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## **Forest Management: Designing Timber Sales for the Benefit of Wildlife**

*from Michigan State University Extension brochure: "Improving your Land for Wildlife."*

The best place to start improving your land for wildlife in Northern Lower Michigan is by creating openings in the woodlands on your property. On many parcels of private forest land in our area, there are natural upland openings that are not fully covered by trees. Some type of native grass or herbaceous ground cover primarily exists in these openings. These types of openings are highly prized by wildlife such as songbirds, rabbits, turkey deer, and others.

However, the value of existing openings for attracting wildlife is often not well understood by many landowners. Planting these openings with trees will effectively eliminate the function of the opening, and should be avoided. Openings should comprise about 10-15% of the land.

Timber harvesting is an excellent tool that can be used to improve habitat for many species of wildlife. Good forest management and wildlife habitat management are closely linked. The key is to design the timber sale with the needs of wildlife in mind.

Deer, for example, prefer small harvested areas that provide a large amount of edge. Therefore, a well planned timber sale for deer is one where the harvested area is a long and irregular shaped strip (rather than a large square shape) to provide more edge and protection. The challenge in Northern Michigan (where high deer populations exist) is to make harvested areas large enough to avoid having deer over browse regenerating trees. Where that situation might exist, harvests of 15-20 acres (or more) are recommended.

On the other hand, ruffed grouse prefer young, freshly harvested aspen (i.e. popple). Recently harvested areas in close proximity to older mature aspen are critical for grouse to successfully complete their needs for food, cover and rearing their brood. Therefore, timber harvest should be small (5-10 acres in size) and linked very closely to older stands of aspen growth. The classic description of a checkerboard effect (of harvested areas next to unharvested areas) is often used to describe ruffed grouse management.

Another practice that can easily be designed into timber sales is to leave large crowned, seed bearing trees left standing to drop seed onto the floor of the forest for wildlife (often referred to as mast trees). Oak acorns, beechnuts, ash seeds, and the berries from several native fruit producing trees can be left singly or preferably in small clumps to attract wildlife.

Another timber sale practice that benefits wildlife, is to grade all roads, trails and landings (the areas where logs are stacked) level after the timber sale is completed and plant a mixture of grass, legumes or other plant seed that is adaptable to these areas. While the planting of seed is not something that a logger automatically does, it can often be negotiated into the timber sale contract. Wild turkey, ruffed grouse, and other birds find these seeded roads and landings desirable as places for their young poults and chicks to feed on insects that inhabit these grassy, herbaceous areas.

One of the major challenges landowners face is finding a logger who is interested in harvesting only small areas. Loggers have a large investment in logging equipment that requires them to produce enough marketable wood from each timber sale to justify the equipment cost. Therefore, landowners will often find it difficult to attract loggers for timber sales of less than 10 acres in size. While somewhat discouraging, it is also an economic reality that landowners must understand if they really want to harvest timber from their property.

A few ways to overcome this problem that have been used successfully include the following suggestions. Where a landowner owns a fairly large parcel of land, a series of small timber harvests can be arranged across their property that will provide enough acreage in total for a logger to find attractive. Also where neighboring landowners are in agreement, it is possible to schedule timber harvests on neighboring parcels at the same time that would allow a logger to profitably more his equipment into the area.

Woodlands offer a good source of wildlife habitat for many wildlife game species. However, woodlands should be managed carefully to create the right type of habitat that these species prefer. Successful landowners plan ahead for land management and determine which practices will work best on their property.

For more information:

West Virginia Department of Natural Resources article:

*Timber Management for Wildlife*

When the document opens in Acrobat, you will need to increase the size by clicking on the “+” sign on the toolbar.

<http://www.wvdnr.gov/wildlife/magazine/archive/08fall/Vol8No2timberManagement101.pdf>

Mississippi State University

*Attract More Wildlife Through Timber Management*

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<http://msucare.com/pubs/publications/p1446.pdf>