



Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries

Forests and Wildlife Go Hand in Hand

For many landowners, wildlife is a primary goal for their forestland. Some people want to increase the quantity of game and improve hunting on their land. Others want to be able to see as many kinds of wildlife as possible. The right forest management can help landowners achieve their wildlife goals, whether those relate to diversity or quantity.

A forest is in a constant state of change. Forest succession is the predictable change in plant species over time. As forest habitat changes, so do the wildlife species that live there. If you have a fairly large property, maintaining your land in a mix of successional stages will usually increase wildlife diversity, as well as address many specific wildlife management objectives. Succession occurs naturally, but it can be manipulated to keep land at a desired stage. For example, if you want to have good quail habitat, you will have to manage the land to keep it in an early successional stage. If you want forest interior songbirds, you will need to maintain a late successional forest and minimize the number of openings and roads in it.

Additional Resources

The following Virginia resources address specifics of wildlife management:

Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Abundance through Forestry, from Virginia Cooperative Extension -

<http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/420/420-138/420-138.html>

Wildlife habitat information from Virginia Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries -

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat/>

Cost-share funds are sometimes available for landowners to implement wildlife enhancement projects. Information about cost-share programs that address wildlife improvement can be found at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs>.

Cover photo courtesy of Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries.

For More Information

For more information about VDOF services or programs, please contact your local Virginia Department of Forestry office or visit:

www.dof.virginia.gov

Western Region Office, Salem:

Phone: (540) 387-5461

Central Region Office, Charlottesville:

Phone: (434) 977-5193

Eastern Region Office, Providence Forge:

Phone: (804) 966-5092



Virginia Department of Forestry

900 Natural Resources Drive, Suite 800

Charlottesville, Virginia 22903

Phone: (434) 977-6555

www.dof.virginia.gov

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WILDLIFE AND YOUR FOREST

Forest Management is the Key to Successful Wildlife Management



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Habitat

All animals have specific needs for food, water, cover and space. Some of these needs vary by season or animal life stages. There is no single forest practice that benefits all species of wildlife. Therefore, when wildlife is a priority on your land, you must first decide which species are most important to you, and then consider which ones your land can realistically support. The size of your property and the management of adjacent properties will affect the wildlife on your land. For example, if you'd like to manage your land for black bears, but you only have a few hundred acres, and nearby land uses do not benefit bears, you'll be unlikely to attract them.

Wildlife Projects

The table to the right outlines some specific projects that can enhance wildlife habitat on forested land. Details on completing these projects, and the wildlife species they benefit, can be found on the websites provided in this publication, or by consulting a wildlife or forestry professional.



Project	Results	When to Consult a Professional
Prescribed fire	Controlled burning can reset succession to an early stage, or create a more open understory under large trees. Fire stimulates a flush of vegetation that provides food and cover.	Timing of burns is critical. Only those with proper training should attempt to burn.
Mowing, bush-hogging or disking	These agricultural practices are another alternative for maintaining areas in early succession.	Timing is important to avoid nesting seasons.
Water features	Maintaining existing streams, ponds and seeps is key for animals that require free water. Excavating new water holes can improve a habitat that lacks water.	Permits may be needed to create or alter water features.
Brush piles	Material left from logging or yard maintenance can be used to build piles that shelter many small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.	
Dens and cavities	Protection of hollow trees and rock outcrops creates sites for reproduction or hibernation of some species. Artificial structures, such as nesting or roosting boxes, can improve habitat that lacks natural cavities.	
Buffers, islands and corridors	Forested buffer strips along streams protect water quality for fish and other aquatic animals. Clusters of older trees left in a cutover can provide mast and nesting sites, and vegetated strips provide travel lanes between suitable habitats.	In some parts of the state, leaving buffer strips of a certain width is mandatory during timber harvest.
Forest openings	Harvesting trees creates early successional conditions, with an abundance of grasses, forbs, shrubs and insects. Irregular borders create more edge habitat.	
Thinning	Removing trees with low vigor allows healthy trees more room to grow, which may improve mast production. Thinning can also increase the growth of understory plants that provide food and shelter.	
Food plots	Food plants can be selected to attract specific species of birds or mammals. Annuals must be replanted each year; perennials may need to be mowed or burned periodically.	Take care when selecting species to plant, as some commercial wildlife mixes contain invasive plants.
Special features	Protecting unique features, such as vernal pools, rock outcrops or downed logs, can be critical for some species, particularly reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.	