

Wildlife Openings: Design & Management



The Forest Stewardship Program is designed to integrate many forest management objectives, including wildlife. Wildlife openings provide an important habitat naturally provided through forest gaps & meadows. For both game & nongame wildlife, restore & manage wildlife openings in a balanced mix of native annual & perennial weeds, legumes, sparse patches of bare ground, grasses, & shrub thickets to create early successional habitat. These are areas of native plants of about 3 years of age or less that provide various types of cover, highly palatable & nutritious browse for deer & rabbit, & abundant seeds & insects for turkey, quail, songbirds, & other wildlife. Maintain this habitat with fallow field management, like prescribe burning, winter disking, & spot-spraying with herbicides. When your time & resources allow another priority, carefully select & cultivate plantings within centers of some openings.

HOW TO DESIGN WILDLIFE OPENINGS

Size, Abundance & Shape: Openings should be 2-4 acres each & scattered over 5-25% of the total land area. If they are less than 2 acres, trees around the edges will likely shade plant growth in the opening. Curved, elongated openings with widths ranging from 30-120 yards are best. Use stakes & flagging to mark & adjust proposed outlines of openings before creating them.

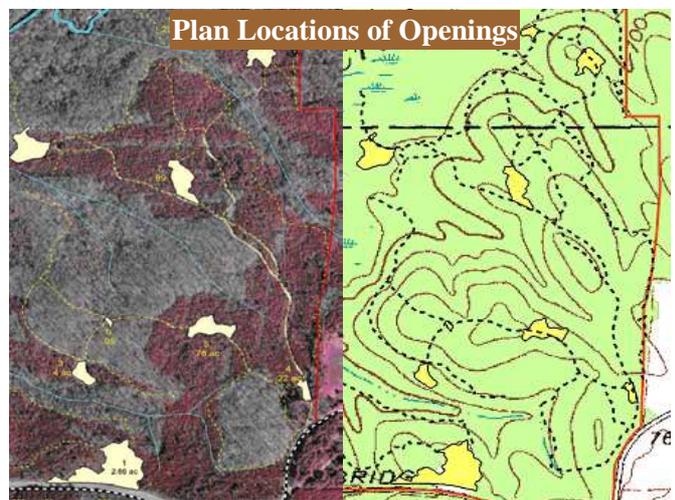
Structure: Place openings on level terrain to reduce erosion potential. Promote 30'+ buffers of grasses & shrubs in areas of openings having steeper slopes. To temporarily control erosion in new openings over the coming winter, plant a mix of (a) browntop millet, partridge pea, & ragweed from April to June if soils are highly compacted like in logging decks, or (b) wheat & oats from September – December if created after July. If possible, use no-till drill to plant these and include a mix of native warm season grasses like little blue stem, Indian grass, big blue stem, & a little switchgrass.

Surrounding Landscape: Place openings where different stand types meet, like at junctions of pine or hardwood forests of different ages or existing fields. Openings should be widely scattered in portions of or enlarged areas like forestroads, old or existing fields, logging decks, firebreaks, forest gaps & thinned rows in pine plantations, broad ridge tops, & rights-of-ways.

% Land area recommended to be in wildlife openings (2-4 acres each) for select priority species



Plan Locations of Openings



Aerial photo map of openings among pine & hardwood stands.

Topographic map of openings & forestroads along slopes to minimize erosion.

Some Fruits of Planning & Follow-Through



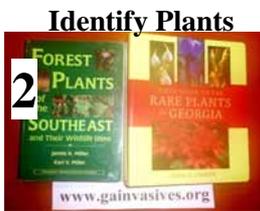
Georgia Forest Stewardship Program Templates.



HOW TO MANAGE WILDLIFE OPENINGS

Contact your local Georgia Forestry Commission office for service in establishing wildlife openings, price quotes, &/or a list of private vendors. Once your openings are established, you may decide to continue using these services or manage them yourself with a tractor, harrow, prescribe burn permits, native plant/shrub identification guide, set of herbicide spray gear, & cultivated planting guide.

Prioritized Conservation Practices for Wildlife Openings per time & resources



Low Intensity Management option using priority conservation practices 1 - 4 above

Implement fallow field conservation practices to maintain native plant communities in early successional stages of growth of 1-3 years. This typically results in moderate to high quality, drought-hardy wildlife habitat. Divide openings in 2-3 sections & then prescribe burn &/or disk a section each October-February on a staggered 2-3 year rotation. Monitor openings at least once each year for invading trees or exotic plants & then spotkill them with an appropriate herbicide. To learn how to identify & eradicate invasives, visit www.gainvasives.org or ask for the most current copy of an invasive-exotic plant control publication. Invasive-exotic plants include Bermuda grass, fescue, privet, sercica lespedeza, bi-color, Autumn olive, etc. Avoid unnecessary disturbances, like vehicle traffic, in openings during the April-September nesting season, to improve usage by wildlife.

Medium Intensity Management option using priority conservation practices 1 - 5 above

First, implement fallow field conservation practices as prescribed under low intensity, & then second, retain or plant native shrub thickets. Establish a native shrub thicket with a 40' diameter per 1 acre of opening, or per 300' of field border. Establish thickets of natives like blackberry, American beautyberry, sumac, plum, or waxmyrtle. Along field corners or edges, native trees like persimmon, crabapple, American holly, chinkapin & oak can be either retained by marking existing shrubs with flagging or established by planting. Carefully handpull or kill, using an appropriate herbicide, plants competing within 4-6' of flagged or planted trees.

High Intensity Management option using priority conservation practices 1 - 6 above

First, implement fallow field conservation practices as prescribed under low intensity within a 30'+ field border, then second, establish native shrub thickets &/or native hard or soft mast producing trees as prescribed under medium intensity, & then third, cultivate non-invasive plantings in the remaining central area of the opening.

To attract a variety of game like deer, turkey, rabbits, & doves, cultivate (a) half of the central area in a warm season planting mix of grain sorghum, millet, & iron clay peas, & (b) the other half in a cool season planting mix of wheat, winter peas, &/or clover. As a steward of your land, please insist that all seed you purchase is certified & follow-up with monitoring & eradication of invasive-exotic plants (www.gainvasives.org). For cultivated plantings, have your soil tested for fertilizer & lime needs. Follow instructions for preparing sites for planting, planting seed, & maintaining plants. For other recommendations for specific game or nongame species, consult the planting section of a Wildlife Resources Division deer, turkey, or small game publication (www.georgiawildlife.com). Other sources are available through, for example, the Quality Deer Management Association's *Quality Food Plots* book (www.qdma.com) or National Wild Turkey Federation seed program (www.nwtf.org).

