

# Manage Forests With Enhanced Conservation Strategies



NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

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. The program guidelines below are for landowners who have a near-equal emphasis of these objectives. Annually monitor for & correct issues needing immediate attention like with forestry Best Management Practices & disease, & control invasive-exotic plants by referring to template [Herbicide Use in Georgia Forests](#).

## PINE STANDS

**Pine forest communities are important for wildlife species** because they can provide food, water, cover, horizontal structure, & other space, in the form of early-successional plant habitat.

**Combine frequent thins & consistent burns** among scattered 15-40 acre burn compartments on a 1-3 year rotation. This helps create & then maintain a checkerboard pattern of early-successional habitats for wildlife & controls competition from advanced woody tree growth. Thin non or pre-commercial stands to below 475 trees per acre & commercial stands with a basal area (BA) of 120+ square feet per acre to 90, with 91-120 to 60, & with 71-90 to 50. BA is a measure of timber productivity foresters estimate & is the sum of surface areas of tree cross-sections at 4.5' high per acre. Repeat thins every 3-6 years to maintain 70 BA or less to allow 30%+ of the ground to be in direct sunlight to grow grasses, weeds, & shrubs that wildlife like deer & turkey need. Refer to template [Why Thin & Prescribe Burn Forests?](#)

**Create a wildlife opening per 25 acres that is 2-4 acres in size** by harvesting trees around logging decks & refer to the template [Wildlife Openings: Design & Management](#) for low, medium, & high intensity management options.

**Create transitional habitat buffers around open areas that cover 5-25% of each pine stand** by thinning to 30 BA within 10, 25, or 40 yards along edges of wildlife openings, rights-of-ways, agricultural fields, & forest roads.

**Evenly scatter logging debris & retain hardwood snag trees** with 4-6 having 5-11" diameters & 1 having 10+."

**To temporarily control erosion in disturbed areas with high erosion potential**, establish native plantings or non-invasive/non-persistent plantings to allow surrounding native plants to eventually stabilize soil in these critical areas. Prior to winter, plant a mix of (a) browntop millet, partridge pea, & ragweed from April to June if soils are highly compacted like in logging decks/roads, or (b) wheat & oats from September – December if after July. Where stabilization from nearby native plants will take many years, use no-till drill to plant these & include a mix of big & little blue stem, switch, & Indian grasses. Avoid invasive-exotic plants, kudzu, sericia lespedeza, Bermuda, fescue, & rye grass.

**Daylight sections of forest roads with mudding problems** by thinning or clearing roadsides 20+."

**Consider reforesting harvested areas with native tree & plant communities**, like longleaf pine.

## HARDWOOD & MIXED PINE-HARDWOOD STANDS



**Hardwood forest communities are important for wildlife species** because they can provide (a) food, water, cover, vertical structure, & other space usually within both terrestrial & aquatic habitats & (b) forest buffers that can serve as travel corridors for wildlife through bottomlands & uplands.

**Decide how to manage a stand in the future by evaluating tree species composition & density** by selecting at least one sample point per 10 acres & recording BA of trees for: white oak group, red oak group, soft mast producers, pine, other desirables, & undesirables. If pine composition is evenly distributed & greater than 60% then manage for pines, if less than 40% then manage for hardwoods, & if 40-60% manage for either or a mixed stand.

**Thin** by harvesting or killing cull trees to leave 80 BA or 50-80 croptrees per acre of a 50% even diversity of white & red oak tree species & 50% even mix of all other tree species. In mixed stands create one wildlife opening per 25 acres, while in hardwood stands create one 4-acre wildlife shelterwood area per 50 acres leaving 30-40 BA of oaks. For a more intense management option instead: (1) thin as described above but favor leaving fire-tolerant trees, (2) burn during cool-seasons in scattered 15-40 acre compartments on a 3-5 year rotation for mixed stands & 3-10 for hardwood stands, & (3) control advanced competing regeneration with direct-stem herbiciding in years after thinning in mixed stands, while in hardwood stands increase shelterwoods to 2 per 50 acres. Evenly scatter logging debris.

**Maintain bottomland hardwood forest buffers of 100-300' on each side of perennial streams/water bodies & 50' for intermittent streams.** Do not harvest within 25' of any stream or water body. In the remaining 75'+ for perennial stream buffers leave 50%+ canopy cover or 50 BA, & in the 25'+ for intermittent streams leave 25%+ canopy or 25 BA.

**Create better networks of mature upland & bottomland forest buffers to serve as travel corridors for wildlife** by designating 200-600' wide bands to link existing corridors. See template [Priority Conservation Landscapes in GA](#).

**Discourage conversion of healthy mature hardwood stands**, like those composed mostly of oak, hickory, or cypress.

Georgia Forest Stewardship Program Templates.

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