minimum of 1 hard snag per 5 acres should be left. More is generally better. Groups of snags scattered throughout the property are helpful. Consider killing a few trees where snags are insufficient.



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