

GENERAL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT FOR FORESTS OF TEXAS

INFORMATION FOR FOREST LANDOWNERS

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative program combines the perpetual growing and harvesting of trees with the long-term protection of wildlife, plants, soil and water quality. In Texas, the SFI program is working to provide you with information related to wildlife habitat management.

As a good land steward, it is important to be aware of the animal species and their habitats and how forest management activities on your lands may affect them. Various wildlife species require different types of habitats. Large mammals like deer have large home ranges which can cover thousands of acres while smaller mammals like rabbits and squirrels can live on just a few acres. Smaller animals are generally more affected by what a landowner does to their property. For instance, removing all of the mature trees in an area will limit squirrel habitat by reducing den sites and hard mast (acorn) production.



Bird species also vary in their requirements. Many birds, including the northern bobwhite, prefer the early successional stages that young pine plantations provide. They are creatures of low brush and grassy openings and feed on the insects and seed provided by grasses, shrubs, and forbs. However, birds like wood thrushes and woodpeckers prefer a more mature forest type, where canopies are closed and an occasional dead tree (snag) provides decaying wood in which to search for insects. Similar to mammals, large birds have larger home ranges and the Eastern Wild Turkey has one of the largest, especially for a ground dwelling bird. Turkeys can cover dozens of miles a day to find food, water, and roost trees. Providing corridors and streamside management zones (SMZs) that connect mature timber stands enable turkeys to travel between suitable habitats.



The smallest creatures in our woods are also affected by timber management strategies. Reptiles and amphibians, along with small rodents, require decaying logs and brush for cover and feeding zones. Rotting wood contains wood-eating insects that provide food for lizards and salamanders.

Handout provided by the Texas SFI Implementation Committee, 2016

Mice consume small seeds and fruits provided by grasses and shrubs in the understory of forests. Timber management strategies should include opportunities to leave downed woody debris and snags, as well as natural openings for brush and grasses.

STREAMSIDE MANAGEMENT ZONES (SMZS)

The protection of SMZs is one of the most important conservation tools a forest landowner can use. SMZs protect water quality and provide a number of other benefits for many wildlife species. Hardwoods within SMZs provide den and nest sites as well as hard mast for food. Generally, tree canopies are denser in SMZs, which helps shade the forest floor, keeping the understory less dense. Several wildlife species prefer a more open, park-like forest in which to feed and travel.

RETENTION

Retaining single or groups of hardwoods, especially oaks, in planned harvests is extremely beneficial to a wide array of wildlife species. Hardwood mast in the form of acorns provides food for many creatures. The trees themselves provide shelter, nest and den sites, feeding sites for woodpeckers, and perch locations for hawks and owls. Once the tree dies it becomes a valuable and long lasting snag.

Dead or dying trees (snags) provide cavities for birds and woodland bats and provide feeding grounds for many species of woodpeckers. Over 40 species of wildlife use snags for cavities. Down woody debris in the form of logs or brush piles are very important to several kinds of wildlife. Reptiles and amphibians, medium and small rodents, and several bird species all benefit from the insects that feed upon the decaying woody material. Large brush piles that remain after logging are used for escape cover, den sites, and feeding areas for numerous creatures.

OPENINGS

Natural or man-made openings can be very important to wildlife. Whether enhanced or left natural these openings provide areas that capture more sunlight than the surrounding timber stand. Increased sunlight encourages plant growth which increases stem, leaf, and fruit production. Large and small herbivores feed upon these areas in the forest.

The most common opening in many working forests is the log set or log deck. Left unplanted they provide all the previous mentioned benefits. However, some of these areas can be cleared of stumps and tops and planted into food plots. Deer, turkey, and rabbits especially benefit from man-made food plots. These openings can be planted in spring or fall with the seasonally appropriate seed mix and fertilized. The seed mix should include at least one legume; clover in the fall, and alyce clover or cowpea in the spring.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

Prescribed burning is one of the best and most economical forest management practices for wildlife enhancement. Prescribed burning reduces forest fuels which helps prevent catastrophic wild fires. It also stimulates new growth of shrubs, forbs, and grasses. New growth is more palatable and nutritious for herbivores, attracts more insects for the critters that consume bugs, and can help open the forest floor to improve travel corridors. Burning also reduces rank vegetation back to ground level and which exposes new growth to ground dwelling birds and mammals.



TECHNICAL AND COST-SHARING ASSISTANCE

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) (www.tpwd.state.tx.us), or U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (www.fws.gov) can provide information on wildlife species in your area. These organizations coordinate the management of inventories of wildlife resources in the United States and Texas.

For more information or assistance, contact:

Texas Forestry Association at
(936) 632-TREE or tfa@texasforestry.org
<http://www.texasforestry.org>