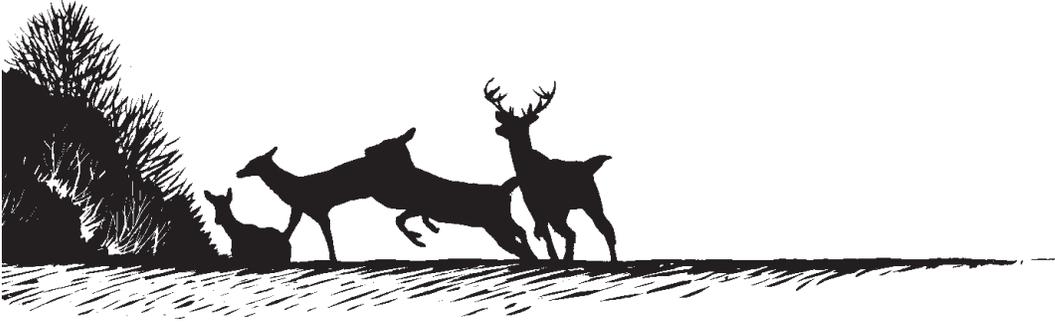


# 1 Wildlife and the Land



Perhaps you enjoy the excitement of hunting and the fruits of the hunt, such as venison stew on a cold winter day. Maybe you look forward to the arrival of the first whip-poor-will of spring, the call of a quail on a summer morning, or the hooting of a barred owl at dawn with an answer from a distant wild turkey gobbler. Enjoying wildlife, whether it is the harvest of a turkey or simply watching butterflies visit a blazing-star wildflower, is one of the rewards of managing a plot of land. The purpose of this booklet is to help you with this important and enjoyable task.

Wildlife populations reflect land use and social changes. For example, increased area in short grasses such as lawns, closely grazed pastures and manicured landscapes favor Canada geese, bluebirds, and killdeer, all of which have increased in North Carolina. Meanwhile populations of quail, Eastern meadowlarks, and field sparrows that require *early-successional habitats*, such as tall grasses and fallow areas have experienced long-term declines. Populations of wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and black bears, once rare because of severe habitat loss and unregulated harvest, have rebounded because of stocking efforts, compliance with well-designed hunting regulations, and the adaptable nature of these species.

The greatest threat to wildlife today is habitat loss and fragmentation due to development and the intensive land use associated with the production of farm and forest products. Though efforts to conserve our wildlife resources are framed by policy decisions at the state and national level, the work must be implemented one woodlot, one hedgerow, and one backyard at a time. If you own a forest, a farm, or a lot and are willing to invest some time and energy into developing and implementing a wildlife management plan, you can enjoy more wildlife. Creating and maintaining wildlife habitat on your property, no matter how small, is an important contribution to the conservation of healthy and diverse wildlife populations across North Carolina.

## ***Why should I manage my land for wildlife?***

Our management decisions reflect our personal philosophy toward the land. Aldo Leopold in his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, spoke of the relationship between us and our land. Instead of viewing land as a commodity to be mined for resources, he saw land ownership as a responsibility. This responsibility requires us to use the land to provide for our needs, but, in return, we have the responsibility to leave it in better condition.

We want our land to be productive from an economic or aesthetic sense and, in almost every instance, we can integrate wildlife habitat improvements into other primary land uses. Often, some concessions will be required, but by taking advantage of all the tools at our disposal, we can minimize expenses and sometimes even increase the net value of, or net income from, our property while providing habitat for wildlife. For example, *field borders* can convert low-yielding field edges to conservation buffers that provide annual rental payments; thinned and burned pine forests can produce higher-quality forest products, as well as better food and cover for *early-successional wildlife*; ditch banks managed by spot-spraying problem trees can yield savings on mowing and reduce frequency of maintenance; and a field of wildflowers can provide welcome relief from the monotony of closely cropped lawns.

Actively managing your land for wildlife has a multitude of other benefits including more wildlife, increased opportunities for viewing and hunting, aesthetics, exercise and just having more opportunities to spend time outdoors. The decisions you make concerning land management will depend upon how you rank wildlife objectives in

relation to other objectives, the suitability of your property, and the surrounding landscape in support of your goals. The best news is that many landowners will find the enjoyment attained by having more wildlife well worth any concessions made.

## Wildlife-Friendly Practices

### Forestland

- Thinning and burning can transform a pine plantation into a more productive area for wildlife.
- Edges where fields meet forest are more attractive to wildlife when a transition zone of brush and shrubs is established and maintained.
- Small canopy gaps can make the interior of hardwood forests more attractive to songbirds and many species of wildlife.
- Felled tree tops and brush piles along woodland edges provide cover for wildlife.
- Woodlots can be protected from the competition of grazing cattle.
- By leaving an occasional island of *mast* producers when harvesting timber, you can provide food resources and create hunting opportunities.

### Cropland

- No-till farming, where crop residue remains on the soil surface, can increase profitability, reduce erosion, and enhance the benefits of cropland to wildlife.
- Field borders of native grasses and wildflowers or volunteer vegetation can provide wildlife food and cover as well as annual income from conservation programs.
- Small patches of standing grain along field edges will provide food and cover for wildlife during winter months.

### Grassland

- Improved soil fertility will contribute to both wildlife and domestic livestock productivity.
- Native warm-season grasses provide dependable summer livestock grazing during the often hot and dry summer months, while providing food and cover for wildlife.
- Adding a legume to perennial grass pastures and hay lands builds the soil, improves forage for livestock and wildlife, and supports abundant insects on which wildlife feed.
- Burning grass stands is more beneficial to wildlife than mowing because burning results in greater diversity of plants and removes plant litter from the surface of the ground.
- Rotating cattle through different pastures can improve cattle weight gains and wildlife habitat.

### Wetlands and Idle Areas

- Fence stream banks to exclude livestock.
- Managing fencerow and ditch-bank vegetation can increase food and cover on working lands.
- Streamside-management zones that are maintained in mature hardwoods can provide wildlife travel lanes and diverse food resources.
- Existing or constructed temporary pools, which hold water only during portions of the year, are important breeding sites for frogs and salamanders.