



The Habitat Corner

While other factors certainly influence wildlife populations, the cornerstone of having abundant wildlife is to have enough of the proper habitats. This new feature in Tennessee Wildlife is intended to offer advice and examples of how you can manage habitat for wildlife on your property.

For Frank Gillingham, wildlife and nature have always been passions. Frank moved to Tennessee three years ago looking to buy a farm and make it the best possible haven for wildlife. When he bought the 200 acre Henderson County tract, it was mainly a pasture and row crop farming operation.

Frank enlisted NRCS biologist Mike Hansbrough to help in this endeavor. Mike helped Frank develop a sound wildlife management plan for the property. The amount of wildlife habitat currently on the property was suppressed due to the existence of introduced (non-native) grasses in the pasture areas and very little cover existing in and around the row crop areas. The first thing Frank did was remove all interior fencing from the property. The next action was to eradicate the fescue and bermudagrass and replace them with a mixture of native warm season grasses and broadleaf plants. Through USDA assistance, Frank also created a 10 acre shallow water area to attract wetland wildlife. Additional practices such as prescribed burning and annual disking were also utilized to naturally stimulate the regeneration of native legumes and plants to create good nesting and brood-rearing cover for bobwhite quail and other wildlife. Native shrub thickets and hedgerows were strategically located to improve escape and protective cover.

To help offset the personal cost of installing different practices on the farm, 75% cost share was provided through the NRCS's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and TWRA's Farm



A newly-created, shallow wetland area, native grass fields and field buffers, woodlands, and shrubby hedgerows attract a wide diversity of wildlife on the Gillingham farm.

Wildlife Habitat Program. Chris Hunter, TWRA Private Lands Biologist, also provided technical assistance for things such as prescribed burning and herbicide sprayer calibrations.

Prior to starting this process the property held some species such as deer and turkey, but since the programs have been implemented, quail, waterfowl and non-game animals such as frogs and toads are now present and thriving. This success story is a direct result of the landowner who had a vision and partners available to help make this vision become a reality.

HABITAT TIPS

Establish native plants instead of non-natives, since they are more likely to be utilized by wildlife. In your habitat development, make sure all essential elements of habitat – food, reproductive and protective cover, and water – are addressed. Many people make the mistake of focusing on fall food items but do not adequately address many species' year-round needs.

HABITAT PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

Early fall is a great time to get a management plan developed for your property, especially if you are interested in taking advantage of USDA program funding. This gives you time to properly prepare for many management practices that commonly occur during fall (such as fescue eradication), winter (planting trees and shrubs), or spring (planting native grasses and forbs).

ASK THE BIOLOGIST

Q: I am a wildlife "generalist", and want to see as many species as possible on my land. What habitat types should I manage for?

A: A variety of habitats will generally provide for the greatest diversity of wildlife. However, every piece of property is different and wildlife response may be limited by property size, topography, soils, water sources, habitat types already existing, and ability of the landowner or land manager to implement the desired management practices. A host of information is available on TWRA's and other Web sites, and a site visit and management plan provided by a TWRA or NRCS wildlife biologist can help you identify realistic expectations for the wildlife you can expect to manage on your property, and can offer strategies to save time and money in your plan implementation.

"Helping Landowners and Wildlife Through Habitat Enhancement"

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has Private Lands Biologists that will assist you in developing a management plan for your property and a strategy to implement it. See www.TWRPrivatelands.org for who to contact for technical assistance and other useful information on habitat management and programs.