

Why Thin & Prescribe Burn Forests?



The Forest Stewardship Program is designed to help private landowners manage their natural resources with a written management plan that integrates & focuses their objectives of sustaining quality native timber, native wildlife populations, soil & water resources, aesthetics, & recreation. Plans prescribe select conservation practices for specific areas of land. In forests throughout Georgia, combining frequent thins & burns is usually the most financially & environmentally beneficial action that can be made.

Thinning & prescribe burning safely mimics natural events that historically sustained Georgia's once abundant forest type of savannah habitat, & many other habitats. Most of our forest biodiversity evolved from our state's annual average of 7,000 lightning-derived wildfires that created natural 1-3 year fire rotations, & from ice storms, hurricanes, drought, tree diseases, tornadoes, & wind that often maintained 40-60% tree canopy cover. These opened forests burned about every other year creating diverse plant communities known as early successional habitat offering food, water, cover, & space needed by wildlife that evolved with fire.

THINNING & PRESCRIBE BURNING ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE...



Unthinned forests inhibit sunlight, plant growth, food & cover for wildlife.

Thins stimulate tree growth & allow enough sunlight to reach the forest floor.

Burning thinned forests mimics nature, reviving plant diversity & growth.

Financial income & healthy habitat increase with thins & burns.

For timber production purposes in Georgia, thinning advances timber into higher value product classes & burning is critical because it reduces both hazardous forest fuel that can carry economically destructive wildfires & competition for resources from advanced shrub & tree growth, all while overall pine forest health, vigor, access, & appearance are improved. Research from the University of Georgia & Georgia Forestry Commission shows that a first thinning for pulpwood will, even if no income is generated, advance timber into higher product classes yielding a higher internal rate of return than if not thinned. Consistent thins & burns improve & maintain benefits, economically & ecologically.

For many native game & nongame wildlife in Georgia, thinning is important because it opens the forest canopy allowing sunlight to reach the ground & regenerate native plants. Burning is then critical because it maintains native grasses, weeds, & shrubs, providing food & various types of cover needed. Persistently maintaining a rotation of prescribe fire keeps this type of early successional habitat by preventing shade-killing conditions caused by advanced shrub, tree sapling, & canopy growth. Pine savannah, needing abundant amounts of sunlight penetration to the ground, is one of Georgia's officially designated high priority habitats & home for 20 wildlife & 56 plant species that suffered significant declines in recent decades. Consistent thins & burns allow fire-dependent plant communities to flourish.

